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Les Murray in a Dhoti: Transnationalizing Australian Literature

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MY FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE AS such (that is, as more than a few works of children's fiction read at home), was in high school in Papua New Guinea. There, we read Vance Palmer's *The Passage* alongside Shakespeare in a setting that made both seem equally strange. It was an early and only dimly apprehended lesson in the cultural politics behind curricula. I knew I would not have read a lot of what I did had I been back in Australia, and when I returned there to undergraduate literature courses, it was back to British texts until Honors year when, along with a new subject on Commonwealth Literature, we were able to take an elective in the writing of our own country. Years later, when I began teaching at an Australian university, there were still people on staff who would airily question whether there was such a thing as Australian literature, implying that if there was it certainly didn't warrant taking up space along with the *real* stuff of cultural learning.

India has faced a similar challenge in establishing the serious study of its own writing in English, one made more problematic by the battle not only to overcome ingrained colonial prejudice against that writing as second-hand imitations of British literature, but because of the resistance from nationalist critics championing writing in the autochthonous languages of the subcontinent. Against both of these groups, local writers in English had to overcome the slur that they were no more than spurious imitations of foreignness, or, as Gordon Bottomley supposedly said of Indian English poetry: "Matthew Arnold in a Sari" (Iyengar 7). Seeking common cause with other Commonwealth writing, critics worked to show the new, different and local qualities of nation literatures using a globalizing language. Thus began a gradual but productive dialogue between Indian and Australian literary studies, commonly engaged in separating decorative imitations from interesting recombinations and original fusions. Questions of translation, cultural as well as linguistic, underpinned such critical work, both internally and across the two nation spaces as university English curricula began to include Commonwealth and Postcolonial literary studies.

Now the generations before mine and my own cohort have largely succeeded in getting recognition for Australian Literature to the extent that younger generations are yawning at its established mythologies, and an industry of writing

classes and literary prizes runs alongside occasional journalistic laments that our national culture is in crisis for lack of school and university attention (Neill 2006). The tactical solution amongst academics in Australia has been in part to accept the consolidation of the field in the national context (and with that the impression of a loss of momentum) and to look (influenced by postcolonial awareness and the turn to globalization studies) beyond the national to historical complex networks of literary production and circulation under Empire (Dolin) and to current networks of diasporic movements in and out of Australia (Bode and Dixon). This applies not just to writers, but also to texts—and even to whole bodies of literature—as they become part of the transnational circulation of *product* in global publishing and educational combines. Graham Huggan's analysis of the globalization of the *postcolonial exotic* is but one witness to this. So, as with my early awareness in PNG of overseas circuits of Australian cultural dissemination, I now find myself—via interests in postcolonial studies, in particular Indian English writing—looking at the circulation of Australian texts in India and at the circumstances in which they are studied.

Australian literature, taken as a transnational network rather than a national body of texts, can assume some interesting reconfigurations, both in what its canon looks like from outside and what it means to readers not trained in the conventional set of ideas and expectations that are worked over in classrooms across Australia. An example of this can be found in the recent collection of conference papers from the European Association for Commonwealth Language and Literature Studies, where the only Australian-resident scholar included wrote on Carey and Malouf, whereas one paper on Thea Astley and another on Murray Bail's *Holden's Performance*—neither topics of frequent discussion in Australian journals of late—were given by European critics (see Van den Driesen, Herbillon and Percopo). Here, I would like to conduct a similar examination of what Australian texts Indian critics are reading and what they make of them as they are studied in a different context.

Before I conduct a survey of the criticism, perhaps a brief history of literary contacts will be in order for those unfamiliar with this particular corner of the Australian literature field. India was a key part of Australia's colonial supply chain from

