
Editorial

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This issue of *Queensland Review* takes as its focus the literature of the Sunshine Coast and its hinterland. Under a conceptually rigorous regime, it might be deemed necessary to interrogate some of these terms closely: both ‘literature’ and ‘the Sunshine Coast’ are both, for different reasons, potentially contestable notions — as also, in this context, is the word ‘of’: does it mean ‘from’ or ‘about’ or both? Our authors have elected not to contest these matters in the abstract, but rather to adopt broadly inclusive definitions of all three terms — and, for that matter, of ‘the hinterland’. Our cover image does something similar. An unattributed colour photograph taken nearly half a century ago, looking westward from the northern tip of Bribie Island (or thereabouts) to the Glasshouse Mountains, it captures — rather cunningly given the proximity of human habitation just outside the frame — something of the primeval beauty of both the littoral and the hinterland, a recurrent theme in this collection.

A relaxed approach to definitions and boundaries perhaps reflects, at least in part, the ethos and lifestyle of the region in question: it is, after all, a favourite holiday destination for Australians, and has been for a long time. (Who needs the hassle?) But it also reflects the nature of the event at which most of these papers were first presented, which was a small two-day conference organised and attended by retired members of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature (AsalVets, as we call ourselves — unemployed at last!) at Caloundra in April 2016. Many interstate delegates were seeing the place for the first time, and luxuriating in its seascapes, landscapes and weather; many Queensland delegates, meanwhile, were lost in the mists of childhood nostalgia. Both groups were primed for a leisurely intellectual saunter amid the warmth, brightness, fecundity and (relatively) unspoilt beauty that have captivated writers for more than a hundred years.

And that was very much what happened, thanks in large part to the enthusiastic participation of the local writers and historians who attended the sessions and contributed their knowledge, expertise and goodwill to the discussions. Their presence also helped to create a receptive audience for the kinds of papers that, over the last few years, the AsalVets have tended to prefer at their annual conferences: applied literary criticism and comparison of the works of individual writers in their social and historical contexts.

Most of the articles in this issue are unashamedly of this type. Some dozen Australian writers, all with significant connections to the Sunshine Coast and its hinterland, receive close and appreciative attention from a variety of angles, and one, Vance Palmer — author of that classic novel of Caloundra in the 1920s, *The Passage* (1930) — finds his way into three essays. Deborah Jordan, an established

authority on the life and thought of Nettie and Vance Palmer, shows how the Palmers' Caloundra writings — in distinct but complementary ways — addressed some surprisingly contemporary questions about environmental conservation and the value of regional writing in the context of a self-consciously national literature. Susan Lever takes up some similar issues in her lively and provocative comparison of *The Passage* with Susan Johnson's recent novel *The Landing* (2015) — two evocations of 'utopian' Sunshine Coast communities published 85 years apart. Belinda McKay looks at the 'Aboriginality' present in 'whitened' form in Palmer's novel, comparing it with the different (but also uncomfortably displaced) treatment of Indigenous culture nearly forty years later in that other wonderful novel of the hinterland, Eleanor Dark's *Lantana Lane* (1951), relating both novels to ideas about 'development' in the region. As it happens, Dark's minor masterpiece has had a good run in *Queensland Review*. McKay herself published a more comprehensive piece on *Lantana Lane* in 2001 (vol. 8, no. 2), and just last year Melinda Cooper wrote about it in relation to 'late modernity' (vol. 23, no. 2). Both can be accessed on the Cambridge University Press website, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/queensland-review>.

The natural environment was always going to be a leading theme in a collection of this kind. If coastal seascapes preoccupied Vance Palmer — and later John Blight, whose two volumes of sea sonnets Kay Ferres explores here with subtle ingenuity — it has been the fertility and verdancy of the hinterland that have attracted writers like Peter Carey, whose stellar career might plausibly be dated from the three years he spent living in a hippie commune at Brown's Creek near Yandina, when he published *War Crimes* (1979) and *Bliss* (1981). Tony Hassall guides us through the strangely beautiful novel, *His Illegal Self* (2008), in which Carey returns at the end, in both plot and spirit, to that same luxuriant landscape. The hinterland also features prominently in Inga Simpson's work — indeed, she has described herself as both 'nature writer' and 'hinterland writer'. Jane Frank's essay provides an appreciation of the 'quiet power' of her recent novels, set in the Eudlo/Palmwoods area. Nina Gartrell, another denizen of the hinterland, departs from the conventions of the critical essay in her 'permaculture travel memoir', a lyrical rumination on the balance between her emotional fidelity to a regionally precise childhood home and her 'polyamorous affinities' to other places in the world.

Other essays document less idyllic, more ambivalent experiences of the region. Cheryl Taylor compares the poems Thea Astley wrote about love and landscape while she was teaching at Imbil and Pomona in the late 1940s with her more jaundiced and satirical treatment of the same material in her novel *A Descant for Gossips* (1960). Sue Sheridan, in considering the career of Nancy Cato, best-known for her Murray River trilogy *All the Rivers Run* (1978), finds good reason to reframe her work in 'ecocritical' terms. Delightfully responsive as her poetry (largely uncollected and little known) is to the natural beauties of the Noosa area, where she spent the last thirty years of her life, it is deeply informed by the politics of her career as an environmental activist in the latter part of the last century, when resistance to the greed of local developers and governments was important to the future of the whole region.

Judith Wright, another indefatigable environmental warrior, is not discussed directly in this issue (although it was pleasing to welcome the eminent Wright scholar Shirley Walker to the conference). But Wright's husband-to-be, Jack McKinney,

published a number of humorous stories and sketches about the daily trials of a small farmer, Septimus Patrick Noonan, drawing on his own years as a dairy farmer in the Sunshine Coast hinterland in the 1920s. Roger Osborne has performed an important service in recovering and contextualising these once-popular works.

Obviously this collection of essays makes no claim to comprehensiveness, or even representativeness, in its treatment of the literary history of the Sunshine Coast. If there is a larger pattern to be discerned, though, perhaps it is one of *transient engagement*. Whether it be Judith Wright or Jack McKinney, Thea Astley or Eleanor Dark, Peter Carey or the Palmers, Susan Johnson or John Blight, many of the writers who have most memorably brought the region to literary life have come from elsewhere and have not stayed for very long. The notable exception was Nancy Cato and, at the time of writing, David and Kristin Williamson, Gary Crew and Inga Simpson are still residents of the region, perhaps embodying the possibility of a more permanent literary presence for the immediate future. Patrick Buckridge's essay on the roles of the Nambour *Chronicle* and Public Library in the first half of the last century poses the question of whether, in those earlier decades, the Sunshine Coast should be thought of as a 'literary region' at all. Whatever the answer to that may be, it is abundantly clear from the essays in this issue that it is a region in which, both then and now, 'literature happens'.