

Bright, and most of all the writers of Queensland—past and present—for their fine contribution to the culture and life of the state.

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INTRODUCTION

The widely held conceit that Queensland is different led to the creation and publication of this book. These eleven essays and more than forty excerpts and poems celebrate and represent a century of Queensland writing. Some essays recount cruel jokes about the state, others are love letters to lost Queenslanders, but all begin with the premise that there is something to be said about this place and its writers that is not said elsewhere in the corpus of Australian letters.

Pat Buckridge describes Queensland as constituted by 'a different sense of distance, different architecture, a different apprehension of time, a distinctive preoccupation with personal eccentricity and [...] a strong sense of cultural antithesis'. It is not clear that this 'difference' is any more than a sometimes flattering, sometimes condemning fantasy, creating a Queensland deserving of praise, excuses, wonder and scorn. It is, however, an idea that has intoxicated writers, both from here and elsewhere, since white settlement in 1824 and colonial separation in 1859.

Charmian Clift after visiting the Gulf country in the 1960s wrote that 'it is sinister country. Evil to me since I react violently to landscape and am repelled utterly by this one that seems to be saturated with a sort of thick grey heat.' Rosie Scott, a local during the 1990s, was more positive:

Queensland seems to have a similar meaning for Australian writers as the Deep South has for American writers, as a kind of rich seedbed for the original, the eccentric, the flamboyant, the decadent, the extreme. It is definitely partly to do with the landscape. In Brisbane, for instance, the rickety old wooden Queenslanders drenched in bougainvillea, the palms, the astounding number of birds even in Red Hill where I lived, the jacarandas, are all unique in Australia [...]. There is a sense of limitless space and limitless leisure [...]. It is also something to do with the extremes you find in Queensland too—the turbulence of the politics and the tendency to authoritarian government whatever the party, the corruption and ruthlessness on the one hand, the idealism on the other [...]. There are possibilities in Queensland—eccentricities, ambiguities,

extremes—that are powerfully evocative for writers who are born or live here for awhile,¹

At the very least it can be said that Queensland is different in the same way as everywhere else, that is, in its own way. And this difference is worth capturing. Gwen Harwood agrees:

For all the justified scepticism about a definable distinctive quality of 'Queensland writing' it does seem likely that Australian literature is in the process of developing regional characteristics comparable to (say) the difference between American writing of the east and the west coast. We do not appear to have reached a similarly clear distinction yet, but signs of such evolution are beginning to show.²

There is also a diversity within Queensland writing and history. It's a long way from David Malouf's *12 Edmondstone Street* to Nick Earls's *Zigzag Street*, though they are on the same map of the UBD. Despite a changing mix of voices and views over the twentieth century many of the themes and mythologies of Queensland remained constant: the exotic, political repression, historical forgetfulness and denial, frontierism, conservatism versus the radical, racial prejudice, the excesses of climate and the environment, blind development, city-bush divide, expatriatism, feisty women, and the state's sometimes paranoid, sometimes arrogant, solipsism.

Mostly the eleven essayists were given a decade and a single idea about it as a starting point—but in some decades a single defining idea seemed impossible. Should, for example, an account of the 1990s focus on the Demidenko farce or on Queensland's wider cultural rebirth? As well as tackling dominant ideas we wanted to acknowledge the significance of key writers such as Arthur Hoey Davis (Steele Rudd), Xavier Herbert, Oodgeroo and David Malouf. Often a central figure of a particular decade was a starting point: Judith Wright in the 1950s, Thea Astley and Oodgeroo in the 1960s.

Sadly, few writers are covered in the depth they deserve. Worse, many worthy writers have been left out entirely. You can imagine a very different

collection which focused instead on Rosa Praed, A.G. Stephens and the *Bulletin*, George Essex Evans, James Brunton Stephens, William Baylebridge, Brian Penton, Jessica Anderson, Janette Turner Hospital, George Landen Dann, Peter Porter, Gwen Harwood, Tom Shapcott, David Rowbotham, Val Vallis, Judith Rodriguez, Clem Christesen, Ernest Favenc, Vance Palmer, Nettie Palmer, P.R. Stephensen, Jean Devanny, Ernestine Hill, Constance Mackness, John Blight, Bruce Dawe or others. In the end, rarely is the finished essay just about a single writer or a single idea; rightly the complexity of things intrudes.