the beginnings of white intrusion, an example of which was the exchange of horses between the Raj and military personnel in the colony. During the early years of transition from penal colony to self-governing colonial states, a convict's son trained in law, John Lang, found employment in Calcutta and moved through northern India in the 1840s writing journalistic reports, under the pen name Mofussilite, and several novels satirizing colonial cantonment life. A century later, Ethel Anderson, the Australian wife of a British officer in 1920s India, recorded the period in *Indian Tales* (1948). Attempts were made to develop a program for introducing Indian labor in Australia, mainly to tropical Queensland, though most were ultimately unsuccessful (London 1970, Roberts 1972, Tinker 1977). Nevertheless, numbers of Indians did make it to Australia, particularly from the Punjab, and they found a literary place in the rural Victoria of Eve Langley's *The Pea Pickers* (1942) and the short stories of Australia's first Indian-origin writer, Mena Abdullah (*Time of the Peacock* 1965). From the 1960s, Australians began to travel in "the East," and writers like Christopher Koch (*Across the Sea Wall* 1965) and Janette Turner Hospital (*The Ivory Swing* 1982) set novels in India. Vicky Viidikas and Colin Johnson/Mudrooroo also produced poetry collections based on their Indian sojourns. Migration to Australia from the subcontinent gradually increased and works by Suneeta Peres da Costa, Christopher Cyrill, and Bem LeHunte reflect their families' histories and record the trials of adapting to a different society. More recently, Aravind Adiga and Inez Baranay have moved diasporic writing into a more interactive global mode, with the former moving from Madras to Sydney, where he completed high school and where his father still lives. Adiga has also lived in the US and lately in Mumbai, whence his *White Tiger* (2008) leapt to international fame. Baranay migrated from Europe to Australia, then spent time in PNG followed by India, where she published two novels, *Neem Dreams* (2003) and *With the Tiger* (2008). In reverse, Indian writers have not paid much attention to Australia, although evidence of global literary interaction can be found in the recent quotation from Michelle De Kretser's novel *The Hamilton Case* that introduces Vikas Swarup's detective story *Six Suspects* (2008).

University study of Australian literature in India began when Commonwealth Literature was introduced into the tertiary curriculum in the late 1960s. Professor C. D. Narasimhaiah was the leading innovator here. He had trained under F. R. Leavis and his journal, *The Literary Criterion*, maintained a focus on the serious discrimination of stylistic merits and moral virtues as touchstones of the best writing. This was also infused with the idealist principles of classical Indian literature to validate the study of writing in English in the context of an independent national education system. Along with William Walsh and others of that generation of scholars, Narasimhaiah favored texts that emulated the tones of Tennyson and the social wit of Austen, couched in the modernist imagery of Lawrence. Patrick White was one such writer, and A. D. Hope and Judith Wright were seen to uphold the high purpose of literature. Narasimhaiah edited a collection of essays with

his son, C. N. Srinath, in 1981. *The Flowering of Australian Literature* comprised essays all by Australian notables in the field, and covered convicts, romanticism, Lawson, poetry, drama, White, Stead, Richardson and Furphy; Wright, Hope and McAuley, Keneally, and representations of nature.

Since Narasimhaiah's foundational work, a slow but steady output of collections of conference papers from India has continued. Commentary on Australian writing is peppered through publications on Commonwealth and Postcolonial writing, but in recent times there have been editions of specifically Australian focus as well. The standard format is becoming a piece by a visiting writer, a couple of essays by Australian academics attending the conference, and the rest readings from staff and postgraduates from Indian universities. The Australians tend to talk about connections between Australia and India to make their material relevant, while Indians tend to produce formalist close readings of texts under a universalist humanist rubric, or read them to reflect on their own social and cultural concerns. This does not always make for interpretations sensitive to the nuances of cultural and social difference, but it does, overall, provide an interesting picture of how Australian writing looks through Indian eyes and a glimpse of the vagaries by which some texts get to be studied at all or assume different standings than they would have in their original cultural field.

When Australia began to support studies of its literature overseas, standard selections of books were sent out to many university libraries or study centers. This government-centered process tended to lock in early standards such as the White–Wright–Hope trio, but it was not maintained, leaving ongoing supply of materials dependent on individuals, which did little to help establish significant representative collections. Trade barriers and lack of copyright protection meant Australian publishers were not inclined to push their lists into the Indian market, and until the boom in middle-class, English-medium graduates was detected, the impression was that there would be few readers anyway. From the other side, Indian students were not likely to pay Australian prices for imported texts, and there was resistance on the part of university English Departments to spread their curricula beyond British, some American, and a bit of Indian English writing, plus a survey course on Commonwealth Literature.

