

# Imagining the Hinterland: Literary Representations of Southeast Queensland Beyond the Brisbane Line

**Belinda McKay**

Southeast Queensland — the region encompassing Coolangatta and the McPherson Range to the south, Cooloola and the Blackall Range to the north, and the Great Dividing Range to the west — represents one of Queensland's most significant literary landscapes. For millennia, this area — defined by mountains and waterways — contained important gathering places for ceremonies and trade, and its inhabitants elaborated the meaning of the landscape in a rich complex of stories and other cultural practices such as the bunya festivals. Colonisation disrupted but did not obliterate these cultural associations, which remain alive in the oral traditions of local Aboriginal people and, in more recent times, have surfaced in the work of writers like Oodgeroo Noonuccal and Sam Watson.

European interest in the Moreton Bay region developed slowly. A penal colony was established in 1824, but the area was not opened to free settlement until 1842. The separation of Queensland from New South Wales in 1859 accelerated the growth of two towns: Brisbane — the region's only viable port as well as the capital of the colony — and, to a lesser extent, the river town of Ipswich a few miles inland. Economically, Southeast Queensland developed into a classic example of a port and administrative centre servicing a large, sparsely populated hinterland. Imaginatively, too, the southeastern corner of the colony came to be represented in literature as a region of cultural contrasts, in which the urban life of Brisbane was juxtaposed against the natural or rural character of the surrounding region, which was often characterised as a hinterland in the figurative sense of a relatively unexplored and mysterious territory.

This contrapuntal representation of Southeast Queensland was first elaborated in a number of novels by Rosa Praed, where the main characters commute between the political, administrative and commercial hub of 'Leichardt's [sic] Town' (Brisbane) and an area identifiable as the Logan Valley, which is the site both for rural

enterprises such as farming and grazing, and for recreation and restoration through expeditions to sublime and potentially dangerous natural environments. Somewhat surprisingly, perhaps, a similar literary representation of Southeast Queensland's *coastal* areas as sites for colonial enterprises such as logging and fishing, as well as for restoration and recreation, developed only in the twentieth century.

Today, however, the sharp literary contrast between urban and natural environments in Southeast Queensland is disappearing as the hinterland's relationship with Brisbane undergoes a radical transformation. From the 1950s onwards, the expansion of Brisbane and the urbanisation of the Gold Coast increasingly blurred the old distinctions: rainforests reach into Brisbane backyards in the work of Janette Turner Hospital, and the Gold Coast is all artifice built on shifting sands in the work of Matt Condon. In the early twenty-first century, conurbation is obliterating the natural environment and generating a vast suburbia that already stretches from Coolangatta to Noosa, and is now spreading up the river valleys of the Scenic Rim. The economies of the Gold and Sunshine Coasts are no longer dependent on Brisbane, and new forms of transport allow people and goods to bypass the capital city. At the same time, the long-standing literary dichotomy of 'urban' Brisbane and the 'natural' or 'rural' landscapes of its surrounds is transmuting along with the landscape and economy of Southeast Queensland. This paper will explore the shifting literary representations of Brisbane's hinterland over the past 150 years.

The earliest writings about Southeast Queensland are the journals, reports and letters of explorers such as Matthew Flinders, John Oxley, Allan Cunningham and Ludwig Leichardt.<sup>1</sup> Later, the diaries and letters of early colonists recorded white understandings of the land and of contact with Aboriginal people: Tom Petrie's reminiscences, recorded by his daughter Constance Campbell Petrie and published in 1904, have provided a particularly rich source for both historians and literary writers. Petrie recalled the role of the triennial bunya festivals in bringing together Aboriginal people from different areas, and emphasised the importance of storytelling at these events:

Tales were told of what forefathers did, how wonderful some of them were in hunting and killing game, also in fighting. The blacks have lively imaginations of what happened years ago, and some of the incidents they remembered of their big fights, etc., were truly marvellous!<sup>2</sup>

After Petrie, stories about Aboriginal relationships with the land, and creation legends, are recorded by a number of white writers in the context of deepening their own (and their readers') sense of place. Enid Bell published Aboriginal stories about the 'mountain peaks of the great blue range above the [Logan] valley' in *Legends of the Coochin Valley* (1946) and, in his reminiscences of Moreton Bay — a significant source for Vance and Nettie Palmer — Thomas Welsby includes a good deal of Aboriginal material.<sup>3</sup> Concerns about cultural appropriation began to emerge in the second half of the twentieth century: in 1951, Judith Wright

declined to edit a collection of Aboriginal legends for Oxford University Press, refusing to turn them into 'European yarns to amuse the kids'.<sup>4</sup> It was not until the publication in 1972 of *Stradbroke Dreamtime* by Kath Walker (later Oodgeroo Noonuccal) that the history and legends of Southeast Queensland came to be written from an Aboriginal perspective.<sup>5</sup>

