Citation
Tropical Flowers: Romancing the North in Early Female Fiction and Poetry

Seven Romantic Female Authors, 1899-1937
Immediately I set foot in the place I loved it....When I got out of the plane—it was the end of April, and it wasn’t very hot, but it was dry, barren, I knew I was home....I like to visit places outside of North Queensland but I wouldn’t like to live or die in them.
TROPICAL FLOWERS

Harriet Patchett Martin
Frances Campbell
Rosa Campbell Praed
Nancy Francis
Zora Cross
Dorothy Cottrell
Marie Bjelke-Petersen
http://www.austlit.edu.au/specialistDatasets/TropicalNorth

The Writing the Tropical North subset contains information by and about authors who were born in, lived in, visited or wrote about areas of Australia north of the Tropic of Capricorn. It also includes information about journalists, columnists, editors, newspapers, periodicals and associated companies and individuals important to the cultural life of the region.

Begun in 2004 as Writers of Tropical Queensland, the subset widened its scope from 2008 to become Writing the Tropical North. The team of researchers based at James Cook University in Townsville are opening up the comparatively unexplored literature associated with the Northern Territory and northern Western Australia as areas of specific AustLit research focus.

Here in the North, with the day a yellow panther thirsting in the heat, and the night a naked savage, lawless as love, incomparably chaste as Nature, splendid as passion and desire, even the most disciplined woman may turn in a moment back to the golden days of simple forest beginnings.
Harriet Patchett Martin
_c. 1840-1908_

_Datura Metaloides_ : Thorn Apple, or Sacred Datura
It was such a night as one sees only in the tropics flooded in moonlight and as bright as day. One could distinguish the different shades of leaf and flower, the delicate pink of the oleander, the greenish white of the seringa bloom, the waxen hue of the magnolia; the air was full of soft sounds and mysterious murmurs, laden with nutty fragrance and the heavier scent of the datura and trumpet-blossom.

They had walked on till they had left the scarce habitations behind them, and Alma felt as if she were in some enchanted place. There was an unreality about this luxuriance of beauty, in the midst of which she and Hilarion were walking together as Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. (30-31)
Frances Campbell

For Three Moons (1900)

Two Queenslanders and Their Friends (1904)
Townsville, with the full moon hanging over her house tops, is really very beautiful; that is, if you are on board a ship anchored in the bay, and you are looking at the capital of North Queensland from across the smooth sea, and you can just guess at the dim outline of the purple shore, thick with the blue gum and Moreton Bay fig clothing the rich hills down to the very waves.

The moon sailed aloft over the Ilonia, in all the beauty of the midsummer tropical night, over purple sea and wooded shore, where the little waves were breaking on a beach like silver, and lighted up the tin roofs of sleeping Townsville, dreaming in her fragrant gardens of the time when she will obtain separation, and be a capital of a country to herself. (p. 1)
Rosa Campbell
Praed, 1851-1935
Rosa Campbell Praed:  
**The Lost Earl of Ellan (1905-6)**

**Narrawan:**

The store buildings lay along one side of the yard—three slab-walled, bark-roofed humpies, with low earthen-floor verandas, in which were saddles waiting to be mended, green hide ropes in process of making, carpenter's tools, leather saddle-bags, and a variety of station properties. On the other side of the yard was the kitchen building, with a large stone chimney, a corrugated tent at the end, and the Chinaman's hut attached behind.... The meat-house was quite at the end of the store wing, and had hides stretched on its bark roof—a primitive mode of curing—and blocks of sawn gum-tree trunks, scored from the chopping of meat, set against the wall of the veranda, while there were dry little heaps of salt on a rimmed wooden slab beneath the window. Just here disagreeable blow-flies hovered, and on a bare gum-tree close by a number of crows perched in line and cawed lugubriously, like a set of ghouls biding their opportunity. (9-10)
Alice Nicklin and “Quetta” Remains, Thursday island and Somerset
Nancy Francis
“Black Bonnet”
1873-1954
Article on Nancy Francis and Her “Writing Daughters” by Zora Cross (“Bernice May”) in the Australian Woman’s Mirror, 24 May, 1927:

