

# TRANSNATIONAL LITERATURE

## With Syd on Kangaroo Island and in the McLaren Vale

Edward Baugh

Thanks to Syd's initiative, I spent the month of September 1989 at Flinders University as Visiting Commonwealth Scholar. I had got to know Syd through ACLALS, and he quickly became one of the most unforgettable characters I had ever met. He wasn't in Adelaide when I arrived on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, from Wollongong, because he was attending the ACLALS triennial conference at the University of Kent. When he returned, on the 5<sup>th</sup>, he came bearing the news that I had been elected Chair of ACLALS for the next three years. Syd was a most engaging host, and my month at Flinders was unforgettable. Apart from the seminars and talks (including to the Adelaide PEN Club and the English Department at the University of Adelaide), there was the camaraderie and conviviality of Syd's students and colleague-friends: lunch at the 'Raj Mahal',<sup>1</sup> tennis on afternoons, followed by a beer at the Duck Inn. Syd also took me to see my first (and-up-to-now last) Australian Rules football match.

Perhaps the most memorable experience was the two days I spent with him and Jane on Kangaroo Island. Here are a few sentences from my diary:

**Saturday, 24<sup>th</sup>:** 7.30 a.m. Goodbye to my VIP flat at Flinders, and it's off to Kangaroo Island (yes, there *is* such a place) with Syd and Jane. By ferry from Cape Jervis to Penneshaw on K.I. ... Choppy sea, but effect alleviated by the fact that the wind was behind us. ... Syd and Jane have a little bungalow, which they call a shack (with electricity, running hot water, telephone, bath, etc!), on the low hill overlooking the bay and the jetty, and looking across to the mainland.

After a quick lunch, we headed out, towards the western part of the island. Seal Bay: a unique place – only place in the world where people can walk on the beach among sea-lions in their natural habitat. They are quite unconcerned about onlookers, although they can be dangerous if angered. ... The bay itself – even without the seals – spectacular and unspoiled, wild, windswept, the path to it quite steep. ...

Then on to Flinders Chase, a vast wildlife reserve which occupies the western end of the



Syd at Admiral's Arch, Kangaroo Island

island. Wallabies with their 'joeys' in the pouches – very 'tame,' coming up to the car in the hope of being given food. We were also lucky to see the koalas eating in their (special) gum trees and swaying in the breeze as they did so, and one fast asleep in a fork lower down. Also saw an emu – ostrich-like.

At Admiral's Arch, a spectacular archway of jagged rock curving over a tiny inlet – you look through to the sea and the sunset, the waves beating up – and in the 'pool' below, New Zealand fur seals ... frolicking. Then the Remarkable Rocks

<sup>1</sup> The 'Raj Mahal' is an affectionate reference to the Flinders University Staff Club (now permanently closed), which was established by a committee headed by Emeritus Professor Raja Huigol.

Syd Harrex tribute: With Syd on Kangaroo Island and in the McLaren Vale. Edward Baugh.  
*Transnational Literature* Vol. 8 no. 1, November 2015.  
<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

(an understatement) at the south-western-most tip of the island, a wonder of ‘natural art,’ ... a perfection of masses, displacement, concavities and convexities, solids and hollows, weight and delicacy, texture, colour – ... a magnificence to walk round, walk through, ... walk under, touch, stand back from – Henry Moore might have stopped sculpting if he had seen this!

... At least an hour of the ride back to Penneshaw was after nightfall. Once we nearly hit an opossum, who, blinded by the light, turned back just as he had reached the middle of the road; and later a wallaby just missed copping it as he came hopping towards the road. ... Back to a terrific, juicy, thick fillet steak done by Jane – the slices cut by her from a fillet chosen by her from their butcher. ...

**Monday, 25<sup>th</sup>:** In the morning headed out again, west again, but this time ... towards the Northern coast, and eventually to the secluded Western River Cove. ... Jane, pregnant, had to stop for a leak at Parndana (or some other place). Should have gone myself, because I’d had a beer with Syd when we stopped at a viewing-point a little earlier, in a strong, chill wind – but foolishly held back, so then was in trouble for the next hour at least, until we finally reached Western Cove, where I asked if there was a toilet, only to be told that I’d ‘have to go bush’ ... Trouble was, there was no bush around, only an old broken-down latrine and other tourists, but did get the blessed relief behind the latrine. ...

**Tuesday, 26<sup>th</sup>:** Back on the first ferry at 8.30 a.m. ... We then drove into the McLaren Vale, one of the best wine districts. Stopped first at Hamilton’s small winery, where one of the proprietors, Hugh Hamilton, mid-forties, was on hand – friend of Syd’s, so leisurely conversation while we tasted, and I had to appear knowing when asked my comments. I did particularly like one of the whites – ‘fumé blanc’ – a very distinctive flavour. When Syd and Jane decided they’d take that and one of the reds, I revealed my innocence of the life-style by offering to pay for them, as a gift, thinking that they meant one bottle of each. But Syd charmingly and easily disabused me of my error, by saying that they were ‘serious wine drinkers.’ They bought two cases.

Syd asked Hugh to suggest a new winery worth visiting, so off we went to Hugo’s – even smaller, it seemed, and more rustic, but apparently some good stuff ... Here they bought another case-and-a-half. Clearly, Russell McDougall’s wine rack, with about 200 spaces, wasn’t a rarity.<sup>2</sup> Finally to a large, long-established winery, whose name I’ve forgotten. ... Syd introduced to two new pieces of wine-tasting terminology: ‘lifted’ and ‘fat around the middle.’ Lunch at the Salopian Inn, referred to by Syd and Jane as Philippa’s, after the proprietor, who is apparently known to most people as Pip (Forrester) ... I chose ‘green curry duck’ – not bad, but could have been more piquant and spicy. Jane drove the rest of the way back.

As a jolly gesture before my departure from Adelaide (for Sydney and Macquarie), Syd had a few of us (me, him, the students) contribute to a clutch of farewell light and nonsense verses. His was titled ‘To Eddie Leaving Us (The Raj Mahal, 27/9/89).’ This was my contribution:

Having been harassed by Harrex  
to the point of an-harrex-ia nervosa,  
this verse, as you see, is supposed to rhyme  
but by gum and be-gorra it refuses-to.

---

<sup>2</sup> Russell McDougall is Professor of English at the University of New England. When I visited Flinders, he was a lecturer in the English Department at the University of Adelaide, and Acting Director of the Adelaide Centre for Australian Studies, of which he was a co-founder.