Curiously, despite such abundant evidence from early colonial times of Aboriginal stories, some colonial writers insisted that their adopted land needed to be awakened by a white bard. Mary 'Eva' O'Doherty, in her poem, 'Queensland', represents the colony as 'barren', 'blank' and 'lifeless' — awaiting 'that touch informing' of a nationalist poet. This idea was expressed as late as 1905 by F. Corkling, who writes in *Steele Rudd's Magazine*: 'For untold centuries the land embraced by this vast circle [Moreton Bay] slept like the sleeping beauty... [N]o inspired bard immortalized the heroes' deeds.'<sup>6</sup>

Cornelius Moynihan grappled with such sentiments in writing his long poem, *The Feast of the Bunya* (1901). He certainly considered the material to have the potential for an epic along classical lines, but in his Introduction argued that such a work 'can never be written in the absence of an aboriginal [sic] genius'. Rather than projecting himself into the minds and emotions of his characters, Moynihan describes the bunya festivals from the point of view of an external observer. *The Feast of the Bunya* begins with the journey of the Moreton Bay clans to the Bunya Mountains:

From the fair shores of Bribie,  
 To Cook and Flinders known,  
 Caloundra to Elimbah,  
 Famed for the pumice stone ...  
 From lofty Bearburrum,  
 Home of the feathery grass,  
 Toomboomoola, Bearwah,  
 Mountains of glittering glass;  
 From woody-crowned Maroochie,  
 Where grow the kauri pines;  
 Cootharaba, Illandra,  
 To Gympie's precious mines;

From where the glossy mangroves,  
 Woomgoompa's saltmarsh hide;  
 Where the frail craft, with flapping sail,  
 Drifts with the ebbing tide;  
 From the low channel islands,  
 Whose oyster banks between,  
 With many a sandy shallow,  
 Extend to far Tuleen;

With each a separate leader,  
By differing paths and roads,  
And some with scarce a nulla,  
And some with grievous loads;  
Armed with their native weapons,  
In all their proud array —  
To Mobolon are marching  
The tribes of Moreton Bay.

By the end of the poem, the tribes — like most of the bunyas — have vanished, but the 'pioneer residents' of the Bunya Mountains have assimilated the qualities of those of 'those easy-going late aboriginal [*sic*] inhabitants', and live in an 'ideal state' of harmony with the natural environment. This motif of symbolic 'reconciliation' effected retrospectively by the colonisers — perhaps indicative of a strongly felt need for moral redemption — appears later in Roy Connolly's epic novel, *Southern Saga* (1940), which also makes extensive use of Aboriginal legends and history in a dramatic account of the colonisation of the bunya lands.<sup>7</sup>

Like the bunya region north of Brisbane, the Logan Valley to the south figures prominently as an important early literary landscape in Queensland writing, reflecting its importance in the rural economy of the early colony. In several novels by Rosa Praed, this setting provides a counterpoint to the representation of political life in 'Leichardt's Town' [*sic*], which is a thinly veiled portrait of Brisbane. Praed's main characters are typically close to the centre of power in the new colony, but their wealth and status derive from the land. In the Logan environment, they are depicted as landed gentry in the English tradition, but transposed to a strange and sometimes threatening environment. In *Policy and Passion* (1881), *The Head Station* (1885) and *Outlaw and Lawmaker* (1893),<sup>8</sup> the Logan Valley is the setting for the kind of rural enterprise on which the wealth of the new colony is based, but it is also portrayed as a natural environment whose beauty can be a benign source of recreation or a sublime wilderness which unleashes tragic potentialities.

In *Policy and Passion*, the restorative and recreational potential of the landscape is elaborated in the chapter 'A Picnic in the Mountains', where the local landowners — who also play leading political roles in Leichardt's Town — conduct a kangaroo hunt with hounds, which is followed by a picnic at Koorong Crag (based on Mt Lindesay). The underlying menace of this sublime landscape, however, is never far from the surface. On the picnic, a visiting English aristocrat is bitten by a whip-snake and falls over a precipice, though he survives. In *Outlaw and Lawmaker*, Lord Horace Gage (a character based loosely on Henry Phipps, Lord Lorne, who owned property in the Logan Valley) is less fortunate: he dies after being bitten by a death adder on the eerie slopes of Mount Luya (again, a fictionalised representation of Mt Lindesay). In this novel, Rosa Praed uses Barolin Waterfall on Mount Luya as the setting for a doomed love affair between the bushranger *cum* politician Morres Blake and the spirited young Elsie Vallant. At the end of *Outlaw and Lawmaker*, Morres Blake throws himself over the waterfall, the sublime potential

of which for both exaltation and tragedy is foreshadowed in the author's first description of the site:

The waterfall ... could hardly be equalled in picturesqueness, as it stole from the black masses of the scrub, with the grand girdling precipice just above ... The jagged pines gave a certain weirdness to the scene, and the utter absence of any sign of humanity added to its extreme wildness and desolation.

