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Review Caring Cultures: Sharing Imaginations: Australia and India

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sense that *real politics* is enacted through them, but also in the sense that they stand in for a whole range of processes through which access to certain spatial understanding is mediated. Maralinga thus becomes the great absent presence in Australian cultural life, while Woomera is a place deployed as 'not Australia' in a manner that troubles our reading of Australia and/or provides a troubling reading of Australia.

Importantly, Tompkins's analysis is consistently framed through the relationship between performative space and the spatiality it seeks to represent; so we find nuanced readings of works as diverse as Louis Nowra's *Sunrise* (1983), Janis Balodis's *Heart for the Future* (1989), David Williamson's *Travelling North* (1979), Jack Davis's *No Sugar* (1985), and Beatrix Christian's *Blue Murder* (1994). Diverse in theme and content as these plays may be, they are each revealed as deeply imbricated in the processes through which Australian spaces are imagined and are imaginable; each tells us something about Australia's various communities and the spaces they share – a relationship that is as yet 'unsettled'.

Each of these studies admirably fulfills the manifesto proposed by the series; they each bring the openness associated with comparative criticism to the field of Australia's identarian politics and the performance of identities. Taken as a pair they represent a sustained and significant contribution to the study of Australia's repositioning in a globalised world. More than simply studies of Australia's dramatic past, then, each in their own way has something to tell us about the intellectual territory on which the region's future will be played out.

Eugene McNulty

***Caring Cultures: Sharing Imaginations: Australia and India*, edited by Anuraag Sharma and Pradeep Trikha. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2006. Hardback, US\$25.00.**

The reading of Australian literature from international perspectives is vital, not only for the publication and promotion of Australian literature overseas, but also for the maintenance of a robust and energetic discipline that is both national and global in its reach. India, increasingly, is a contributor to this international network of scholarly engagement, with at least four anthologies of critical essays on Australian literature published in New Delhi in as many years. The present collection of papers, *Caring Cultures: Sharing Imaginations: Australia and India*, adds to this growing body of work. Several of its essays offer fascinating views on Australian writers and their texts, particularly in regard to Indian connections and influences within Australian literary works, and in drawing comparisons between Indian and Australian writers. The contributions, however, vary considerably in quality. Not all dazzle; some are questionable in argument or lacking in analysis. Also, even though copy-editing issues usually close a review, I must say from the outset that the frequency of copy error in this volume is a major annoyance.

The book is the result of a symposium held at Dayanand College, in Ajmer, India, in 2004, at which three Australian scholars joined with Indian academics and PhD students in discussions

of Australian texts, ranging from the earliest publications of short stories in the colonies to the poetry of Les Murray. This Australian focus is complemented in the collection by a number of the papers which deal with Indian material: transformations in the Indo-English novel, the pluralism and tolerance of Hinduism, and eco-tourism in India. Each paper is informed or guided by the symposium theme of caring and sharing across cultures. The most interesting contributions are those which highlight these cross-cultural communications, either in literary production or its analysis. Bruce Bennett's opening essay 'Some Early Australian Storytellers and Their Tales' – while dealing with the history of the short story in Australia – notes that amongst nineteenth-century writing John Lang's collections of stories were set in both Australia and India. Lang's *Botany Bay* and *Wanderings in India* were published in the same year (1859) and, Bennett informs us, demonstrate similarities in their representations of, and sympathy for, indigenous peoples. Such cultural 'cross-overs' from this period, Bennett suggests, deserve further research (10).

Several of the other essays draw our attention to cross-overs in more recent literary production. Sunita Bhadoria analyses the 'Calcutta Dreaming' poems of Colin Johnson (Mudrooroo) from his first poetry collection *The Song Circle of Jacky and Other Poems*, as well as sixteen of his poems – also having Indian themes – from *Dalwurra: The Black Bittern*. Bhadoria comments on the similarities she finds between Indian philosophy and Aboriginal spirituality, as both are refracted through Johnson's poems. While the Indian connection may be less overt in the poetry of Mark O'Connor, Shalini Sharma is able to interpret his work through the prism of Vedic literature, noting the parallels, especially regarding environmentalism and ecological consciousness. Meenakshi Raman's comparative essay on the novels of Miles Franklin and Arundhati Roy considers the challenges posed by the self-assertive female protagonists to their male dominated societies. Though separated by nearly a century (as well as an ocean) the women of their novels struggle against the expectations and limitations of their respective social orders, each of which is inflected by colonialism as much as by patriarchy. These essays among the collection remind us, of course, that narratives and discourses travel – and that Australia and India share significant points of literary contact.

Other essays here, however, are less impressive. Pradeep Trikha's claims to examine the depiction of Australian multicultural society through the works of well-known writers such as Murray Bail, Peter Carey, and Michael Wilding, amongst others. Yet his essay has surprisingly little to say on multiculturalism, with most of his theoretical remarks borrowed from the anthology *Theorizing Multiculturalism*. His comments on multiculturalism are, for the most part, declamatory rather than analytical. He notes resistance to Americanisation, yet makes almost no mention of any of the diverse cultures that contribute to contemporary Australian identity and experience. As a consequence, the multiculturalism depicted remains a vague assertion. Lack of focus and substance is a problem in several other contributions including Evelyn Eli's commentary on Robert Gray's poetry, and Rashmi Bhatnagar's essay on John Tranter's Sydney poems.

Perhaps to criticise these pieces for lack of analytical rigour or theoretical insight is to miss the point of this collection which is, after all, celebratory. The first five pages of the book consist of letters of congratulations on the staging of the symposium at Dayanand College and on being able to bring the papers together for publication. The assistance of the Australia-India Council (AIC) in supporting the publication is acknowledged, and when one considers that the broad objective of the AIC is to encourage contacts between peoples and institutions in the two countries, and to foster a greater awareness of matters Australian in India (and vice-versa), then clearly its investment in this volume is warranted. Dayanand College's commitment to Australian Studies is set to continue, with the announcement of a new half-yearly journal *Lemuria*, the official journal of the Rajasthan Association of Indo-Australian studies, under the direction of the editors of this volume.

While this promotion of Australian studies and Australian literature deserves every encouragement, as it will provide important opportunities for new research and varied and original readings of Australian works to be published, it is also necessary to ensure a more rigorous editorial hand at all stages of scholarly writing. Both established academics and those new to their careers depend upon tough readers willing to point out shortcomings in analysis or structure, and to suggest alternatives; all of us, everywhere, rely on careful and professional copy-editing. Examples of its lack in this volume include: dates printed as '1930s' and '1960s' (14–15); full stops scattered through sentences without reason (17, 89); modern becoming 'modem' five times in three pages (21–23); and commute appearing as 'comnute' (53). In one place we read that Kate Grenville was born in 'Sidney' (131) and in another we find that Murray Bail wrote 'The Dover's Wife' (144). Cumulatively, such typographical errors – and I cite only a very small fraction – seriously erode a reader's confidence.

Michael Jacklin