

## ***Bruce and Exploding Coffee Perculators***

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Anybody who met Bruce would remark on his open frank smile which captivated both the person he met, the audiences he spoke to and which was, the hallmark of his open-mindedness and generosity towards others. I will eventually get to the “exploding perculators”, but first I would like to back track to when I first met Bruce.

In 1984, Doireann MacDermott organised one of the Triennial EACLALS Congresses<sup>1</sup> in Sitges, a beautiful town on the coast south of Barcelona. Bruce was there and I was introduced to him as I had just joined the English and German Department at Barcelona University. At that time I was in my final doctoral year writing my PhD on Australian Literature. He immediately made me feel comfortable as somebody about to present her first ever paper at a congress and was most interested in my thesis, what I was doing and where I hoped to go with it. As a member of the organising committee I saw him only briefly after that at the congress and we were not to meet again until 1987.

In 1987 Shirely Walker, to whom I owe so much, was looking for candidates to go out to Australia on what was then known as an assimilation tour and to attend the ASAL conference at Launceston, Tasmania.<sup>2</sup> Julian Croft had just returned from Barcelona and put my name forward. To my amazement, sometime later, I received a letter of invitation from Shirley Walker and took no time at all in accepting. It was in Launceston that I met Bruce again. I had now completed my PhD and was on the department staff fulltime waiting to go for a tenured position. I remember that I felt very over awed at being in Tasmania and at such an exhilarating conference. The learning curve was huge and the ever present question was “How come Australian Studies in Barcelona?” It was on one of these occasions that Bruce was in the group I was with and he interjected that Barcelona was a European hub for all things Australian mentioning the work done by Doireann MacDermott, as was Århus University in Denmark with Anna Rutherford. Bruce’s constant delight in promoting Australian Studies became evident to me then. He had a huge network of contacts at his fingertips and he was ever generous in putting people into contact with each other. I left Tasmania with Bruce’s list of people to contact and things that were a “must” for me to see on the rest of my trip.

Over the years we met at conferences around the world and in Australia and it was always a delight to catch up, exchange news and, in my case, learn. I have many

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<sup>1</sup> EACLALS acronym for the European Association for Commonwealth Language and Literature Studies

<sup>2</sup> ASAL acronym for Association for the Study of Australian Literature, Australia

memories of conference outings, papers, dinners and his many visits to Spain. One abiding memory is that of us meeting in Århus. It was at the time when the steering committee for setting up a European Association for Studies on Australia (EASA) was just beginning to lay down plans and meetings were underway in Århus during a congress there. Anna Rutherford was somewhat worried about the consequences of such an association with regard to any impingement on EACLALS. I well remember Bruce, Werner Senn, later to be President of EASA, and I walking in gentle Autumn rain on one of the many campus lawns. Our conversation inevitably turned to the possible clashes between EASA and EACLALS, and Anna Rutherford's logical concerns with regard to the existence of EASA. Bruce, always able to see way down the track, was convinced that no such clash or overlapping would occur. He very wisely said that the co-existence of the two associations could only benefit many and if the conferences of each were never planned for the same year, all would be well. He was right; the two associations have thrived side by side and indeed have enriched each other. He was now to become a regular at EASA conferences as well as those of EACLALS!

Bruce visited Spain on several occasions and his ports of call were usually Barcelona and Oviedo where he had firm friends in both universities. On one occasion he came to Barcelona to give a lecture to the undergraduate students as did Veronica Brady. We had congregated in Barcelona as we were all going to a congress in Oviedo organised by Socorro Suárez Lafuente. The night before we were due to leave, we invited Bruce, Veronica and Doireann MacDmerott to dinner at home. We had a great time with lots of lively discussion and laughter. At one stage Doireann and I retired to the kitchen while I made coffee. This was long before the advent of anything remotely like Nespresso and I was using my old italian perculator. Standing chatting in the kitchen, Doireann and I were talking about the long train journey ahead the next day when we heard a load hiss and then an explosion! The perculator had broken the safety valve and the kitchen was covered in coffee up to the ceiling and down the passage to the back door. As Doireann and I recovered from our ducking positions I saw with horror that her lovely blond hair was now streaked with black! Fortunately neither she nor I were burned and the perculator had remained intact rather than converting itself into shards of shrapnel. Before I could recover everybody was in the kitchen! The next thing I saw was that Bruce and Veronica had got cloths and were busily engaged in clearing up the mess. Veronica climbing onto a small ladder which appeared out of the blue was working on the tiles. There was a kind of stunned silence as we all mopped up and then quite suddenly Bruce said: "I knew this would be a great dinner but never thought such domestic games were included" We all just fell about the kitchen laughing and needless to say that was the night I did not serve coffee!

I am grateful to have met and be befriended by Bruce. Over the years he was a stalwart champion for anything we attempted to do at the University including the founding of the Australian Studies Centre. His advice was always sound and he never failed to help any student I asked to contact him. People around the world will miss Bruce's presence both in their academic and personal lives. He leaves us with a wealth of work which will form the backbone of reading for generations of young and not so young scholars. His contribution to academic literature will always be of great value to us all.

Vale Bruce!