For Praed, the notion that the 'foot of European has never trod' here, and that 'the Blacks' have a 'superstitious reverence, amounting to terror, for this region' heightens the emotional power of the landscape, as does the remoteness of the upper Logan, which could be reached only through Ipswich and the Dugandan Scrub — a journey which took several days.<sup>9</sup>

While Praed used Aboriginal legends to reinforce and heighten her English readers' perceptions of the Queensland landscape as romantic and sublime, other writers struggled to respond to a landscape that, as Stable and Kirwood put it, held for the European diaspora 'no glamour of past romance'.<sup>10</sup> Francis Kenna, who wrote for the *Sydney Bulletin* as 'K' and edited the *Logan and Albert Bulletin*, published *Songs of a Season* in 1895. Most of these slight poems in the Celtic twilight tradition have only the most tenuous sense of place, but in 'The Dead Lagoon' Kenna draws on an association with Aboriginal legends to heighten the local colour: 'Oft the dusky native father / Sitting by his trembling child' sings of the legend 'fraught with terror' of this 'shunned and dreaded region'.<sup>11</sup>

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many well-known poets wrote occasional poems about various scenic points in the natural environment around Brisbane. Emily Coungeau, who lived on Bribie Island for many years, uses her nature poetry to bring the Queensland landscape into the imperial project. Her understanding of herself as a public poet is reflected in the formality of her acrostic, 'The Glasshouse Mountains, Queensland', the first two stanzas of which sufficiently suggest the lofty tenor of the poem:

T Thou mighty Monoliths of Nature's mould,  
H Horologes of time and seasons which have rolled  
E Ere mortals' drama on life's stage begun.

G Gray oceans hid thee in oblivion.  
L Lo! In the archaic rocks thy feet were laid,  
A And Saurian monsters once around thee played,  
S Sun, moon and stars alone thy forms had viewed,  
S Standing in weird mysterious solitude.  
H Heaving and shuddering with internal wrath  
O Out from thy vitals Jovian bolts came forth:  
U Unchained thy fury and malignant ire,  
S Spirits of Vulcan poured their liquid fire,  
E Epochs rolled on. The waves retreating fled.<sup>12</sup>

By contrast, Alice Ham entices her reader to participate in her joyful experience of nature in 'Burleigh Heads' (1886):

Set your foot on the sloping stone,  
Swing by a vine stem - so!  
Above are the vaulted boughs alone;  
Beneath, where the drift is upward thrown,  
The weltering waters go.<sup>13</sup>

Such lyric ecstasy also characterises the work of Emily Hemans Bulcock, Vance Palmer's sister, who had a long association with Caloundra. In *Jacaranda Blooms* (1923), her poems 'Caloundra' and 'Montville to Mapleton' emphasise the 'romance' of nature: Caloundra is a 'Sleeping Beauty' whose 'charm is hidden from careless eyes'; the Glasshouses are 'weird' in the sunset, and Montville is an 'enchanted land'.<sup>14</sup> 'Curramundi - Caloundra' in *From Quenchless Springs* (c. 1945) goes further, using religious language to describe the effects of nature on an acolyte:

Sunset at Curramundi, well might move the heart to prayer,  
The day grows great in giving, as to splendid death she goes:  
Far off the Glasshouse Mountains stand like giant guardians there,  
On purpling Blackall Ranges, bush-fires, like torches flare!  
And soft with benediction the healing darkness grows.<sup>15</sup>

Here Bulcock foreshadows later writers in finding a restorative spiritual force in the natural environment.

Vance and Nettie Palmer lived in Caloundra from 1925 to 1929, an extremely productive period of their careers. According to biographer Vivian Smith, Vance Palmer 'conceived and wrote in a first form or re-wrote the small group of novels on which his reputation as a novelist rests' and '[t]hese years too saw Nettie Palmer's greatest activity as a critic'.<sup>16</sup> When the Palmers returned to Melbourne, Nettie reflected on the legacy of their time at Caloundra:

Quiet days of work, with odd hours on the beaches or the flower-plain; and then the breaks at the week-end — tramping up barefooted over the wet sand to picnic at Curramundi, or rowing over to the lee side of Bribie Island. There's been time to read and think, even to enjoy the company of the casual visitors who've wandered in. People don't unbutton themselves so easily in town. What long talks we've had on this old veranda, looking down at Maloney's boat coming in or watching the swans flying up the Passage about sunset! ... [T]he place has become part of us.<sup>17</sup>

Nowhere is the profound effect of a place on human lives more powerfully evoked in fiction than in Vance Palmer's novel *The Passage* (1930), which is set in and around Caloundra. The central character, Lew Callaway, is shaped by his environment: 'It came to him that almost since his boyhood there had been an inner

life going on in him like the movement among the swaying grasses of the sea-floor.<sup>18</sup> Unlike those characters who fight against the natural environment, Lew is able to move forward confidently into the future.