“the journey to Cooktown from Sydney is like taking a trip to another continent...”
Nancy Francis: “Queensland Luck”

I had never been so far north before and was accustomed to hear my Sydney friends speak of North Queensland as a dreadful place impossible for white people and only fit for black or coloured folk. I found a delightful climate, a summer that lasted all year round, grand and beautiful scenery, healthful breezes and cooling rains. Our house was covered with yellow allamanda, the verandah hung with orchids, brown, purple and feathery cream, which we bought from the blacks who brought them into town from the scrub. (The Northern Herald 15 August, 1923, p. 28)
Stately cedars and kauri pines, red oaks and beeches were here, not singly, but in groups. Mighty trees, whose identity was hidden under the tracery and scroll work of the trees, buttressed, arched and groined, like the columns and pillars of a grand cathedral. (The Northern Herald 29 August, 1923, p. 28)

The trees were full of birds, parrots screamed from one to another, white cockatoos winged overhead, their yellow tinted under-feathers and crests showing against the clear sky, while pigeons cooed, and made love in the shade, or busily fed on the tall tops of the plum trees. Strange growths, wonderful orchids and ferns draped the sepia trunks and branches, and delightful scents perfumed the air. (The Northern Herald 29 August 1923, p. 29)
I mind it well
The jungle drops quite steeply to the bay,
Where is a crescent flat, well grassed and edged
With palms and she-oaks leaning from the sea.
Great boughs bend over, set in wave-lapped sand,
Form a dim colonnade; on either hand
Beach lilies blooming. Through each dusky tree
Are white and amber jewels—orchids ledged
To light the crannies of the enchanted way....

The camp we pitched
Beneath the talking trees close to the shore;
The beat of homing pigeon wings at eve
Close overhead, the lonely curlew's cry,
The great moon swinging to the purple dome...
Ah! It is Paradise, my Northern home!

Peace spreads her mantle 'neath the brooding sky,
Beauty and joy their spells in silence weave,
And all my love is there for evermore.
I want my own North land again tonight,
St George and Brisbane, Cairns and Charleville.
There is a coldness at this mountain height
That touches me with hands too cool and still
And sends my thoughts like wandering summer flocks
There where the Johnstone runs through Innisfail,
And all the precincts of my Gympie rocks
Are showered with the hoya blossoms pale....
“Home-Sickness”

STANZA 3

How can I think of home and check my sighs
For the bauhinia hills of Herberton,
Cane waving in the spear where Goondi lies
Green as a carpet by a genie spun?
Chill is this moon, clean-cut as pallid ice,
It seems not the same lamp that lights my land,
All dappled with the dust of tropic spice
A-swoon in a blue dream and bamboo-fanned....
Oh, give me my own home—its carelessness,
Its prodigal wild wealth of fruit and flower,
The spell of its indifferent caress
Its scarlet banksia or hibiscus bower.
Give me its bougainvillea embrace,
Its stinging trees, its orchids poised for flight,
The filmy green of the wild cedar lace
Seen through the sleeves of wattles silver-white.
The Lute Girl of Rainyvale (c. 1925)

She saw through the open door the moonlight-coloured waters, blue as lapis-lazuli, spread out like a lake of gems for miles about them. The ruby-tinted ship lit up by hundreds of mellow electric lights, must have looked to the unforgotten stars above it like a great jewel set in a jewel as lovely as itself, so calmly did the steamer move on.

Something of the warm persuasive tropic soul of the sea slipped imperceptibly into Melise’s soul. For she leaned a little nearer Dale; and she scarcely knew herself for the girl who had boarded the steamer so reluctantly at Brisbane; and had suffered the first part of the voyage alone in her cabin.

