

Editorial

Thea Astley — the great Queensland novelist who died in August 2004 at the age of 78 — famously expounded the notion that Queensland is quite unlike anywhere else. Even when familiar cultural elements are present, she argued, they are combined so incongruously here as to produce an utterly distinctive environment:

It's all in the antitheses. The contrasts. The contradictions. Queensland means living in townships called Dingo and Banana and Gunpowder. Means country pubs with twelve-foot ceilings and sagging floors, pubs which, while bending gently and sadly sideways, still keep up the starched white table-cloths, the heavy duty silver, the typed menu. Means folk singers like Thel and Rick whom I once followed through to Clermont on that lecture-tour while they cleaned up culturally ahead of me; but it also meant listening to the now extinct State Queensland String Quartet playing the Nigger Quartet in my fourth-class room among the sticks of chalk, the tattered textbooks; means pushing our way through some rainforest drive laced with wait-a-while to hear the Lark Ascending, or more suitably, the Symphonie Fantastique crashing through the last of the banana thickets.¹

Many of Astley's novels and short stories explore the ways in which Queensland enters and shapes her characters' bodies and minds. Astley's biting humour, her vivid evocations of excess in the tropics, and her elusive search for spiritual authenticity in a stolen land are — at least in part — products of the quirky, infuriating, but also deeply creative environment in which she grew up.

An interview with another great Queensland novelist, Janette Turner Hospital, opens this issue of *Queensland Review*. At the end of 2003, Turner Hospital won the Queensland Premier's Literary Award for Best Fiction Book for her most recent novel, *Due Preparations for the Plague*. Although she is the recipient of a number of overseas awards, and has honorary doctorates from Griffith University and the University of Queensland, this was her first Australian literary prize, and it is fitting that it came from the state that she has called home since the age of seven. Shortly afterwards, she won the Patrick White Award for Lifetime Literary Achievement. My interview with Janette Turner Hospital explores the ways in which Queensland continues to shape her literary imagination, although she has lived mostly in North America for the past 35 years. In the paper which follows, Sue Lovell analyses the 'psychic space' of Queensland in Janette Turner Hospital's work, showing how her novels re-make a Brisbane childhood into one of the great literary mindscapes of our time.

Papers by William Hatherell and Patricia Clarke explore earlier literary responses to Queensland's distinctive environment and culture. William Hatherell investigates the cultural politics of Brisbane from the 1930s to the 1970s, focusing in particular on the anti-modernism of the grand old man of letters, James Devaney (1890–1976), who attacked the modernist version of realism and defended traditional poetic forms and clear speaking. Patricia Clarke's paper revisits wartime Brisbane, a time of great cultural activity with the establishment of *Meanjin*, the influence of a number of American poets serving in the Pacific, and the arrival in Brisbane of Judith Wright. Patricia Clarke is well known for her many studies of early Australian women writers. Her latest book, *The Equal Mind and Heart*, a collection of the letters of Judith Wright and Jack McKinney, co-edited with Meredith McKinney, was launched at this year's Brisbane Writers Festival and will be reviewed in the next issue of *Queensland Review*.

In their joint paper on the construction of the Capricorn Coast's Scenic Highway in the 1930s, Steve Mullins and Betty Cosgrove study an early example of tourist development in Queensland. While acknowledging that the construction of the Scenic Highway can be read as yet one more example of the developmental ethos which has driven the history of Queensland since colonisation, they also argue that the highway imbued in residents a deeper sense of place, and led to the preservation of natural environments through the creation of national parks and reserves. Grahame Griffin's paper looks at a more recent example of Queensland's developmental ethos, Palazzo Versace on the Gold Coast. He argues that Palazzo Versace symbolises the promise of luxury, and leads the investment in a new identity for the Gold Coast — one which is cosmopolitan, sophisticated and exclusive.

The final paper in this issue is a study by Felicity Grace of Brisbane's gay and lesbian print media. Grace argues that — perhaps ironically, given Queensland's reputation for repression of difference — Brisbane's gay and lesbian newspapers are unusually exuberant and diverse in their use of sexuality to sell everything from sex itself to pet food. They have escaped the commodification that has occurred elsewhere — particularly in the United States — as editors 'sanitise' their publications in order to attract national corporate advertising.

Queensland, it seems, is not in any imminent danger of losing its distinctiveness, except perhaps in a small pocket of the Gold Coast. Thea Astley can rest in peace.

— Belinda McKay

Note

- ¹ Thea Astley, 'Being a Queenslander: A Form of Literary and Geographical Conceit', *Southerly* 36: 23.