The influence of the environment on people's lives — symbolised by the ineradicable lantana — is also evident in Eleanor Dark's *Lantana Lane* (1959), written during her seven years in Montville. This collection of stories about 'a bunch of unrepentant anachronisms assembled in Lantana Lane' draws a parallel between the small farmer and the artist:

The small-scale production of sustenance — whether mental, physical or spiritual — exposes the producer to certain subversive influences — namely nature and solitude. These influences render him quite unfit for useful participation in the affairs of an advanced civilisation, for they make him think, and wait, and stare, and dream ... What makes small-scale activity so undesirable is clearly the solitude it involves, and the temptation inherent in solitude, to think.

*Lantana Lane*, a collection which experiments playfully with the essay and short story genres, celebrates the lantana-like resistance of small-scale producers to the capitalist ideology of the 'expanding era' where 'the one thing that contracts is time'.<sup>19</sup>

While the work of the Palmers and Eleanor Dark is inspired by the settled fishing and farming communities of the Sunshine Coast, a different literary approach to Southeast Queensland was also emerging by the 1930s, based on the idea of nature as wilderness. In 1908, the first National Park in Queensland was created at Witches Falls on Mt Tamborine, heralding the beginning of a battle to conserve biodiversity in the region. During the twentieth century, the environmental movement came into conflict with various economic interests, such as logging, farming, mining and tourism, over the fate of Southeast Queensland's rainforests and sand dunes. The inclusion of the Queensland section of the border rainforests in the Central Eastern Rainforests Reserves (Australia) World Heritage area in 1994 represented a significant victory for environmentalists.

Interest in the idea of nature as wilderness arose in part out of the climbing culture of Southeast Queensland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>20</sup> The 1937 Stinson air crash also impressed on the imagination of the Queensland public the dramatic scenery and isolation of the McPherson Range. *Green Mountains* (1940), Bernard O'Reilly's account of his discovery of the survivors of the Stinson air crash of 1937, emphasises the rugged natural beauty of this region:

Masses of tree ferns were gathered round; great lilies were banked on either side; ropes of lawyer vine, with their palm-like leaves dipped in low festoons over this small torrent[;] on either side, and meeting overhead, were the ancient Antarctic beeches covered with moss, which dripped from the drifting spray of the waterfalls and from the ever present moisture which goes with mountains almost eternally enveloped in cloud.<sup>21</sup>

In the second half of the twentieth century, rainforests — along with sandy beaches — became key symbols of the beauty, complexity and fragility of Southeast Queensland's natural heritage. Judith Wright, both as poet and environmental activist, was the foremost interpreter of this landscape.

Judith Wright lived on Mt Tamborine from the late 1940s until the early 1970s, and also frequently visited Cooloola on the Sunshine Coast. Out of her close observation of and love for the natural environment of Southeast Queensland, she came to see the human role 'as a new obligation for the continued existence of the earth and its doings and beings'.<sup>22</sup> For Wright, the value of the landscape is no longer merely aesthetic, recreational or restorative. Unlike earlier writers, she links a sense of place to the history of human interaction with the environment: a growing awareness of the dispossession of Aboriginal people and the destruction of the land underpins her lyrical response to nature.

In 'The Lost Man' (*The Gateway*, 1953), the fate of James Westray, the young Englishman who survived the Stinson crash but died in his attempt to walk down the mountain to raise the alarm, might represent the bewildering journey of all newcomers to this land:

To reach the pool you must go through the rain-forest —  
through the bewildering midsummer of darkness  
lit with ancient fern,  
laced with poison and thorn.

Awareness, achieved only at the moment of death, comes through a bodily experience which is likened to the passion of Christ: 'the way of the bleeding / hands and feet, the blood on the stones like flowers'.<sup>23</sup> Wright's growing unease over the role played by her own family in the dispossession of Aboriginal people finds expression in 'At Cooloolah' (*The Two Fires*, 1955). A blue crane is 'the certain heir of lake and evening':

but I'm a stranger, come of a conquering people,  
I cannot share his calm, who watch his lake,  
being unloved by all my eyes delight in,  
and made uneasy, for an old murder's sake.

A 'driftwood spear / thrust from the water' reminds her of her grandfather's story of having seen a ghost, 'a black accoutred warrior'. Like her grandfather, she 'must quiet a heart accused by its own fear'.<sup>24</sup> Wright's large body of work — poetry, prose, essays — much of it written on Mt Tamborine, grapples with the question of how to move forward from dispossession and destruction. Always, however, as Wright made explicit in 'The Morning of the Dead' (*Five Senses*, 1953), the act of creating works of art is a large part of the answer:

let the thin bubble of blown glass, the passion  
of vision that is art, refine, reflect and gather

the moving pattern of all things in consummation  
and their rejoicing.<sup>25</sup>

Wright's years in Southeast Queensland played a key role in forging her 'passion of vision'.