(p. 49)
A strange smell of copra mixed with tar, and the heavy sweet scent of tropical fruits and sugar came out to meet them from Townsville. She is only an echo of the real North, but the breath of the distant Northern farms and fisheries is there. (p. 55)
The Lute Girl of Rainyvale

The Passionate Tropics

Mourilyan to Innisfail (Rainyvale):

In a near farm they were burning off the cane, and as still night came down suddenly on the scene she drew in a deep breath of delight. Let come what would, this was adventure, this was romance! (p. 125)
The Lute Girl of Rainyvale

Anything at all might happen in such a fairyland world as the North. (p. 75)

But the North had a breath of comradeship in its air for all people. Quarrels are difficult to provoke in a land where Content has had home, Ease and Indifference their being. (p. 62)
Dorothy Cottrell (1902-1957)

The Singing Gold
1928-29

Short Stories
1932-51
Dorothy Cottrell, c. 1920, “Portrait of a Man,” and “Bough Shed, Elmina.”
Dorothy Cottrell’s painting of Dunk Island, to which she and her husband eloped in 1923. Banfield died on the island in June, while the young couple were visiting Bowen.
The Singing Gold

We stood together amongst our piled possessions, and panted... We stood now in an effulgent world of strange brilliant peace and light.... possessing that most compactly magical thing in all the world, a tropical island... The divine setting for adventure, for youth, for love; never to me quite real.

There were wistful brown casuarinas against a smoke-blue horizon; ragged yellow-flowered beach hibiscus among the sedge; umbrella-trees lifting candelabras of red coralled flowers with the fire-green butterflies about them....

There was life and colour and life, life, life... in the vine-rioting jungle on the orchid-knotted rocks; life rising from the coloured floor of the sea in pillars and reefs and flower-forms of coral...(pp. 120-1)
Marie Bjelke-Petersen
1874 - 1969
On all sides there was a riot of an almost unbelievable green loveliness. It began on the ground, where lianas and numerous vines looped over grasses, ferns and mosses. Above this layer, shrubs, plants and bushes held one another in a suffocating embrace. Then came smaller trees, and beyond these rose the immense giants of the jungle, which shot almost out of sight before a single branch broke their stately straightness. Kauri pine, walnut, silkwood, buttressed-rooted penda trees, maple, red tulip oak and many other varieties of timber, raced skywards, their perpendicular boles ornamented with stag-horns, orchids, elkhorns, and ferns....
Jungle Night

Over this maze of beauty there brooded a gigantic, a colossal peace—a peace which had no connection with gentleness or things spiritual. It was wholly of earth: wild, savage, primeval. It was a peace which could not be disturbed or rifted; it was indomitable, indestructible, and it was everywhere. (pp. 28-29)
Before entering the gigantic cavity she put her ear to a crack in the wood and listened to the sound that proceeded from within the tree. It was a music curious and weird. She knew it was caused by the hum of numerous insects and various notes of birds all blending together in wonderful harmony and producing an extraordinary unearthly symphony. It was like music played by wind and sea, by flowers and moonshine and stars, strains which could not be drawn from the strings of instruments invented by man...
The enormous cavity was dark, though not wholly black, for there were rents and small openings in the bark, letting in streaks of sunshine, which partly lit the gloom and made it possible for the girl to see the huge dome-like ceiling arching above her. However, the most extraordinary thing about this natural cathedral was that at the farther end of the vaulted formation there hung a huge cross. It was formed by thick branches and gleamed oddly white in the dimness. (p. 192)
Reasons for Celebrating the Tropical Flower Writing Tradition

1. They speak for tropical Queensland and for the women of the region.
2. Their accounts affirm a region too often belittled or conversely oversold as a tourist destination.
3. They associate the region with women’s freedom.
4. They seek to inspire and uplift women readers.
5. They are advocates for the natural environment.
6. They are open to different spiritualities.
7. They express support and affection for Aboriginal people.