Publishing and education in India has gone more global since then, and some Australian texts are being picked up, but the process seems still to rely on perceived connections to the subcontinent or literary tours by people with international reputations or personal connections. Academic interests are always out of kilter with popular taste, too; so while some key sites in India have been worked on to develop resources and subjects in Australian Studies, bad press about attacks on Indian students in Melbourne in 2009–2010 will turn off the average person looking for anything Australian to read. Therefore, the titles by Australians found recently on bookshop shelves mostly sound as though they are from the local region. Authors include Yasmine Gooneratne, Adib Khan, Chandani Lokuge and Azhar Abidi—and, if Australia

can still claim him, Aravind Adiga. A major exception is Gregory David Roberts's blockbuster *Shantaram*, found everywhere and the subject of at least one academic paper.

In the critical field, there was a short-lived attempt at a *Journal of Australian Literature* in India in 1990, thanks to the interest of Subhas Chandra Saha; some discussion of Australian Literature in R. K. Dhawan's *The Commonwealth Review* was sustained by conferences of the Indian Society for Commonwealth Studies, and a few sporadic articles appeared in journals of the literature departments of individual universities such as Rajasthan, Kakatiya and Osmania. Since then, however, efforts have consolidated around the Asian Australasian Studies Association and the Indian Association for the Study of Australia (IASA) in collaboration with the cultural section of the Australian High Commission in New Delhi and the Australia-India Council based in Canberra. Australian Studies centers have been developed at Madras University, at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, and Burdwan University in West Bengal, plus the clustering of a long-standing interest from the Jaipur area around Dayanand College in Ajmer and the consolidation of a teaching program in the Indira Gandhi National Open University. There was a collective project to produce a standard curriculum for graduate-level Australian literature study, and recently the national Indian research body, the University Grants Commission, approved funds to set up a center for Australian Studies in Simla. The result has been a slow but steady proliferation from 2004 of Indian books and journals specifically on Australian writing.

A tidy tracking of critical interest is provided by three collections of essays that came out exactly ten years apart: C. D. Narasimhaiah and C. N. Srinath's *The Flowering of Australian Literature* (1981); David Kerr and R. K. Dhawan's *Australian and Indian Literature* (1991), and Deb Narayan Bandyopadhyay, Santosh Chakrabarti and Amitava Roy's *Australian Studies: Themes and Issues* (2001). The latter two collections reveal an expected turn from foundation stories to multiculturalism, the persistence of Patrick White as a Nobel Prize winner, and Hope and Wright, as well as a few surprising names: poets Kate Llewellyn and Douglas Stewart, and children's author Libby Hathorn, for example. The Indian component in the 1991 collection mixes background information with analysis of themes and artistic vision and produces some thoughtful commentaries useful to Indian readers seeking ways in to Australian literature. In the 2001 collection Indian critics dominate and the coverage becomes more eclectic.

Across these and later collections, Aboriginal writing clearly attracts the most interest, although this is a relatively late phenomenon. After that, in descending order come Patrick White, Judith Wright, A. D. Hope, Miles Franklin, David Malouf, Les Murray, Kim Scott, Yasmine Gooneratne, Barbara Baynton, Kate Grenville, Elizabeth Jolley, Mark O'Connor, Mudrooroo and John Tranter. Gooneratne receives attention in connection with the interest in multiculturalism, and O'Connor toured some Indian universities and donated works for study. Single articles are devoted to many other writers. The

list covers a wide range, though mainly fiction, and does not completely reflect what is actually taught or found in bookshops (Bem LeHunte, Adib Khan, Azhar Abidi, Inez Baranay, for example). It is perhaps surprising that canonical figures such as Henry Lawson and Banjo Paterson, or Kenneth Slessor, do not get more notice while the not always easy John Tranter does.

