

Hinterland Gothic: Subtropical Excess in the Literature of South East Queensland

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Abstract

South East Queensland's subtropical hinterlands—the mountainous, forested country lying between the cities of the coast and the Great Dividing Range—are sites of a regional variation of Australian Gothic. Hinterland Gothic draws its atmosphere and metaphors from the specificities of regional landscapes, climate, and histories.

In works by Eleanor Dark, Judith Wright, Janette Turner Hospital, and Inga Simpson, South East Queensland's Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast hinterlands are represented as Gothic regions “beyond the visible and known” (“Hinterland” in *Oxford Dictionaries Online* 2019), where the subtropical climate gives rise to an unruly, excessive nature.

In Gothic literature, excess is related to the unspeakable or the repressed. Bringing Gothic, postcolonial, and ecocritical perspectives to bear on the literature of South East Queensland's hinterlands reveals a preoccupation with the regions' repressed histories of colonial violence, which are written on the landscape through Gothic metaphors.

Keywords: Hinterland, Australian Gothic, subtropical, excess, postcolonial, ecocriticism

The hinterlands of South East Queensland are sites of a small but significant body of literature representing a regional variation of Australian Gothic—a Hinterland Gothic that draws its atmospheres and metaphors from the subtropical landscape. This paper considers “hinterland”—a term meaning literally the “land behind” or a region “lying beyond what is visible or known” (“Hinterland” in *Oxford Dictionaries Online* 2019)—as a conceptual space imbued with connotations of imperial possession, othering, and marginality. As Derek K. Alderman has put it, place names function as “symbols to which people attach meaning” and are critical to “the development of a sense of place” (pp. 2189–2190). To name a place hinterland, then, is to invest it with certain qualities, which I argue contributes towards the persistently Gothic representations of these regions in Australian literature.

This paper surveys a selection of literature (including fiction, non-fiction, and poetry) set in or written about Queensland’s Sunshine Coast and Gold Coast hinterlands by writers including Vance Palmer, Judith Wright, Janette Turner Hospital, Eleanor Dark, and Inga Simpson. It argues that in these texts the hinterland functions as a Gothic repository, a space “always over the border, always somewhere else” (Luckhurst 2014, p. 62) where the national repressed can be contained and explored. In hinterland texts, the landscape retains histories of colonial and ecological violence which return to the surface through Gothic metaphors of excess drawn from the subtropical environment: invasive lantana, treacherous mountain roads, rainforest vines, felled trees.

Analysing Gothic representations of landscapes in the literature of South East Queensland’s hinterlands demonstrates that Australia’s subtropical landscapes offer up a wealth of Gothic metaphors and materials. This paper shows how regionally specific Gothic landscape metaphors can be activated across generically diverse texts to generate effects of anxiety and terror that gesture towards the unspeakable and repressed. In doing so, it uncovers the hidden meanings of Gothic representations in the literature of South East Queensland’s subtropical hinterlands, and opens up these regions—and other hinterland regions—to further literary and critical exploration.

Approaching the hinterland

The hinterland texts surveyed here are not necessarily generically Gothic, and the use of Gothic landscape metaphors is not necessarily intentional, but Gothic motifs within these texts give rise to a pervasive sense of the uncanny that can be linked to a national unease about unacknowledged aspects of Australia’s past and present. Sharon Rose Yang and Kathleen Healey note that writers working outside the Gothic genre still very often

employ—intentionally or otherwise—Gothic landscape metaphors and descriptions as “invaluable, powerful shorthand to evoke in their readers horror, alienation, or uncertainty at the grotesquery, instability, and corruption of their worlds” (2016, pp. 11–12). Likewise, Gina Wisker argues for the importance of reading for the Gothic where it is not an overt presence, particularly in a postcolonial context, because “[i]f the Gothic is ignored [...] we overlook and cannot hear what spaces, places, constrictions, people and events are telling us about the trauma and legacy of the colonial and imperial past” (2016, p. 124). Where Gothic emerges, even if only in traces, it signifies something—some anxiety or taboo, something repressed. It is these traces this paper reads in the literature of South East Queensland’s subtropical hinterlands.