Kath Walker, later Oodgeroo Noonuccal, was an important influence on Judith Wright from their meeting in 1963. *We Are Going* (1964), the first published collection of poems by an Indigenous Australian, powerfully expresses Walker's anger at the ongoing dispossession of her people. While they contribute to a national debate, these poems derive their intensity from being rooted in personal and local experience, and many of the poems refer to particular individuals. 'The Dispossessed' is dedicated to Uncle Willie McKenzie of the Dongiya tribe from the Caboolture district:

Peace was yours, Australian man, with tribal laws you made,  
Till white Colonials stole your peace with rape and murder raid;  
They shot and poisoned and enslaved until, a scattered few,  
Only a remnant now remain, and the heart dies in you.

Fruitless promises of equality and justice are like a second dispossession: 'so slow the justice due, / Courage decays for want of hope, and the heart dies in you.'<sup>26</sup>

Oodgeroo writes about places as cultural landscapes, meaningful because of the way they shape, and have been shaped by, the human presence. In 'Gooboora, the Silent Pool', dedicated to Grannie Sunflower, the place (now known as Lake Karboora on North Stradbroke Island) continues to exist, but its meaning is diminished:

Gooboora, Gooboora, the Water of Fear,  
That awed the Noonuccals once numerous here,  
The Bunyip is gone from your bone-strewn bed,  
And the clans departed to drift with the dead.

Gooboora, Gooboora, it makes the heart sore  
That you should be here but my people no more!<sup>27</sup>

The poems in Oodgeroo's later volume, *The Dawn is at Hand* (1966), arise out of her belief that the past survives in the present:

Let no one say the past is dead.  
The past is all about us and within.  
Haunted by tribal memories, I know  
*This little now, this accidental present*  
Is not the all of me, whose long making  
Is so much of the past.<sup>28</sup>

The 'long making' of the present also underlies Oodgeroo's various collections of stories. *Stradbroke Dreamtime* contains childhood recollections as well as traditional stories. Although these works celebrate the strength and endurance of Aboriginal culture, the destructive effects of colonisation are never far from the surface. In 'Stradbroke', she deplores the changes brought by a second invasion of her island in the form of an 'assault on nature' by 'greedy mineral seekers' and tourists.<sup>29</sup> Her own journey is symbolically told in 'Oodgeroo' (which means paperbark), about a girl who 'longed for her lost tribe, and for the stories that had belonged to her people'. Through marking paperbark trees with the charred sticks from the dead fires of lost tribes, she finds her way back to the old Dreamtime.<sup>30</sup>

Although the natural landscapes of Southeast Queensland continue to inspire lyric poetry — recent examples include Michael Sariban's *Facing the Pacific* (1999) and poems by David Malouf in *The Year of the Foxes* (1979) and *First Things Last* (1980)<sup>31</sup> — since the 1950s there has been an increasing concentration on prose, to the extent that Frank Moorhouse has described the Gold Coast as 'one of the most potent narrative sites in Australia'.<sup>32</sup> This change coincides with the postwar metamorphosis of the Gold Coast from an unpretentious getaway for Brisbane families into Australia's foremost holiday destination. In Keith Leopold's *My Brow is Wet* (1969), a Brisbane academic, lured by 'a strange sense of freedom and elation', is drawn into the criminal world which is an inherent part of the Gold Coast's transformation from 'primitive' backwater to artificial pleasure-dome. Surfers Paradise is the hollow and deceptive 'Glitterlights' in Thea Astley's *The Acolyte* (1972). In David Malouf's *Johnno* (1975), 'staid old-fashioned Brisbane' is sharply contrasted in Johnno's imagination with the 'wickedly alternative life' of the Gold Coast 'only sixty miles away', where: 'Among its harlequin motels, Florida, El Dorado, Las Vegas, call girls had begun to operate, and a fast crowd from the South was continuously at play.' The artificiality of the Gold Coast is now more remarked upon than its natural attributes, and it is often represented in literature as a simulacrum. Peter Goldsworthy's *Honk if You are Jesus* (1992), for instance, is set at Hollis Schultz University, which includes a Bible Theme Park and an imitation of the Notre Dame Cathedral. Matthew Condon, in *A Night at the Pink Poodle* (1995), depicts the Gold Coast as 'Brisbane's Riviera':

This was the imagined territory of white robes and champagne and flirting and sex and pyjama parties and bikinis and endless fantasies a hundred kilometres from the office blocks of Brisbane. It became a state of mind.<sup>33</sup>

As all these writers suggest, the Gold Coast — whether in spite or because of its illusoriness — has an extraordinary hold on the imagination. In Elizabeth Webb's *Into the Morning* (1958), the Gold Coast is a place where new possibilities can be imagined and enacted. Toddy Vine, the 'half-caste' narrator, visits Mermaid Beach as the chauffeur of a Brisbane politician:

We drove through the modern, bright-painted shopping centre of Surfers' Paradise, with its big brick hotel where nobs from all over the world come and spend their winters, to where the road runs into bushland again, between the sand-dunes.