Deb Narayan Bandyopadhyay (whose essay appears in this issue: Ed.) has developed a study center at Burdwan University in West Bengal and worked actively with others in Kolkata to promote Australian Studies through the Eastern chapter of the Indian Association for the Study of Australia. IASA has now held several conferences, and its 2008 conference, held in collaboration with Monash University, led to the publication in 2009 of *Australian Studies: Reading History, Culture and Identity*, edited by Professor Bandyopadhyay and Shibnath Banerjee (since reissued with added editorial input from David Dunstan). There are papers on the little-known novel *Hindustan Contessa* (Jane Watson, 2002), on Australian cinema, and on the "Federal Character of Australian Polity." Others take on Peter Goldsworthy's *Wish*, Richard Flanagan's *Gould's Book of Fish*, David Malouf's *An Imaginary Life* (read as "Recapturing the Self"), Peter Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang*, Judith Wright's poetry, and Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves*. An interesting distinction is made between Australian Literature and Aboriginal Literature, with the two given equal space. Soumyendra Kishore Datta considers natural resources and land rights; Angshuman Kar surveys Aboriginal poetry; Sumit Chakravarty analyzes "Mimicry as Strategy in Doris Pilkington's *Under the Wintemarra Tree*"; Arindam Das reads Kim Scott's *Benang* as "Counter-Discursive Allegory"; Antara Mukherjee and Ramanuj Konar place Jack Davis's *No Sugar* in the context of policy changes in race relations; and Sagar Dan reads Mudrooroo's *Wildcat Screaming* for its use of Foucault's application of Bentham's panopticon.

The *raison d'être* of many such conference proceedings is to provide study materials for Indian students; so, if some of the papers cover ideas and writers familiar to scholars of Australian literature, that is appropriate, as is the range of reading that provides a context in which the specific text-based commentary can be located. What is most notable here, though, is the spread of works covered.

While Judith Wright and Patrick White continue to attract attention, Malouf and Carey have now also become popular. It is more interesting from an Australian point of view to see the attention to Goldsworthy's *Wish* and Flanagan's *Gould's Book of Fish*, since these (and perhaps Mudrooroo's *Wildcat Screaming*) are not staples of scholarly commentary elsewhere, and the chapter on Flanagan's novel can be recommended to anyone looking at his work or the colonial relationship with the Enlightenment. We can speculate about how different Australian literature in India will look in a few years time from how it is shaped in Australia, America and Europe. The potential for difference holds exciting prospects of real comparative dialogues. The Aboriginal emphasis, too, although it is not out of keeping with other extra-Australian interest in the exotic/defining aspects of the nation, has a

particular hold on readers in India because of the perceived relevance to studying the problems of marginalized Indian groups such as “tribals” and Dalits. Films also help “sell” authors to students, and *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* was popular and has promoted interest in Aboriginal writing.

For a long time, Rajasthan was a center of interest in Australian literature, largely due to Professor Janaki Ram’s visits down under. He has since retired, but his legacy has transferred to a small but active group in Dayanand College, Ajmer. In recent times, the development of the Jaipur literary festival promises a continued series of visits to Rajasthan by Australian writers; so, the future of Australian studies there looks promising. From one of their conferences, Anurag Sharma and Pradeep Trikha edited *Identity, Ethos & Ethnicity: Australia and India* (2010). The Introduction to this small collection emphasizes the crisis of identity theme and makes some novel connections. Australianists outside India would be surprised to find Judith Wright, A. D. Hope and Les Murray grouped equally under the label of “writers and social activists” (8) and then framed by a Sanskrit quotation on marriage from the Vedas under the rubric of authorizing a convergence of cultures amongst Irish, Scots and other Australians. Here the tensions of Australian multiculturalism seem to be deployed in order to shore up a vision of Indian society as less prone to crisis and doubts over identity.

A useful reading of Alexis Wright’s *Carpentaria*, limited by the newness of the book to a lot of description, concentrates on the particularity of its layered texture, its interest in patterns of entrapment and escape, and its use of Jungian universals to show Wright’s reliance on mythic and symbolic reference. The now increasingly familiar allusion to Hindu tradition in comparing Sheshnag to the Rainbow Serpent (126) at least has a comparative logic to it, though the differences of their respective world views might be productively explored. The inclusion of yet another paper on Kim Scott’s *Benang* points to this work becoming canonical in the Indian modeling of Australian literature. Narendra Kumar provides a descriptive survey of the book, noting the Rushdie influence and using his own interest in Caryl Philips to make pertinent comparisons to the management of racial mixing under slavery in the West Indies. The special import of this paper, though, is its equal reference to critical work from India and Australia. We can see here the beginnings of a home-grown tradition of Australianist scholarship, loosening the ties to Australia as the source of all material and opinion on its own culture. The breadth and relative independence of Kumar’s work allows him to go beyond the *explication du texte* approach and offer some probing questions about how Scott uses writing and historical records and to what end.