Critical engagement with South East Queensland’s subtropical hinterlands as discrete spaces has been limited. Ruth Blair (2007, 2010) and Belinda McKay (2001, 2005) have each catalogued literary production in these regions, examining poetry, non-fiction, and novels. But the hinterland is a slippery, shifting region to chart, and Blair and McKay both survey slightly different areas, with Blair focusing on the Lamington Plateau and Tamborine Mountain within a broadly conceived hinterland stretching from the Sunshine Coast to Northern New South Wales, and McKay covering what she considers Brisbane’s hinterland, including islands and the coastline. While recognising the shifting and uncertainly bounded nature of the hinterland, this paper focuses on a narrower definition of hinterland, focusing on those areas where the label “hinterland” adheres in local, administrative, and tourism discourses—in particular, the Blackall Range in the Sunshine Coast hinterland and Mt Tamborine in the Gold Coast hinterland. It highlights overlooked Gothic representations of these subtropical landscapes in literature and supplements Blair and McKay’s catalogues of hinterland literature with some more recent works.

The hinterland, for both Blair and McKay, is a region of contrast: for McKay, between the urban coast and the rural hinterland (2005, p. 59), and for Blair where the wild and domestic, the native and the European come into contact in subtropical gardens, where imported temperate and native subtropical plants thrive equally and “settlement and forest liv[e] beside each other” (2007, p. 186). European folklore is also imported into these spaces, as Blair points out, such as the “white witches”—gum trees—for which Mabel Forrest named her cottage. For Blair, this is part of but not the key to the “slumbering gothic qualities” (2007, p. 185) of the area. I suggest it is in the very contrast between domestic and wild, excessive and tamed plant life that subtropical hinterlands’ Gothic qualities emerge in literature.

For Dawn Keetley, images of Gothic and horror in plant representation point towards “humans’ dread of the ‘wildness’ of vegetal nature—its untameability, its pointless excess, its uncontrollable growth” (2016, p. 1). As David Morris has discussed, excess and exaggeration in the Gothic are linked to the sublime, and used to explore “a terror of the unspeakable, of the inconceivable, of the unnameable” (1985, p. 312). Gothic landscapes rely on a contrast between elements, a juxtaposition of the excessive sublime and the picturesque to generate their effects. For Benjamin A. Brabon, this is “of paramount importance” (2006, p. 842) in the eighteenth-century Gothic novels of Ann Radcliffe. Fred Botting points to the common contrasting of “the tranquil, harmonious, light, and ordered space of the family home in a picturesquely rural retreat” with the “dark, violent, and disturbing world of the Gothic castle situated in a desolate and sublime landscape of mountains and forests” (2004, p. 245). Gothic settings themselves, as Gothic plots and motifs do, explore “the play of light and dark, reason and imagination, virtue and vice” (p. 245). Through exploring the play of opposition and the transgression of the boundaries between opposites, Gothic reveals itself as a “writing of excess” (Botting 1996, p. 1), concerned with what exceeds known boundaries and categories, what cannot be contained. In literary representations, the overwhelming excess of subtropical hinterland nature contrasts against the imposed order of European building and agricultural practices, gesturing towards something left unspoken in the text.

Into the Hinterland

The hinterland, literally the “land behind”, is a shifting terrain. Its dictionary definitions include “The remote areas of a country away from the coast or the banks of major rivers” (or, similarly, any “area around or beyond a major town or port”) and “An area lying beyond what is visible or known” (“Hinterland” in *Oxford Dictionaries Online* 2019). In geographical parlance and centre-periphery theories, the first definition is common: the hinterland is an underdeveloped or rural area locked into an economic relationship with an urban centre. In such theories, hinterland can also be detached from a reliance on water courses or coastal ports, and instead used to refer to regions surrounding any major centre. The hinterland, therefore, “may be located anywhere” (van Cleef 1941, p. 308). It remains, however, marginal territory distinct from cultural or economic centres, located “far away from busy or interesting places” (“Hinterland” in *Macmillan Dictionary Online* 2019). The second definition of hinterland points to the term’s association with interior life and the psychological: when we speak of “intellectual” and “political” hinterlands we refer to the metaphorical “land behind” a person’s own subject position, the ground on which knowledge and convictions are built. These dual aspects of hinterland—the physical and

the psychological—are equally relevant when considering how the term has been applied to Australian regions, as are its connections to imperialist discourse.

The word hinterland entered the English language from German in the late nineteenth-century in relation to European imperialist activities in Africa. Competing European powers attempted to expand their colonies on Africa's east coast into the interior, each vying for control of the region surrounding the upper Nile (Davis 2000, p. 99). Under the German "doctrine of Hinterland" it was argued that conquering nations may expand their coastal dominions inland, taking possession of "uncivilised" territories, until they "strike the frontier of another civilised country" (Salisbury in Davis 2000, p. 100). In possessing one territory, "you have a right" (p. 100) to the land behind it as well. It is with this definition of hinterland in mind that Douglas Kerr notes, "To describe a place as Hinterland might already be to make a territorial claim on it" (2008, p. 11).

