Peter Oldmeadow, University of Sydney

‘Sanskrit, Europe and the Romantics’

Only with the beginning of translation of Sanskrit texts in the 18th century did Europe begin to engage seriously with India on more than an economic level. The study of Sanskrit revealed linguistic, cultural and spiritual connections between India and Europe. The biggest impact of this discovery was on the movement known as Romanticism. Some of the Romantics saw in Indian culture a possible redress to the increasing mechanical and technological society of Europe. They looked to India for an alternative vision to replace the “single-vision” of the rationalism and empiricism so prevalent in Europe. This paper explores the impact of Sanskrit on members of this group with particular reference to German Romanticism.

Eyal Amer, La Trobe University

‘Kalidasa and the Yearning Man’

My paper will reveal some of the existential problems occupying the minds of the kāvya (ornate poetry) poets. My discussion will focus specifically on Kalidasa’s lyrical poem, the Meghaduta (‘Cloud Messenger’). The Meghaduta, one of Kalidasa’s greatest poems, tells the story of a yaksha (demigod) who was separated from his beloved. The paper will demonstrate how Kalidasa uses this tale to echo central themes of kāvya poetry, particularly that of ‘love in separation.’

Andrew McGarrity, University of Sydney (co-authored by Kuntala Lahiri-Datt from ANU)

Water and Aquatic Imagery in the Upanishads

This paper explores tensions implicit in the Vedic and Upanishadic worldview through an analysis of water and aquatic imagery in all its forms; namely: as rain, rivers, the ocean and the element of water itself. The sacrificial worldview is one dominated by fire and the metaphor of ‘eating’ and consumption, and Upanishadic speculation draws upon this in seeking to provide a reductive model of the Absolute (whether expressed as ātman, brahman, purusha etc). However, the image of water seems to undermine any attempt for incorporation into ontological or metaphysically reductive hierarchies, yet, as I will argue, its oceanic capability makes it too powerful an image to ignore. Water, and its association with taste (rasa) is also used in the Upanishads to indicate a degree of veridicality in the ascertainment of the Ultimate that is lacking in models associated with seeing, hearing and space. Moreover, Oneness expressed in terms of water is used to present the Absolute in terms of an integrative affirmation rather than a ‘neti neti’-style
abstractive or reductive negation, thus indicating some of the diversity and subtlety of the Upanishadic vision.

Dr Barbara Nelson, ANU

Finding the path in Śāntideva

Śāntideva’s two texts, the Bodhicarāvatāra and the Śikṣamuccaya, outline the practices of a bodhisattva, but do they outline a path? The Mahāyāna path begins with the thought of awakening (bodhicitta) and ends with perfect awakening (saṃyaksambodhi). Between these two, the bodhisattva engages in many practices, including the virtues (pāramitā), and progresses through stages (bhūmi). Did Śāntideva follow any earlier model of the bodhisattva path? Attempting to answer this question uncovers the lack of coherence in depictions of the path in Indian Mahāyāna literature. This paper looks at some aspects of the bodhisattva path in Śāntideva’s texts.

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