Books of essays by a single Queensland writer or a group of Queensland writers are rare. For many here it was the first chance ever to stretch their legs over 4000 words of non-fiction, despite years spent writing shorter pieces for newspapers or for festivals. In the end we favoured freelance writers but a couple of academics snuck in—Martin Duwell and Nigel Krauth—justified by their regular and eminent night duty as critics and authors outside the university. Following tricky deliberations, or for more mundane reasons of fortuity, availability or space, a number of important Queensland writers do not get a guernsey. Instead many are represented here by excerpts of their work. So while we have no essay by Gary Crew we do have a snippet from his angry account of his school days.

Within limits, we have tried to be sensitive to geography and to genre. There are specific essays here on Queensland poetry, theatre and film writing. There is less non-fiction here, meaning little treatment of journalists/writers like Hugh Lunn, Phil Dickie and Adrian McGregor, essayists like Vance Palmer, or historians and scholars like Richard Fotheringham, Ross Fitzgerald, Craig Munro, Ross Johnston, Henry Reynolds, Pat Buckridge, Graeme Turner, Stuart Cunningham, Philip Nelissen or Carole Ferrer. Nor is there much genre fiction. So there is too little on Kim Wilkins, Sandy McCurcheon, Chris Nyst, Cory Daniels or Anne De Lisle, and nothing on Queensland's strengths in romance writing, or the successes of Crime Writers Qld. Likewise there is no bush poetry, so no mention of sure hands like Sandy Thorne and Charlie Marshall. There

are other regional voices, however it was difficult to represent the diversity of the state. So while we have included many Aboriginal voices, we have only a single Torres Strait Islander story, which doesn't seem enough. We hope, however, that the essayists assembled are representative of the strength and diversity of recent Queensland writing. In the end, this book can never be more than a beginning. We look forward to future collections to address these areas.

Mostly the essays, as we expected, came back to us with a personal twist on the brief provided—some luminous in their scholarship and others charming in their perspicacity. They are a formal attempt to make a literary history in a place where a commitment to the lackadaisical would seem to preclude such a thing. Commenting on the Brisbane Literary Trail, Nigel Krauth noted the irony of such projects:

Albert Street ... was then a street of brothels, and the queues of American and Australian servicemen stretched from the Town Hall all the way down to the Botanic Gardens ... precisely where the brass-plaques words of Queensland writers are now laid.³

Unsurprisingly, then, many essays are marked by a sad, wry humour that Krauth calls 'writing from the side'.

These essays have been arranged like the telescope of history. We encounter the transformations of the 1990s first before working our way back to the federation horizon. The essays can be gathered into three groups plus one maverick. Four essays deal with the period since 1970, four deal with the 1950s and 1960s, two are on the bush-dominated pre-war period, and there is a single essay by Paul Galloway on the 150-year history of Queensland theatre writing.

John Birmingham's 'The lost city of Vegas: David Malouf's old Brisbane' leads off the four essays that deal with the period since 1970. Like the others—by Mary-Rose MacColl, Andrew McGahan and Gerard Lee—Birmingham wrestles with the architecture, the climate and the way of life. Malouf has argued that the Queensland house calls for a different way of living:

You learn in such houses to listen. You build up a map of the house in sound, that allows you to know exactly where everyone is and to predict approaches. You also learn what not to hear, what is not-to-be-heard, because it is a condition of such houses that everything can be heard. Strict conventions exist about what should not be listened to and these soon become habits of not-listening, not-hearing. So too, habits grow up of not-seeing.⁴