In this transitional place, where everybody 'is baked as brown as a chip', on the dunes where land meets sea, he begins an empowering love affair with an older white woman, Ana Perez. Toddy finds both self-acceptance and love on the Gold Coast: 'I can't remember any time in my life when I was so happy.'<sup>34</sup>

The theme of the coast as a transitional or liminal space where rites of passage or life-changing experiences occur is taken up strongly in many later novels. Experimental sexual encounters often occur during a coastal interlude: Paul and Hilda make their first 'fumbling interpretations' of sex at 'a sea-anted hotel down the coast' in Thea Astley's *The Acolyte*, while in Georgia Savage's *The Estuary* (1987), widow Vinnie Beaumont has an affair with the 'liberated' Marcia Scott: 'On an evening softened by a big persimmon moon, I let Marcia make love to me in the rough grass which bordered the beach ... I stayed there as shameless and receptive as a sea anemone while she set about showing me her expertise in lesbian lovemaking.'<sup>35</sup> In Malouf's *Fly Away Peter* (1982), working-class drifter Jim Saddler and landowner Ashley Crowther meet in the coastal swamps, drawn by a common interest in bird-watching. Like Lew in Palmer's *The Passage*, Jim is a character formed by bodily contact with the natural world; although inarticulate, he is deeply connected with natural rhythms, and possesses what might be described as ecological or bodily intelligence. In *Fly Away Peter*, the coastal swamps signify a landscape where 'new things could enter and find a place', and this novel about the Great War ends, after the death of Jim and the wounding of Ashley in Europe, with the ecstatic, forward-looking image of a youth 'walking — no, running, on the water' on 'a kind of plank': a harbinger of the surfing culture that would develop after another world war.<sup>36</sup>

The instability and formlessness of coastal topography, however, can also be unsettling. 'How can people be so sure of the boundary between land and sea that they have the confidence to [build] houses on it?' asks Helen Garner in 'Postcards from Surfers' (1985).<sup>37</sup> In Matthew Condon's *A Night at the Pink Poodle* (1995), real estate agent Icarus lives in a penthouse apartment 'on a thin finger of sand between Main Beach and Surfers Paradise' (Narrowneck). Icarus's growing obsession with the impermanence of land speculation and the instability of personal identity is reinforced by his view of the Gold Coast from a helicopter:

I had never realised how *watery* the whole place was, how precarious ... I was amazed at the infrastructure so tenuously stacked on fingers of what were nothing more than strips and nodules of sand. From that height it looked as though it would take nothing more than a slight rise in the level of the ocean, the tiniest increase, and we'd all go under ... I began to see the canals behind the beachfront as threatening. The surf as a killer in waiting. And the Nerang River as a serpent, silver and solid when it caught the sun.

At the same time, this protean quality is fecund with imaginative possibilities: 'Perhaps it was what made the coast so mad, so colourful and bizarre and full of pleasure and conflict. Here it was, teetering on the edge of the Pacific, leaning towards the sea, electric with river currents and the draw of the surf.'<sup>38</sup> In Malouf's poems, too, place shapes consciousness. In 'Glasshouse Mountains', the seascape of the northern part of Moreton Bay metamorphoses into a mindscape, evoking the power of those suggestive peaks — 'seen always across / a bay called Deception' — to enter the dreams of boys and men. They are:

giants unkilld who walk  
tonight the moonlit water  
-lanes of my sleep'.<sup>39</sup>

Malouf's words resonate with an earlier description of these strange mountains by Eleanor Dark:

It is noticeable that sightseers do not so much look at them as watch them, with an almost suspicious attention ... [T]hey have such an air of impermanence, and even of unreality, as to seem less like hills than hallucinations.<sup>40</sup>

The representation of Brisbane's hinterland as a space for recreation, restoration and creative inspiration remains an important theme of both poetry and prose, surviving the transition of large swathes of this landscape from natural paradise to artificial pleasure-dome. There are, however, signs of change. As conurbation proliferates, the distinction between urban Brisbane and its 'natural' hinterland becomes increasingly blurred. Melissa Lucashenko's novel *Steam Pigs* (1997) is set in 'slumcity' (Logan City), on the freeway between Brisbane and Southport: the one hope for the young Murri protagonist, Sue Wilson, is to head up the freeway to gain an education in Brisbane, in an ironic reversal of the usual literary motif of Brisbane youths, typified by Thea Astley's Keith Levenson in *The Slow Natives*, escaping to the Gold Coast.<sup>41</sup>

Development, however, has had the unexpected side-effect of attracting writers to the area. Over the last few decades, the beaches and mountains of Southeast Queensland have become the home to many writers, although not all of them use it as a setting for their work. Peter Carey lived in an 'alternative' community at Yandina in the 1970s, and most of the stories in *War Crimes* (1979) were written in this rainforest setting.<sup>42</sup> Nancy Cato lived in Noosa from the 1970s until her death in 2000, and wrote *The Noosa Story* (1979), an historical account of the area.<sup>43</sup> Kristin and David Williamson spend part of the year at Noosa, and Peter Corris also lives on the Sunshine Coast. Stephanie Bennett, Lesley Singh and children's author Jill Morris are associated with the thriving community of artists on the Blackall Range, and more recently James Cowan too has settled in the area. Popular historical novelist Patricia Shaw lives on the Gold Coast and romance novelist Jennifer Bacia on Mt Tamborine. A literary infrastructure is also developing

rapidly. The Gold Coast campus of Griffith University has a large creative writing program, and the Gold Coast Writers Association was established in 1990. The Sunshine Coast, too, has a number of writers' associations, including the Sunshine Coast Writers' Group and Noosa Creative Writers' Group.