Kerr draws on the physical, psychological, and imperial connotations of hinterland in his book *Eastern Figures: Orient and Empire in British Writing* (2008). The trope of hinterland symbolises the geographic location of the Indian interior, as well as the "inner world" (Kerr 2008, p. 18) of Indian subjects, encompassing both domestic and psychological space. Hinterland, in Kerr's reading of texts by E. M. Forster and Rudyard Kipling, comes to symbolise any "reserved spaces" (p. 14), be they figurative or literal, that lie beyond the European gaze or understanding. Likewise, in *Imaginative Horizons: An Essay in Literary-Philosophical Anthropology* (2004), Vincent Crapanzano uses hinterland as "a governing trope" to conceptualise the "fuzzy horizons" or "auras" at the limits of individual experience, and to explore the ways in which once the "beyond is articulated, a new horizon emerges and with it a new beyond" (2004, p. 2). Like the colonial frontier or the shifting frontline of the battlefield, Crapanzano's horizons of the mind expand with new experiences, creating new hinterlands, new regions beyond the visible and known. McKay also considers the connotations of the term hinterland in her survey of Brisbane's hinterland, arguing that historically this region "was often characterised as a hinterland in the figurative sense of a relatively unexplored and mysterious territory" (2005, p. 59). Elsewhere, I have also used the concept of "hinterland" to analyse Gothic fiction set in the hinterland of New South Wales' North Coast, or Northern Rivers region (Doolan 2016). This region shares similarities of landscape, climate, culture, and history with South East Queensland hinterlands, and an emerging body of work examines the Gothic qualities of its literature and landscape (Chudy, Cook & Costello 2010; Chudy 2014; Philp 2017; Doolan 2018; Doolan & Hawryluk 2019); however, the Northern Rivers hinterland lies outside the scope of the present study.

As the above definitions indicate, hinterlands, as the Othered, “uncivilised” regions that lie “in between” or at the uncertain edges of the shifting boundaries of expanding imperial powers, are liminal spaces in Victor Turner’s sense of the word: that which is “betwixt and between” (1967, p. 97). The liminal is a threshold space or state of transition or flux, suspended between two “fixed or stable” (p. 93) categories, and also a marginal space located at the edge (p. 94). Gerry Turcotte’s vision of the Gothic resonates with such a concept of the hinterland as liminal and peripheral space:

[T]he Gothic has always been fascinated with those forces outside the ‘centre’—the odd, the unaccepted, the unknown. It is a literature which has sought to represent or to criticize the margins; conversely, its probing eye has penetrated the outskirts, the excluded, often to show [...] how inextricably ‘related’ is the margin to the centre, thereby blurring the very basis upon which such fraudulent polarities are established (2009, p. 22).

For Turcotte, the chief domain and concern of the Gothic is the periphery, and Gothic works to blur and destabilise the distinctions between centre and hinterland, inside and outside, civilised and uncivilised, known and unknown. Gothic space is, like the hinterland, liminal space. Hinterlands, identified always only in relation to some other dominant centre, are peripheral zones—prime territory for the Gothic, whose narratives have in this sense always taken place in hinterlands, displacing menace over borders of time and space, elsewhere: to “areas beyond reason, law and civilised authority” (Botting 2014, p. 4).

Although “hinterland” can be applied to a range of places, in Australian colloquial, tourism, and administrative parlance the label adheres particularly strongly to Queensland’s Sunshine Coast and Gold Coast hinterlands, which occupy the hilly, green territory between the urban coast and the Great Dividing Range. Naming “represents a means of claiming or taking ownership of places, both materially and symbolically” (Alderman 2010, p. 2190). But according to Paul Carter, colonial acts of naming went beyond possession, or a simple investing of space with meaning, and were acts of simultaneous “invention” and “erasure” (2010, p. xxiv). To name a place is to differentiate it from the abstract space around it, to render “the world visible, bringing it within the horizon of discourse” (p. 51) by entering it into “a succession of conceivable places that [can] be read” (p. 50). The physical qualities of the place matter less, according to Carter, than the fact that the name can describe and make known “a conceptual place” (p. 51). In inventing these new places, European place names overlaid and overwrote older Indigenous names and ways of knowing places. Through acts of naming, colonial explorers and cartographers “not only

projected their Western values onto the landscape but also excluded and devalued the naming systems of the original inhabitants, in effect writing off native knowledge” (Alderman 2010, p. 2190). When the regions inland from Australia’s coastal cities were labelled hinterlands, their Indigenous pasts were overwritten and obscured by new European ones. It is these repressed pasts, this paper argues, that rise to the surface in Hinterland Gothic texts, as the space of the hinterland, as its very name, seems always to *hint* towards its other, obscured histories.

