

PERCY BANESHIK LECTURE GIVEN BY PROFESSOR MOLLY BROWN

AT NORTHWARDS, JOHANNESBURG – 17 SEPTEMBER 2016

Guests of the English Academy of Southern Africa were welcomed by a scrumptious tea to the Percy Baneshik Lecture, held in 2016 in Johannesburg. The tea was served on the northern portico of Northwards, overlooking arguably, one of the most beautiful views of Johannesburg. The morning had been threatening rain but the foggy sky lifted showing the expanse of trees that is Johannesburg's northern suburbs.



View of Johannesburg from Northwards

Northwards, a 40 room mansion, designed by Sir Herbert Baker was built in 1905 for Randlord, John Dale Lace. After tea, Dr Neil Viljoen, Northwards's curator, gave a short tour of the house. Dr Viljoen pointed out architectural details pristinely restored to their original. But, it was anecdotes about the flamboyant lady of the house, José Dale Lace, which brought the house to life. The outrageous lady is said to have bathed in milk and to have left home to the sound of bugle fan-fare in her zebra drawn 'horse' and cart.

The Gauteng region of the Academy was honoured to have our President, Professor Rajendra Chetty, fly up from Cape Town for the event. Professor Chetty welcomed guests and introduced the speaker, Professor Molly Brown, who is Head of the Department of English at the University of Pretoria. Professor Brown was supported by her husband, Patrick Lanahan.

Professor Brown's lecture, **Children's Literature Matters (?)**, began with a quotation from Elizabeth Bowen, Anglo-Irish writer and member of the Bloomsbury group. Bowen emphasised that the way in which one reads as a young child contributes to one's adult identity. Professor Brown's talk made interesting references to literary critics, writers and philosophers to demonstrate important points and included a discussion on genes and memes, cultural factors that serve to condition who we are and what our tastes are. Professor Brown's lecture was also beautifully illustrated. At the end of it, no one was in doubt that children's literature does, indeed, matter. Most of us can remember, with a good deal of nostalgia, the precious moments shared between parent and child either being read to by our own parents or doing the reading to our own children.



Professors Molly Brown and Rosemary Gray

Merwyn Woodrow, a well-known South African writer gave the vote of thanks. Although Merwyn is in his 80s, he has just published another book, *My Little Green Book*, essentially a memoir of charming anecdotes, poems and illustrations.

Rave Caterers then treated the Academy's guests to a delicious lunch. And guests enjoyed an opportunity to network whilst enjoying the spring Johannesburg sunshine in Northwards's beautiful garden.



Prof Rajendra Chetty, Dr David Robinson and Barbara Basel tuck into Rave Carterer's delicious food

Special thanks to the Percy Baneshik Trust, Professor Brown, Patrick Lanahan, Merwyn Woodrow, Professor Rose Gray (who organised the event) and to Rave Caterers (for their delicious tea and lunch).



Academy members Rob Sharman and Owen Seda at the function

Annette Meklis (with thanks to Rose Gray)
October 2016