The Gold and Sunshine Coasts, and even the river valleys that stretch into the Scenic Rim, are no longer figured as the antithesis of urban life, either in the popular imagination or in literature. Increasingly, these areas are developing their own distinctive and complex identities, in which the contrast between 'natural' and 'urban' values operates ambiguously and at a highly localised level. The creative possibilities of these internal tensions are glimpsed by Matthew Condon's character Icarus, as he parasails above the Gold Coast:

I had never realised until now the two worlds of the coast that brushed against each other. The metropolis, and then, suddenly the primitive backwaters that stretched up to Moreton Bay — the hundreds of islands of mangrove and bird tracks and nests and the millions of yabbies down there in the foul black mud, pinching through it, thrashing their tails in the darkness ...<sup>44</sup>

As Malouf suggests in *Fly Away Peter*, it is precisely at the intersection of different worlds that 'new things' can 'enter and find a place'. Over the past 150-odd years, the hinterland has been reinvented as a landscape, economy and culture, and in literature it has become much more than a 'natural' counterpoint to 'urban' Brisbane: it is now represented as a protean site of great internal diversity where new lifestyles and new imaginative possibilities are generated.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See, for example, Tim Flannery, ed., *Terra Australis: Matthew Flinders' Great Adventures in the Circumnavigation of Australia* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2000); John Oxley, *Report of an Expedition to Survey Port Curtis, Moreton Bay, and Port Bowen* (London, 1825); F.W. Ludwig Leichhardt, *The Letters of F.W. Ludwig Leichhardt*, collected and newly translated by M. Arousseau, 3 vols (London: published for the Hakluyt Society by Cambridge University Press, 1968).
- <sup>2</sup> Tom Petrie, *Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland*, recorded by Constance Campbell Petrie (Brisbane: Watson Ferguson, 1904): 12.
- <sup>3</sup> Enid Bell, *Legends of the Coochin Valley* (Brisbane: Bunyip Press, 1946); Thomas Welsby, *The Collected Works of Thomas Welsby*, ed. A.K. Thomson, 2 vols (Brisbane: Jacaranda Press, 1967). Welsby's seven books on Moreton Bay were originally published between 1905 and 1937.
- <sup>4</sup> Quoted in Veronica Brady, *South of My Days: A Biography of Judith Wright* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1998): 192.
- <sup>5</sup> Kath Walker [Oodgeroo Noonuccal], *Stradbroke Dreamtime* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1972).
- <sup>6</sup> F. Corkling, 'Moreton Bay' in *Steele Rudd's Magazine*, October 1905: 867-72.