Gary Crew has described the quality of the 'outside-coming-inside' present in the tent-like structure of Queensland houses as both terrifying and empowering. A sense of the fecund and the threatening is often present in Queensland writing, as we can see in both Birmingham and Janette Turner Hospital:

The hailstorm passed. Steam rose from the bitumen. Soil and plants and even the boards of the house exuded a rich smell of rot and genesis, as juicy and tactile as the syrup seeping from the fissures in the fat, over-ripe mangoes which lay at the foot of the tree in the farthest reaches of the backyard.⁵

Maybe there are hordes of tarantulas waiting their turn in the crawlspace beneath the verandas? The louvres are always slanted open to entice sea breezes. Is that how the spiders get in? And where do they hide by day?⁶

For Errol O'Neill—as for Gerard Lee in his essay 'HARPO'—the differences are more in the social values and structures:

Queensland's cities have never become the impersonal, all-consuming Leviathans that other states have produced. Most family histories contain a special chapter on the shift to the metropolis, but in this state of conservative family values and fundamentalist faith in primary industry, the story is frequently only a generation back. And those who live in the city still have family in the bush, still travel back for Christmas, still leave their back doors open at night. God is watching, all are safe.⁷

Birmingham, like many in this collection, celebrates and mourns the loss of these different 'Queenslands' (or 'Brisbanes') of his adolescent years. As Malouf has argued, erasure in the rush to embrace progress is part of the Queensland way:

The house I lived in as a child is no longer there. Like most of old South Brisbane it has been torn down and a factory stands on the site, part of a process that had already begun when I first knew the area more than forty years ago.⁸

But progress has been costly, and we are haunted by the extirpation of the past rather than the past itself. As Rodney Hall notes, the landscape and architecture of Brisbane has altered dramatically, becoming almost unrecognisable as the sleepy city loved and hated in the fifties: 'Brisbane could have been the New Orleans of Australia [...]. Instead we got Dallas.' Steven Herrick agrees: 'A great little city, Dallas of the South, Johannesburg of the East, Bhopia of the West and Antarctica of the North, with no history, less architecture and a penchant for selling to the highest bidder.' Birmingham's essay, in conjuring up the old Valley and pre-Fitzgerald Queensland, seeks to recover a too easily lost past.

The emptiness created by these losses has left a space to be filled with words. As Mary-Rose MacColl shows in 'A room of one's own ... a pay-packet and a few friends', there was new confidence in the 1990s to do so. Nick Earls, in many ways a successor to Hugh Lunn in his fidelity to the charms of suburban life, has described how he discovered a Queensland he could write about:

For years I wrote things and deliberately avoided setting them in South-East Queensland because people didn't seem to do that and the area didn't seem to be regarded as worthy of carrying a story. I was then on a Writers' Festival Panel with Andrew McGahan, in about 1993, when someone asked him about *Pyrite* being set in Brisbane. He said something about having read books [...] set in New York and places like that where people name-dropped in such a way [...] they had this arrogant sense that you would understand what a place was like. That was when I first started to question the assumptions I had been working on and started to wonder why we didn't see South-East Queensland more in fiction.⁹

If there was a difference in the way Queenslanders wrote about the place in the 1990s it may be because writers stayed here to do so. Ross Fitzgerald has argued that in the 1970s and 1980s the state's writers—Malouf, Astley, William Yang, Susan Johnson, Robyn Davidson—were dispersed:

Remarkably few novelists, poets and dramatists remain in the state. David Rowbotham, literary editor of Brisbane's *Courier-Mail*, the elderly Xavier Herbert in north Queensland, Nancy Caro at Noosa and the poet Bruce Dawe at Toowoomba remain in the cultural wasteland that is Queensland.¹⁰

The reality is more complex; writers left and stayed for a range of personal and professional reasons. But perhaps more correct, and more tragic—at least for many writers of the 1970s and 1980s—was not that they fled, but that many stayed and were invisible. Except for a few—Hugh Lunn, Bill Scott and Gerard Lee—who enjoyed some profile, most writers laboured here without much recognition: Manfred Jurgensen, Lorna McDonald, Philip Nelissen, Hilary Beaton, R.G. Hay, Errol O'Neill, and Henry Reynolds among them.