With the opening up of the Indian economy to globalized capital, and the burgeoning new English-speaking middle class, new publishers are springing up, including local branches of the major multinationals. This, and the recognition of its diaspora as valuable members of the national community, has resulted in a greater internationalizing of the Indian

book market. The national book review periodical *Biblio*, encouraged by regional writers’ festivals, international awards and the Man Asia Literary Prize, has begun surveying writing from the broader Asia-Pacific region. In 2008 it reviewed Steve Toltz’s *A Fraction of the Whole* and included a story by Nicholas Jose. In 2009 it reviewed Walter Crocker’s book on Nehru. Crocker was Australian High Commissioner to India 1952–1955 and has published with Random House India (Misra). There is also a review by Amitabha Bagchi of Azhar Abidi’s *Twilight* (sold on to Penguin India). This mentions the Australian character in the Pakistan-located novel but neglects to mention that the author is himself an Australian. Nonetheless, it is an important shift that carries promise of turning an Australian literature confined to university classrooms into an Australian literature read across a wider section of society. It will remain a minority interest, but it will also generate more lively and instructive new readings as dialogues amongst writers and scholars from the two countries become more common.

The Australian government has made various attempts to promote Australian literature in India. One of the most effective had been sending writers to talk at conferences and give readings at literary festivals. Representation at a couple of book fairs seems not to have produced much result, but recently some funding was given to support an Australian edition of *Biblio* (2009). This has led to some reviews by Australians of current releases in Australia and an ABC interview with Kate Grenville appearing alongside reviews of locally published works, but the advertisements by Indian publishers tellingly lack mention of Australian titles issued locally. Apart from an extract reprising Yasmine Gooneratne’s *A Change of Skies*, readers of this issue would be unable to buy any title reviewed unless they went online to Australia or Amazon. Jane Camens’s survey asks “Where is Australia on the Asian lit-map?” and the answer, for India, appears to be nowhere of any significance, Aravind Adiga notwithstanding. Brian Stoddart points to a “knowledge vacuum” about India in Australia (and a correspondingly simplistic appreciation of Australia in India) and calls for a new program of cultural interchange. Rukmini Bhaya Nair kicks this off with her “Travels by taxi in the Antipodes” diary. The exception that proves the rule is a collaborative compilation of stories about terror by Indian and Australian writers, edited by Meenakshi Bharat and Sharon Rundle, published by Picador in India. Collaboration seems to be the way to go, since the one other book published in India is a collection of stories about Australian experiences of India, from the nineteenth century to the present, edited as a classroom text by Bruce Bennett, Susan Cowan and Santosh Sareen (2009).

A review of this book reveals the different perceptions of tone and general attitude between readers familiar with the range of Australian writing and those presumably coming on a sample of the material for the first time. Bruce Bennett has been writing about the literary connections between Australia and India for a very long time now, and his colleague, Santosh Sareen (represented in this issue: Ed.) has led the teaching

of Australian literature in general at Jawaharlal Nehru University. Knowing something of the breadth of racist and Orientalist attitudes in British and pre-1950 Australian writing, they can detect modulations of response, self-mockery, irony, and qualifications of stereotypes that are less obvious to the novice. On this basis they collect an historical survey of writing about India by Australians and publish it in Delhi, possibly anticipating a wryly appreciative, historically relativized reading not unlike their own. An Indian scholar trained in the US, who reviews the book in *Biblio*, takes the nationalist position, accompanied by the rights discourse of North American identity politics in which “the thin veil of humor and self reflexivity is rent” (Chandra 41), and all of the work is seen as patronizing, belittling of Indians, and evidence of a general history of racial discrimination leading to the contemporary muggings of Indian students in Australia. It stands in glaring opposition to Rick Hosking’s 2010 review of the same title in the *Australian Book Review*.

