

## **Farewell Syd Harrex**



In 1994 I returned to studying English literature after nearly 20 years of vocational study and work. It was my great good fortune to choose the English Department at Flinders University, and one of the first subjects I studied was New Literatures in English: Indian, taught by Dr Syd Harrex. I loved every minute of it – reading writers I’d never heard of, and discovering something I didn’t know I was good at. It was one of those pivotal moments in my life when Syd handed back one of my essays and said, “You should submit that to Dr Rajan at Litterit.” Before that, it would never have occurred to me that my work was worth publishing. But I was easily persuaded, and my essay was published: it was the first of many publications, and I often wonder whether I would have had the confidence to try and keep on trying – to keep on writing and keep on sending my writing off all over the world, shrugging off rejections – without that simple but powerful act of encouragement from Syd.

Syd Harrex died peacefully on Friday 29 May 2015. After I sent out notices of his death to the worldwide network of scholars based on the connections he made throughout his career, I have had many responses from former students and colleagues all over the world, and their tone is uniformly affectionate and appreciative. Many, like me, remember him as an inspiring teacher and a generous mentor. But his significance goes beyond his personal

connections. Many know him as the writer of a significant body of finely-wrought poems. And many will remember him as an almost legendary figure in post-colonial studies and new literatures in English.

Syd founded the Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English (CRNLE) at Flinders University in 1977 and remained its Director for many years. It was the first centre of its kind in the world and despite being at the bottom end of the Antipodes, during its 30 years of existence the CRNLE was truly central in the study of new literatures. There was a writer-in-residence programme, there were regular conferences – I recall the excitement of “Factions and Frictions” in 1994 – and many publications of creative and critical work. The *CRNLE Reviews Journal*, later the *CRNLE Journal*, ran for 30 years before becoming *Quodlibet* in 2005, to be succeeded in 2008 by *Transnational Literature*, of which I am the founding editor. His gift of bringing together an international community of scholars, in an era well before email and social media made such a thing relatively simple to establish and maintain, endures in the world-wide network on which *Transnational Literature* is based.

Syd is well known as a *bon vivant* and I have sat around many a lunch table listening to the ebb and flow of witty conversation, with Syd always ready with an apt quotation or a clever observation. I have heard it said that Syd was as interested in cultivating drinking companions as he was in mentoring students: that if you wouldn't have a drink with him, he wouldn't bother with you. I am living proof to the contrary. I wasn't a drinker when I met him and I am still not a drinker, yet we shared a collegial bond. He would come to my office in the University Library and discuss our common interests with a patience and generous interest quite unmediated by alcohol.

In the November 2015 issue of *Transnational Literature* we will include a collection of personal tributes to Syd, and in May 2016 there will be a special feature dedicated to his life's work to be guest-edited by Melinda Graefe.

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