While, as MacColl shows, writers still leave, Queensland has lost the reputation of being a place you escape from to Sydney, Melbourne, or London. Many younger writers obviously now intend to see out their days here. Nigel Krauth, a long-time resident, and one of the first to decide to stay, has commented on the initial queerness of his decision:

I came to Queensland eighteen years ago, wrote my first novel, then left. Seven years later I returned, and stayed. This is not the normal pattern for a writer's relationship with the sunshine state. Most such relationships end in a complicated divorce as the Astley/Davidson/Hospital/Malouf/Scott/Shapcott/Wright experiences show. It's a recognised syndrome in Australian writing: the earlier nurturing years in Queensland, the maturing tensions and literary frustrations, the eventual escape to other states, other parts of the world, away from the turmoil and the madness. The divorce for those writers looks permanent; the relationship continues to haunt several of them years after the split; only some are still on good speaking terms with Queensland.¹¹

There is argument about what, at the close of the 1980s, ended the period of cultural desolation and brain drain. Maybe change came with World Expo in Brisbane in 1988, the fall of thirty years of conservative government in 1989, reforms in arts funding in 1991, or with the new cosmopolitanism of the city following changes in the licensing laws and development of tourism infrastructure. For many, of course, the development was double-

edged. Expo might have ushered in a new confidence but at what cost? Andrew McGahan, echoing Birmingham, has noted the damage to South Brisbane where:

Half the suburb was going to be levelled to make way for the 1988 International Exposition. It was Brisbane's big moment apparently, and the riverfront was the only place to have it. We weren't in the affected area, but I'd heard that they were already clearing out the people who were. The warehouses and docks and small businesses, all being wound down.¹²

For MacColl the important changes for writers were institutional ones funding, the Queensland Writers Centre, media attention and a new confidence. There was a ripening of the conditions to support the development of an active and visible literary culture. MacColl also notes the new diversity in our writers and writing. There was now a better balance of men and women writers. The State led the way nationally in indigenous writing and publishing. And despite having low levels of migration until the mid-seventies, there were many new writers from non-English speaking backgrounds (Venero Armanno, Komminos, Lau Siew Mei, Sang Ye and Lorena Sun Butcher) joining those of earlier generations (David Malouf, Tony Manniaty, Angelika Fremd, Michael Sariban and Manfred Jurgensen). The faked Ukrainian ethnicity of Helen Demidenko (Darville) added to the furor surrounding her writing of *The Hand that Signed the Paper* and its winning of the *Australian/Vogel* Prize, the ALS Gold Medal and the Miles Franklin Award. Queenslanders were at first delighted by the Miles Franklin win, which the *Courier-Mail* trumpeted as cultural coming-of-age for the state. The later 'exposure' and excoriation of Darville with charges of anti-Semitism, willful deception and plagiarism saw her disappear—except for occasional visitations—from the Queensland and national literary scene. Despite this blip, MacColl paints a picture of millennial good health and optimism.

Andrew McGahan's 'Not Made in Queensland'—a reflection on the cultural and economic cost of not filming his screenplay of his novel *Praise* in Brisbane—is more rueful. While *Praise* is, perhaps, the iconic Brisbane

novel of the 1990s, writing a new city over that of Malouf's *Johnny*, there was no state funding forthcoming to make the film here. Instead—unlike Birmingham's later *He Died with a Felafel in his Hand*—*Praise* was shot down south to the opprobrium of local audiences. It is one of many tales in the struggle to establish a local film and television production industry that tells Queensland stories or even just employs Queensland writers.

