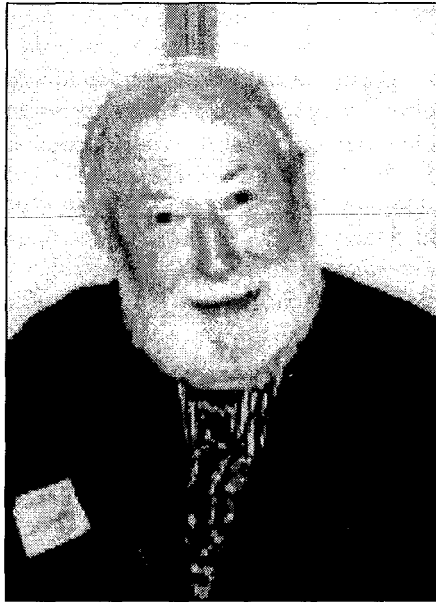


BERNARD HICKEY
(1931 – 2007)
In Memoriam



In the mid-1970s the Australian government began to stimulate departments of English at various European universities to include in their curricula the teaching of Australian literature. Literature Board of the Australia Council helped organize various seminars and conferences, it provided some basic text-books and literary works, and also financially supported Australian university professors to give lectures at these institutions. The Department of English at the University of Ljubljana showed interest in developing these relations and Bernard Hickey was one of the first Australian guests at our university. Sad news that Bernard died on the last Sunday in July this year evoked in us the memories connected with our friendly and professional meetings.

Bernard Hickey was born in 1931 in Queensland, Australia, and his ancestors came there from Ireland. Bernard was born in a working class family and his life-course

depended very much on his own intelligence and hard work. He finished his studies at Trinity College in Dublin and then taught for several years in England before he went to Italy, which became his second home. In 1968 he joined the University of Ca' Foscari in Venice as a Professor of Commonwealth Literature. Venice became his base for his visits to other European and Asian universities, but he was always glad to return there, because he was again and again fascinated by its beauty. In 1988 he was appointed as a Chair of English Literature at the University of Lecce. He was not discouraged by this move although he had to start there right from the beginning not only as regards teaching of Australian literature, but as an initiator of a Centre for Australian Studies with its library which includes now more than 7,000 volumes on Australian literature. In Lecce, in this beautiful baroque city, in the deepest south of Italy, he organized in 1990 a memorable conference of the European Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, which was attended by several hundred participants.

Hickey's first visit to the Department of English, University of Ljubljana, took place in the late 1970s and he returned to Ljubljana a number of times. He always enjoyed his stay in Slovenia, his discussions of Australian literature with the staff of our department and our students. Everybody loved his lectures, which were intellectually stimulating, witty, full of humour and filled with his personal charm. He suggested we should invite to our Department some well-known Australian professors and writers (among them were also Dorothy Green, Veronica Brady, Robert Brissenden, Laurie Hergenhan, Bruce Bennet, Michael Wilding, Tom Shapcott and some twenty others), who enriched our courses on Australian literature. He was also a member of the board of examiners for the doctoral thesis which Igor Maver was preparing in the eighties. When I organized a Symposium on Australian literature and culture at Lake Bled in September 1982, the list of visitors included important Australian, European, and American scholars, academics like Doireann MacDermott, Barry Andrews, Brian Kiernan and a number of other well-known names. Bernard Hickey prepared a lecture for this symposium on the Australian writer Miles Franklin (his contribution was published in *Australian Papers*, Ljubljana, 1983), and he also wrote a paper on Lawrence Durrell for another collection of essays written as a tribute to the former editor of the review *Acta Neophilologica*, Professor Janez Stanonik (*Literature, Culture and Ethnicity*, Ljubljana, 1992), which I also edited. Because we knew how busy Bernard always was, his contributions were even more appreciated. We also thank him for having been a member of the Advisory Committee of our review.

Bernard Hickey was really a person who divided his life between two continents: Australia and Europe. In a letter which he wrote to me from Brisbane on 6 Dec. 1979 he described his impressions about his stay at the University of Queensland with the following words: "Dear Mirko, ... As for Australia: it has been splendid, and our Australian colleagues have a special regard for those of us in the field of Europe. My relationship is a double one, doubly enriching". However, in a letter Bernard wrote to me in 1986, he said: »Home again in Venice ... Hope you and Tom Shapcott had a nice time. My collection of books is growing so I hope your students can come over soon. We'll be in touch about a visit to Lju(bljana). ..All my very best from beautiful Venice«. When political disruption of Yugoslavia was increasing he expressed his worries and his optimism for our future: »We are very sorry to read of the crisis in your country. Please count on our

solidarity« (5 Jan. 1989). And this solidarity was also shown by the Australian government when Slovenia became independent in 1991, and the Australian government was one of the first to recognize Slovenia as a sovereign state.

Bernard Hickey was a real Australian cultural ambassador in Europe. He was a very warm person, an important scholar and a great friend. One of his personal characteristics was that he could influence with his joy of life people with whom he established good personal contacts and therefore many of us will miss him, his professional advice, his good-hearted humour and his friendship.

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