I am not saying here that either interpretation of the material is wrong. In fact, I rather favor the exposure of ongoing racist/Orientalist discourse in Australian writing when it comes to depictions of India (and it doesn’t let Australian writers off the hook by claiming that their attitudes are more moderate than British ones because of a shared colonial past, though I think this can be argued). It is a salutary shock to the Australian apologist for multicultural diversity to have an outsider make a well argued accusation of literary/cultural bias. It’s also worth noting that this accusation extends to immigrant Australian writers of Indian origin.

Explorations in Australian Literature (2006), edited by Jaydeep Sarangi and Binod Mishra, provides some elegant summations of a writer’s work and critical reception that usefully respond to the calls for background reading from teachers and students new to the field. Nandini Sahu provides an overview of Judith Wright, and Ashok Kumar memorably encapsulates Patrick White’s life and works: “Patrick White is a difficult man who wrote difficult novels” (Sarangi and Mishra 143). Other pieces show the problems of introducing new writers from unfamiliar histories and cultures. Many spend so much time surveying the development of ecocriticism and multiculturalism (for example) that they barely have space to discuss the texts. In some cases, what looks like a local critical mode comes into play: a kind of dissociative impressionism, where the reader skips across a text, jumping from one idea to another, sometimes striking illuminating sparks. This can be enlivening after the more stolid close readings, but can also seem erratic and unfocused. It is an extreme claim, for instance, to equate Australian literature with Aboriginal writing and then with “the collective memory of the human race” that holds “ecological wisdom” (94), concluding that “What Australian literature can do for us is to [. . .] reveal the dimensions of environmentally friendly collective existence of human and non-human nature” (100).

While increasing access to the AustLit database is giving scholars outside of Australia a better sense of general critical regard and debate, there is still a lot of work to be done in

equipping enthusiastic teachers and students to make their own appropriations of texts on reliable bases. We can, for example, find amongst the collections surveyed here a paper on Australian women’s travel writing that relies on a rapid survey of one secondary text on the topic, and in passing declares that Robyn Davidson’s *Tracks* is about her travels in America, instead of her camel trek from central Australia to its west coast. Editors eager to promote a new area of teaching and research need to ensure readers are not being led astray like this.

It is a great thing that Les Murray is being translated with enthusiasm, and those involved should not be dictated to by know-all Australians, but more dialogue, cultural familiarity, secondary resources and careful editing will enable overseas readers to construct their particular understandings with greater authority. While it may be true that Murray is seeking to discover a demotic settler spirituality for Australia, and although some of his poems do celebrate cattle-herding culture, we need to keep in mind that his regular use of a Latin-derived dedication to God separates him from Hinduism, and that his compassion for cattle is the sensitivity of a beef-eater who grew up working cows on dairy farms. Reading his poems as reflecting the glories of the laws of Manu, therefore, requires a good deal of subtlety and qualification to make sure that it is based on accurate understanding of context and idiom. “Tat,” for example, in “The Dream of Wearing Shorts Forever” is not a tattoo or an item of clothing; it refers to things that are down-at-heel, scungy, daggy, out of fashion. After several instances of such decadence, “solidarity-with-the-Third-World *tat tvam asi*” has to be read as an ironic critique of trendy tokenistic Australian interest in Eastern spirituality, not outright endorsement of advaita Vedanta (Singh 85–7).

Such translations are vital. Every national reading community needs transnational readings to show it things it will not notice or think of on its own. Few Australian critics have, for example, bothered to look at Nova Peris’s autobiography as Aboriginal life writing (Pandirajan in Sarangi, *Women’s Writing*). The idealism that governs many Indian readings of Australian writing prompts Sudhir K. Arora to survey women’s quest for self-determination in Australian and Indian writing and conclude that “a woman is a woman who will remain the same” wherever she is, united in a common resistance to male oppression (Arora, in Sarangi, *Women’s Writing*). This kind of universalism can be a salutary shock to jaded secularist Australians, although it may also render Indian readers deaf to the ironic tones and skeptical outlook of much Australian writing.