Gerard Lee's picture of being a writer in Queensland in the 1970s, 'HARPO', is by turns, and by contrast, grim and funny. He echoes Birmingham's sadness about a city vanishing with careless change, but tells how the political and cultural oppression of the 1970s gave birth to subversive action and creativity. Under the noses of the Special Branch, writers and artists created vital work. There was a new generation of novelists like David Richards, Robert Whyte and Lee himself, a plague of poets, and radical responses such as the proto-punk band The Saints, the Popular Theatre Troupe and the *Cane Toad Times*. Unfortunately, more often than not, writers worked in isolation or to the bemusement of the wider community. As Birmingham has written, 'nobody cares about your erud in Brisbane, because nobody has any of their own'. For some writers the despondency of life in John's Queensland—and the inertia of their careers—was too much and suicide was the only way out. The harshness of the political climate of the 1970s and 1980s seems to have marked the writers, the work and our memory of those times.

The 1950s and 1960s emerge from the essays by Steven Herrick, Jay Verney, Martin Duwell and Melissa Lucasenko as a janus-faced penny: one face blissful stability, the other stifling conservatism. Steven Herrick's account of his school days is the most idyllic. As Gillian Whitlock has noted, 'writings about Queensland are [often] [...] about childhood or adolescence and the past'. The yearning for the past—present in the delightful detail of Herrick's piece—might explain the strength of Queensland writing and illustrating for young people over the last decade. The 1990s saw the emergence of Gary Crew (winner of every major Australian literary award for children's writers, including one year winning

both the CBCA Book of the Year and Picture Book of the Year), James Moloney (also a regular prize winner), Sue Gough, David McRobbie, Narelle Oliver, Gregory Rogers (the only Australian to win the Kate Greenaway Medal for illustration), Armin Greder (the only Australian to win the Bologna Ragazzi for illustrating *The Great Bear*), Mark Svendsen, Steven Herrick (himself), Natalie Jane Prior, David Mackintosh, Anne Maree Rolley, Cecily Matthews, Annmarie Scott, and emerging writers Lydia Stirton, Kieren Meehan and Brian Ridden. Perhaps this wave was in part the result of the strange Queensland childhood of the 1950s and 1960s: a mixture of liberties and repressions.

Jay Verney's essay 'The Multiple Effects of Thea Astley's Fiction', Martin Duwell's on Judith Wright, and Melissa Lucashenko's on Oodgeroo provide portraits of powerful women in conservative times. Each was a leader. Astley, as we know from her 2000 Miles Franklin win, is still a force. Verney traces the development of her work, its links to Queensland and its influence on other writers. Astley has always had an ambivalent relationship to the place; a parochial, loving scorn:

Queensland means living in townships called Dingo and Banana and Gunpowder. Means country pubs with twelve-foot ceilings and sagging floors, pubs which, while tending gently and sadly sideways, still keep up the starched white tablecloths, the heavy-duty silver, the typed menu.¹³

Like Jessica Anderson's *Tirra Lirra by the River* and Janette Turner Hospital's work, Astley wrestles with the restrictive nature of Queensland society. Hospital's Queensland is often a battle between the delinquent lushness of the climate—employing over-ripe imagery and metaphor to describe a barely checked environment—and the conservatism she experienced in her Brisbane childhood:

They are old comforters, the sun and the mango tree. I think I've always been pagan at heart, a sun worshipper, perhaps all Queensland children are. There was always far more solace in the upper branches of this tree than in the obligatory family bible reading and prayers that followed dinner. I wrap my arm around the trunk, I press my cheek to the rough bark, remembering that wasteland of time, the fifth grade.¹⁴

Thea Astley always found more comedy, and was drier even when writing from wet climes. An early ironist, she has been an influence on women writers of the nineties, not least Verney herself. Astley is an archetype of the feisty woman writer, but only because Queensland has nurtured a tradition of them both before and since.