- <sup>7</sup> Cornelius Moynihan, *The Feast of the Bunya: An Aboriginal Ballad* (Brisbane: Gordon and Gotch, 1901): 14, 31-33, 23, 22. Roy Connolly, *Southern Saga* (London: Grayson and Grayson, 1940). See also Belinda McKay and Patrick Buckridge, 'Literary Imaginings of the Bunya', *Queensland Review*, 9(2) (2002): 65-79.
- <sup>8</sup> Rosa Praed, *Policy and Passion: A Novel of Australian Life*, 3 vols (London: Richard Bentley and Sons, 1881). Rosa Praed, *The Head Station: A Novel of Australian Life*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1885. Rosa Praed, *Outlaw and Lawmaker*, 1893; London: Pandora, 1987.
- <sup>9</sup> Praed, *Outlaw and Lawmaker*: 254, 2. The mountains in Praed's Logan Valley novels are fictionalised and sometimes conflated representations of Mt Lindesay, Mt Barney, Mt Ernest and Mt Maroon, the mountains near her father's property, 'Maroon', where she spent part of her teenage years.
- <sup>10</sup> J.J. Stable and A.E.M. Kirwood, *A Book of Queensland Verse* (Brisbane: Queensland Book Depot, 1924): xii.
- <sup>11</sup> Francis Kenna, *Songs of a Season* (Melbourne: Melville, Mullen and Slade, 1895): 40-42.
- <sup>12</sup> Emily Coungeau, 'The Glasshouse Mountains, Queensland', *Stella Australis: Poems, Verses and Prose Fragments* (Brisbane: Gordon and Gotch, 1914): 30.
- <sup>13</sup> Alice Ham, *Coward or Hero? Being a Collection of Poetical Works by Alice Ham* (Brisbane: Brisbane Printers Ltd, 1928): 21.
- <sup>14</sup> Emily Hemans Bulcock, *Jacaranda Blooms and Other Poems* (Brisbane: Queensland Book Depot, c. 1923): 23-24, 46.
- <sup>15</sup> Emily Hemans Bulcock, *From Quenchless Springs* (Brisbane: privately published, 1945).
- <sup>16</sup> Vivian Smith, *Vance and Nettie Palmer* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1975): 33.
- <sup>17</sup> Nettie Palmer, 19 January 1929, *Nettie Palmer: Her Private Journal Fourteen Years, Poems, Reviews and Literary Essays*, ed. Vivian Smith (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1988): 40-41.
- <sup>18</sup> Vance Palmer, *The Passage*, [1930], 1<sup>st</sup> Australian edn (Melbourne: Robertson and Mullens, 1944): 279.
- <sup>19</sup> Eleanor Dark, 'The Quick Return', in *Lantana Lane* (London and Sydney: Collins, 1959): 141. Dark and her husband Eric spent every winter, and two summers, farming at Bopplenut, Montville between 1951 and 1957. See Barbara Brooks and Judith Clark, *Eleanor Dark: A Writer's Life* (Sydney: Macmillan, 1998).
- <sup>20</sup> See Michael Meadows, Robert Thomson and Wendy Stewart, 'Close to the Edge: Imagining Climbing in Southeast Queensland', *Queensland Review* 7(2) (2000): 67-83.
- <sup>21</sup> Bernard O'Reilly, *Green Mountains* (Brisbane: W.R. Smith and Paterson, 1940): 23.
- <sup>22</sup> Judith Wright, 'Conservation as a Concept', *Wildlife Newsletter*, 16 August 1968, np; quoted in Veronica Brady, *South of My Days: A Biography of Judith Wright* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1998): 299.
- <sup>23</sup> Judith Wright, 'The Lost Man', in *Collected Poems: 1942-1985* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1994): 112.
- <sup>24</sup> Judith Wright, 'At Cooloolah', in *Collected Poems: 1942-1985* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1994): 140-41.
- <sup>25</sup> Judith Wright, 'The Morning of the Dead', in *Collected Poems: 1942-1985* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1994): 209.
- <sup>26</sup> Kath Walker [Oodgeroo Noonuccal], 'The Dispossessed', in *We are Going* (Brisbane: Jacaranda Press, 1964): 16. The title poem, 'We are Going' (p. 25) is dedicated to Grannie Coolwell.
- <sup>27</sup> Walker, 'Gooboora, the Silent Pool', in *We Are Going*, p 29.
- <sup>28</sup> Walker, 'The Past', in *The Dawn is at Hand: Poems by Kath Walker* (Brisbane: Jacaranda Press, 1966): 25.
- <sup>29</sup> Walker, *Stradbroke Dreamtime*: 14.
- <sup>30</sup> Walker, *Stradbroke Dreamtime*: 100-103.

- <sup>31</sup> Michael Sariban, *Facing the Pacific* (Brisbane: Interactive Press, 1999). David Malouf, 'Glasshouse Mountains', in *The Year of the Foxes and Other Poems* (New York: George Braziller, 1979): 28-29; 'Deception Bay' and 'The Crab Feast', in *First Things Last: Poems* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1980): 16-23, 28-37.
- <sup>32</sup> Frank Moorhouse, keynote address, 'Imagining the Gold Coast' conference, Gold Coast Campus of Griffith University, 24 October 1998.
- <sup>33</sup> Keith Leopold, *My Brow is Wet* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1969): 29, 31. Thea Astley, *The Acolyte* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1980): 95. David Malouf, *Johnno: A Novel* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1975): 55. Peter Goldsworthy, *Honk if You are Jesus* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1992); Matthew Condon, *A Night at the Pink Poodle* (Sydney: Arrow, 1995): 309.
- <sup>34</sup> Elizabeth Webb, *Into the Morning* (London: Heinemann, 1958): 153, 219.
- <sup>35</sup> Thea Astley, *The Acolyte*: 15; Georgia Savage, *The Estuary* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1987): 181.
- <sup>36</sup> David Malouf, *Fly Away Peter* (London: Vintage, 1999): 113, 132-33.
- <sup>37</sup> Helen Garner, 'Postcards from Surfers', in *Postcards from Surfers* (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble/Penguin, 1985): 5.
- <sup>38</sup> Matthew Condon, *A Night at the Pink Poodle*: 23, 102.
- <sup>39</sup> David Malouf, 'Glasshouse Mountains', in *The Year of the Foxes and Other Poems*: 28-29.
- <sup>40</sup> Eleanor Dark, 'The Blackall Range Country', *Walkabout*, 1 November 1955: 20.
- <sup>41</sup> Melissa Lucashenko, *Steam Pigs* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1997): 244; Thea Astley, *The Slow Natives* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1965).
- <sup>42</sup> Peter Carey, *War Crimes* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1979).
- <sup>43</sup> Nancy Cato, *The Noosa Story: A Study in Unplanned Development* (Milton: Jacaranda Press, 1979).
- <sup>44</sup> Matthew Condon, *A Night at the Pink Poodle*.