Indian readers of Australian literature, like readers everywhere, seek confirmation of, or new perspectives on, their own concerns. This can result in some novel combinations with promise of new cross-cultural insights: Judith Wright and Sarojini Naidu (Bharathi 1996) or Wright and the ghazal (Rahman 2004) are examples. Sometimes lack of fine-grained knowledge of context leads to some stretched connections —Yasmine Gooneratne and Susannah Moodie compared in relation to two kinds of “bush,” for example (Khan 1995). There is certainly a lot to be said for comparing Gooneratne’s

and Bharati Mukherjee's novels under a diasporic rubric (Nityanandam 1993), as there is, too, for comparing Miles Franklin and Arundhati Roy as young writers striving to make a splash with their first work (Raman 2006). I would not have thought of linking Mark O'Connor and Ruskin Bond, but Meenakshi F. Paul provides an interesting comparison of nature poems that illuminates each writer. The transnational reader can also make productive combinations of Australian writers that do not seem immediately obvious to the Australian reader. Malati Mathur's comparison of A. D. Hope's and Kate Llewellyn's deployment of Homeric story is a case in point (in Kerr and Dhawan 1991).

Sunita Bhadoria engages with cultural translation in "Mudrooroo's Meditative Musings of India: Evolution of a Poetic Persona through Caring for and Sharing of Cultures" (Sharma and Trikha, *Caring Cultures* 112–23) A gloss on the Indian poems in "The Song Circle of Jacky" leaps away into explanations of textual allusions to Indian culture, showing how Mudrooroo uses the black of Kali worship to validate the color in other contexts. The text is one of the very few by Australian writers to make explicit connection between Aborigines and adivasis. There is a perceptive comparison between Blake's visionary work and *Dalwurra's* epic dream journey, and a link made between the green bird in the poem and Tara, the green goddess of mercy. Here we see the not uncommon equation made between Aboriginal and Vedic pantheism, but this time it is based on textual evidence and helps us see how connection with India enables the poet to suggest positive possibilities for first Australians.

Malathi Mathur provides an interesting account of what happens in her poetry classes, noting the shock of students raised on formal shows of reverence to the motherland and its ideals at the lack of national pride in work such as A. D. Hope's "Australia." Critical reading is a tug of war between homogenizing everything into expressions of universalist humanism, assimilating the foreign into different local contexts, and letting the two cultures speak productively to each other from their own differences. The links with Hindu tradition are often overlooked in Hope's poems; but it is something else to try and turn Hope into a Hindu. Recognizing both similarity and difference can supply new insights to distinct reading communities.

This delicate critical balancing act is, of course, what the increasing number of conferences, exchange visits and international scholarships being offered by the Australian government attempt to achieve. Much more can be done, however. The current calibration of research publications in Australia and the allocation of research grants threaten steadily to concentrate resources around a few key international journals and narrow interpretations of the national interest. Australian Studies scholars have a challenge to ensure that national interest includes international outreach. In the meantime, with the spread of IT everywhere, collaborative teaching programs and regular exchange of resources may become possible. A start has been made with providing AustLit database access to key centers of Australian studies

overseas, although this too often only means that people become more aware of what there is to read but they can't get hold of. Books like the ones surveyed here and readers such as Amit and Reema Sarwal's *Reading Down Under, Australian Literary Studies Reader* (2009) are important steps along the path of creating a solid body of Indian scholarship that we will all start to turn to in the same way as we now turn to leading figures from India in global postcolonial literary studies. o

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Carol Jenkins

Water under the bridge

November, late afternoon, the lagoon
double-dinks its load of light and water
under Queenscliff Bridge, condensing
its tessellations where the current squeezes

round the pylons; it's traveling under, out,
digging greener beds and purling
round a brown and upright stick, over
filamental green, superannuated shells.

Then radiating around the canter-
lopping, high-stepping setter that circles
in his feathered wet and prancing joy,
it slides east, past the shadow

of the bridge, nips out the inlet's
quicker deeper breach into the surf,
laps the feet of the man who zips
himself into a Short Tom, kicks out

as salt spray across the face of waves,
it paves a gully ramp for the kite-boarder
who half sails, half flies; runs sweet
on its dispersing ways.

CAROL JENKINS's first book of poems, *Fishing in the Devonian*, was published in 2008 by Puncher & Wattmann. A Sydney-based writer and visual artist, she is also the publisher and producer of the audio collection, *The River Road Poetry Series*. This is her first appearance in *Antipodes*.

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