Henry Reynolds, from his previous Townsville perch as Professor of History, has written widely about the forgetting of race in Queensland and Australian history, and has done much to recover this history. But in putting this collection together it became clear that indigenous and white relations and issues were, and are, an ever-present concern in Queensland writing; important to both black and white writers. Excerpts here by Vivienne Clemen, Sam Watson, Samuel Wagan Watson, Brian Penton, Kerry McGinnis, Steele Rudd, Reynolds himself, Elsie Roughsey, Herb Wharton, Leah Purcell and Scott Rankin, Deborah Mailman and Wesley Enoch, George Landen Dann, and Oodgeroo demonstrate the diversity and currency of these issues. Queensland has the largest indigenous population of any state, including its unique Torres Strait Islander communities. But along with the Kanaka history—the indentured labourers of the South Seas Islands, whose lives Mabel Edmund tells us something of—Queensland has a sorry record in black–white relations. It is no surprise that many of the leaders of the indigenous rights movement came from the state. Oodgeroo of the tribe Noonuccal wrote, spoke and organized on behalf of Aboriginal people and identity: 'Pour your pitcher of wine into the wide river. And where is the wine? There is only the river.'¹⁵

Her death in 1993 was mourned by many thousands, and prompted the Minjerribah Tribute (the largest Indigenous writing event yet seen in Australia, staged as part of Warana Writers' Week). In 'Oodgeroo – Island Poet' Melissa Lucashenko reflects on the influence of such a powerful life. Oodgeroo galvanized Aboriginal community action, and influenced a generation of indigenous writers and artists, including Leah Purcell, Jackie Huggins, Noel Pearson, Melissa Lucashenko, Sam Watson and Samuel Wagan Watson, Herb Wharton, Wayne Coolwell, Lisa Belleair, Wesley Enoch, Alexis Wright, and Vivienne Clemen. If Queensland leads the way

nationally with Kooemba Jdarra Theatre Company, the University of Queensland Press Black Writers' list and the David Unaipon Award, it follows the lead of Oodgeroo.

Martin Duwell's essay 'Pelican, Cycads and Ghost Crabs: Judith Wright and the Poetry of Queensland' completes the trilogy on leading women writers of the 1950s and 1960s. For Duwell, Wright was at the centre of the emergence of a Queensland poetic voice. Before her there were a few early poets like George Essex Evans and James Brunton Stephens, but after Wright there were many: Rodney Hall, Tom Shapcott, John Manifold, John Blight, Gwen Harwood, David Malouf, David Rowbotham, and later still Ross Clark, Bruce Dawe, Stefanie Bennett, Michelle A. Taylor, Manfred Jurgensen, Bronwyn Lea, Philip Neilsen and others. What emerges in Duwell's account is a grand diversity of work (everything from Rupert McCall's sporting eulogies to Val Vallis's hymns to fishermen) around a core of poetic concerns: the exoticness of Queensland, the environment, and, for Wright and Oodgeroo, politics.

In the realm of the poets, for once, Queensland's cultural isolationism served it well. While novelists struggled to get published by the Sydney and Melbourne-based houses until the 1990s, Queensland poets had a flotilla of small poetry presses: Jacaranda (which published Oodgeroo and others), Makar and Gargoyle Poets series, and UQP's poetry list. As Rodney Hall commented about the 1950s, 'the great thing for a young Australian [...] was to get away, to prove yourself in the real world'. But many poets stayed behind in Queensland where publication was already a distinct possibility. By the 1990s most of the small presses were gone, however the poets organized around a reading and performance culture and some institutional initiatives such as the short-lived Queensland Poets' Association, the Metro Press Poetry series, and later the Queensland Poetry Festival.

Nigel Krauth's 'Mavericks and Misfits' and Mark Svendsen's 'The Real Stud: Arthur Hoey Davis and Queensland's Literary Stereotypes' switch the focus to the bush. Herbert and Davis are part responsible for, part inheritors of, literary archetypes—the maverick and the bush larrikin—that

dominated not just Queensland but Australian writing. Herbert's work and his decision to live here might be seen as his choice to identify with the 'outcastedness' of Queensland. He celebrated the maverick. Mudrooroo has gone so far as to say that Herbert went too far—that his '*Capricornia* is a romance in which history is rendered through nostalgic recollections of a supposedly bygone era and relations of power are glossed over rather than negotiated or actualised'.

Despite its conservatism Queensland has always accommodated and sometimes nurtured the radical and the larrikin. As Gerard Lee has noted, 'mostly it is a good place to sleep in a park or a street: it is warm, you can catch a feed and no-one minds much'. This seems, in part, a hangover from nineteenth-century Queensland's melting-pot diversity and frontier individualism. The politically attuned Humphrey McQueen has suggested Queensland is:

... inherently radical. The world's first Labor government in 1899, Australia's first general strike in 1912, the anti-conscription stance of premier Ryan, forty years of nearly continuous Labor rule, Australia's only Communist parliamentarian, and the militancy of certain Queensland unions in the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁶

Such political iconoclasm and separatism—the Colony of North Australia; William Lane and his Utopias; the Gairndah communes, Fred Paterson; the birth of the labour movement and more latterly John Bjelke-Petersen and Pauline Hanson—have always presented a ripe field for writers. The strikes and unrest of the 1890s gave birth to Banjo Paterson's 'Waltzing Matilda' written at Dagworth Station near Winton. The frontiersman and the drover were, at their purest Queensland ideas. Paterson's 'Swagman' added a dose of the rebel and larrikin. This amalgam was defied and employed within the national culture. Revisited by later writers such as Errol O'Neill and Nigel Krauth, the 'Swagman' was politicised and radicalised:

Information has been received at Winton that a man named Hoffmeister, a prominent unionist, was found dead about two miles from Kynuna. The local

impression is that he was one of the attacking mob at Dayworth and was wounded there. There were seven unionists with Hoffmeister when he died. These assert that he committed suicide.¹⁷

For Mark Svendsen, Arthur Hoey Davis's Steele Rudd and his Dad and Dave books represent a widely digested form of regional writing and the popular outback myth. Although Davis was a Brisbane-based government clerk, 'Steele Rudd' has been constructed as a 'regional writer' peddling a 'thick as mud' Queensland archetype of the small landholder with a small selection (it might be remembered that the first Queensland novel was Colin Munro's *Fern Vale, or the Queensland Squatter* published in 1862). Steele Rudd's work was, however, the first Queensland writing to capture the national imagination. Critics of the time viewed it as something lesser than Lawson, but the sales and its widespread use as sure fire educational filler saw it regarded much as Bryce Courtenay or Paul Jennings might be today.

On *Our Selection!* led the way from the short story of the nineties to the discontinuous Federation novel—the same characters, different incidents—which Lawson, Edward Dyson, Sumner Locke, Henry Fletcher and others would exploit.¹⁸

In his popularity Steele Rudd became a diffuse idea:

Arthur Hoey Davis was soon forgotten, and is almost unknown today. Later, Steele Rudd too became an imprecise concept, a genre, a way of describing a broad field of outback humour, from dirty jokes to feature movies and the radio serial Dad and Dave. Few now remember even 'Steele Rudd', but 'Dad and Dave' endure.¹⁹

Despite Brisbane's cultural renewal in the 1990s, which has seen a renegotiation of the capital city's place within the identity of Queensland, for both Krauth and Svendsen, Queensland's and Australia's historical identity is to be found in the bush. As Thea Astley has written, 'there is a saying in Queensland that the real Australia doesn't begin until you are north of Rockhampton.'

The final essay in the book, Paul Galloway's 'Lively Art, Dismal Science' traces economic's limiting effects on 150 years of Queensland playwrighting.

While Queenslanders have enjoyed many a night at the theatre, mostly it has been watching plays from elsewhere. Except for adaptations of Steele Rudd's work our early theatre was dominated by commercial touring shows. After the war a number of Queensland playwrights, Barbara Stellmach and Ian Austin among them, wrote successfully for 'little' theatre; scaling their work for limited budgets and amateur players. Since 1970 we have seen the rise of political theatre—Toad Show's productions, Street Arts and the Popular Theatre Troupe—both in the traditional format of Errol O'Neill's Labor trilogy, and in community theatre formats of playwrights such as Hugh Watson and Therese Collie. The late period of the century also saw the rise of government subsidised theatre production and playwrighting. A small amount of this has been for the mainstage by playwrights such as Elaine Acworth, Michael Richards, Hilary Beaton, Marjory Forde, Philip Dean, Bille Brown and Jill Shearer. There has also been a substantial amount of non-mainstage work, or niche-audience works by a wide range of writers including Valerie Foley, Daynan Brazil, Wesley Enoch, Stephen Davis, David Brown, Jadah Milroy, Andrew McGahan, Kathryn Ash, Anna Yen, Leah Purcell and Angela Betzien. Galloway sees Queensland theatre as being largely unsuccessful in generating new work for other than local audiences. We might note, however, the work and success of playwrights who have left the state including William Yang and Lawrence Johnson.

Hot Iron Corrugated Sky is not a scholarly account of Queensland's literature although the state deserves one, building on the work of Cecil Hadcraft, Pat Buckridge, R.S. Byrnes and Val Vallis, Arthur Henry Kellow, Elizabeth Perkins, Gillian Whitlock, J.H. Hornibrook, and others. We hope, however, that these essays introduce new readers to a rich body of writing, and afford existing readers a new vantage point. We also hope that this collection adds to the ongoing debate about the nature and culture of Queensland. Every place is complex: rich in story and heritage. Queensland is no different, but it is fuelled by its own powerful mythologies. Writer Matthew Condon has wrestled with Queensland as natural paradise, as a

despoiled wonder and with the artificiality of places like Surfers Paradise, the bizarre and banal side-by-side. We hope we have also captured something of the diversity of the state, its writers and writing.

Robyn Sheahan-Bright
Stuart Glover

NOTES

- 1 Rosie Scott, *The Red Heart*, Vintage, 1999, pp. 69–70.
- 2 *Queensland Words and All*, Outrider, 1993, p. x.
- 3 Nigel Krauth, 'The Big Theme Park: One Writer's Queensland', *Australian Book Review*, September 1997, p. 40.
- 4 David Malouf, 'A First Place: the Mapping of a World', Herbert Blaklock Memorial Lecture, 1984.
- 5 John Birmingham, *He Died With a Felafel in his Hand*, Duffy & Snellgrove, 1994, p. 90.
- 6 Janette Turner Hospital, 'North of Nowhere' in *Paradise to Paramoia*, UQP, 1995, p. 8.
- 7 Errol O'Neill, 'Unknown Roma Queensland, Try Roma Italy' in *Paradise to Paramoia*, 1995, pp. 143–44.
- 8 David Malouf, 12 *Edmondstone Street*, Chatto and Windus, 1985, p. 3.
- 9 Nick Earls, 'Notes' in Philip Dean, *Adaptation of After January*, Currency Press, 2000, p. 91.
- 10 Ross Fitzgerald, *From the Dreaming to 1915: A History of Queensland*, UQP, 1984, p. 633–34.
- 11 Nigel Krauth, 'The Big Theme Park: One Writer's Queensland', *Australian Book Review*, September 1997, pp. 36.
- 12 Andrew McGahan, 'Kill the Old' in *Paradise to Paramoia*, UQP, 1995, p. 159.
- 13 Thea Astley, 'Being a Queensland: a Form of Literary Conceit' in Gillian Whitlock, *Eight Voices of the Eighties*, UQP, 1989, p. 177.
- 14 Janette Turner Hospital, 'After Long Absence' in *Latitudes*, 1986, p. 3.
- 15 Kath Walker, 'Assimilation—No!' in *My People*, Jacaranda Press, 1970.
- 16 Humphrey McQueen, 'Queensland: A State of Mind', *Meanjin* 38, 1(1979), p. 49.
- 17 Nigel Krauth, *Matilda My Darling*, Allen & Unwin, 1981, p. 45.
- 18 Richard Fotheringham, *In Search of Steele Rudd*, UQP, 1995, p. 83.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 6.