Scarred postcolonial landscapes

Situated inland to the north and south of Brisbane in the state’s south east, Queensland’s subtropical Sunshine Coast and Gold Coast hinterlands occupy the hilly, mountainous regions between the coastline and the eastern reaches of the Great Dividing Range. These hinterlands are liminal borderlands, rural regions lying just beyond the coastal urban landscapes of the nation’s everyday life. Quaint country towns, outdoor attractions such as bushwalking and mountain climbing, and a small-farm culture make South East Queensland’s hinterlands popular destinations for both domestic and international tourists. Tourism discourse tends to position these locales as sunny leisure sites associated with relaxation and rejuvenation—places of, as Blair puts it, “retreat” (2007, p. 185) for city-dwellers. Copy from one Gold Coast tourism website is representative in claiming that Mt Tamborine’s “tropical rainforest [...] provides a peace and tranquility that is a complete contrast to the incessant daily noise and never ending [*sic*] demands on our time (Tamborine Mountain Chamber of Commerce & Industry 2017). Hinterland nature in this discourse is situated as gentle, idyllic, remedial. Spiritual, especially Buddhist, retreats are popular hinterland attractions, including the Chenrezig Institute Buddhist retreat and Vipassana Meditation Centre in the Sunshine Coast hinterland and the Springbrook Rainforest Retreat in the Gold Coast hinterland.

History is peculiarly evident in South East Queensland’s hinterlands. The colonial past is enshrined in the tourist villages of the Sunshine Coast hinterland’s Blackall Range and the Gold Coast hinterland’s Mt Tamborine, where architecture preserves or mimics colonial styles—such as the “wooden buildings [...] painted in traditional nineteenth-century colours” (Murphy et al. 2011, p. 72) in Montville on the Blackall Range. A range of competing European pasts are also celebrated in, for example, the half-timbered Tamborine Mountain Distillery building, or Montville’s faux-Irish croft building, Connemara Cottage, which houses a Celtic heritage store. Set against this idealised, artificial European historical space is the natural history of the landscape: dark stands of native rainforest, the spreading boughs of Moreton Bay figs, and views out over the ancient

volcanic formations of the Glasshouse Mountains on the Sunshine Coast and Mt Tamborine in the Gold Coast hinterland.

During the colonial period, European occupation advanced into the Sunshine Coast and Gold Coast hinterlands during the mid- to late-1800s. Following the convict period and early exploration, timber-getters seeking prized red cedar moved north from Botany Bay from the 1820s, and by the 1840s had reached the river valleys of the Sunshine Coast hinterland (McConville 2009, para. 7). The mountainous slopes of Tamborine on the Gold Coast and the Blackall Range on the Sunshine Coast were accessed slightly later, from the 1870s (Blair 2010, para. 3; Mary Cairncross Scenic Reserve 2012). Pastoralists grazing sheep and cattle followed the timber-getters, and were followed in turn by small farmers, who experimented with crops including coffee, bananas, citrus, strawberries, and macadamia nuts (Heritage Office and Department of Urban Affairs and Planning 1996, p. 61; McConville 2009, para. 15) to suit the steep slopes and subtropical climate, which is often out of step with the temperatures and weather patterns of the coast. Many small farms, dairies, and vineyards persist in these regions today, as well as colonial-era buildings and farmhouses.

Alongside pastoral expansion was a violent displacement and dispossession of the Yuggera people of the Gold Coast hinterland and the Waka Waka and Gubbi Gubbi people of the Sunshine Coast region. Timothy Bottoms believes the Queensland frontier, as it moved northwards and inland, was the bloodiest in Australia's colonial history (2013, p.183) and estimates that up to 50,000 Aboriginal people—men, women, and children—were killed in Queensland alone, representing, possibly, a quarter of the state's original Aboriginal population (p. 181). In the Blackall Range in the Sunshine Coast hinterland, a combination of settler violence and the clearing of the region's endemic bunya pines for timber and pastoral expansion put an end to the triennial bunya festivals that historians suggest were the largest gathering of Aboriginal people on the continent (Kerkhove 2012, "Preface"). Pastoral activity and extreme violence are, thus, intrinsically linked in these regions, as in Australian history more broadly; Bottoms notes that the convict era did not see nearly such a large scale of slaughter as the pastoral one, as penal colonies did not require large tracts of land for their support, whereas pastoralists seized, cleared, and fenced huge portions of Aboriginal land, denying tribes access to food sources and sacred sites (2013, pp. 17–18). While colonial violence remains largely unacknowledged and unaddressed in Australia's everyday discourse, the landscapes of South East Queensland's hinterlands visibly bear the scars of the ecological violence that accompanied pastoral expansion. In hinterland texts, this makes the landscape a powerful tool for evoking memories of other historical violence.

As Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin have noted, drawing on Alfred Crosby's work, "in the settler colonies it was the results of *environmental* imperialism that were often most immediately clear" (2009, p. 7; emphasis in original). In settler colonies, native species are displaced by European imports, seen as "necessary and 'natural' impositions on, or substitutes for, the local bush or wilderness" (p. 7), and new species of plants and animals flourish "in lands where their control predators [are] absent" (pp. 7–8). The effects of environmental imperialism are difficult, if not impossible, to rectify, and "indigenous ecosystems [are] irretrievably undone" (p. 8). Postcolonial landscapes visibly bear the scars of environmental imperialism.

Environmental conservation is an important aspect of hinterland regions and communities today. Queensland's subtropical hinterlands are areas of growing suburban development, easily accessible from coastal cities, but maintain substantial areas of rainforest and protected national parks (Australian Government Department of Agriculture 2014, p. 3). Queensland's first national park was declared in 1908 at Witches Falls in the Gold Coast hinterland (Harper 2010, para. 2), and the communities of South East Queensland's hinterland regions share a reputation for environmental conservation and alternative cultures. For example, in 2004 and 2005, Maleny in the Sunshine Coast hinterland made national headlines when residents opposed the construction of a Woolworths grocery store in town, arguing that it would damage an important platypus breeding habitat in nearby Obi Obi Creek. The news coverage of the protests cemented the town's reputation as an alternative, environmentally conscious community populated by "lentil-loving hippies" (Stafford 2005, para. 7).

An ecological consciousness is also evident in fiction of the region. In these texts, Gothic language may be used not to represent a landscape that is *threatening*, but rather one that is *threatened*. Andrew Smith and William Hughes, in their collection *Ecogothic* (2013) write that in Gothic texts of this kind, "[a]s the attack on nature progresses [...] the environments become more frightening" (pp. 5–6). The Tamborine poetry of Judith Wright, who lived on the mountain from 1945, can be read within an EcoGothic frame. In "Flame-tree in a Quarry", Wright uses anthropomorphism to decry "human desecration of the landscape" (Blair 2007, p. 190). The poem is littered with images of violence and death used to articulate a story of ecological destruction. The hill and the quarry dug into it are described in terms of "broken bone", "a wrecked skull", "scarlet breath", blood, flesh, and wounds, the "living ghost of death" (Wright 1949, p. 47). A similar recourse to Gothic language is evident in "The Cycads", in which Wright expresses a sense of Australia's pre-European history with reference to antiquity, broken bargains, curses, "the shrunken

moon", stone carvings, timelessness, and cold (p. 19). Blair speculates that "something more than the Romantic sublime is going on" (2007, p. 192) in this poem, that Wright is using the language of the sublime to animate humility and environmental responsibility. Jane Stadler identifies a similar use of the sublime in Tasmanian Gothic cinema, arguing that the Gothic sublime "can function as a mechanism to engage environmental consciousness and respect for nature" (2012, para. 44). For Stadler, Tasmanian Gothic's environmentalist perspective leads to an "entangled" mode of representing nature, so that the landscape shifts from "Gothic villain to ecological victim" (para. 44). I would argue that a similar ecological Gothic sublime arises in Wright's Tamborine poetry and other Hinterland Gothic texts.

An environmentalist perspective is also evident in Inga Simpson's *Nest* (2014), in which artist Jen Anderson returns to the Sunshine Coast hinterland of her childhood "to look after" and "make amends" (2014, p. 21) to the land her timber-getter father helped clear. Simpson has previously described a sense of artistic imperative in representing Australian landscapes, stating that her work seeks "To move beyond gothic representations, the fearful othering of our landscapes as hostile places against which we must pit ourselves and fail" (Simpson 2010, para. 32). *Nest* does, nonetheless, rely on metaphors of Gothic excess and the uncanny, but rather than being a "negative" landscape that threatens humans, *Nest's* hinterland landscape is rendered Gothic because it is *threatened by* human actions, as Wright's is. A fallen gum is like a "body", a "grey ghost", a "skeleton", or "the remains of a great elephant" (Simpson 2014, p. 116) that Jen must carve up with a chainsaw, and bloodwood trees "riddled with veins of blood-like resin that [ooze] out when their trunks or limbs [are] cut" (p. 20), give off "a smell almost like flesh" (p. 133).

Simpson's subtropical hinterland landscape, scarred by colonial and environmental violence, is also metaphorically aligned with human victims of violence. Imagining what the forest had looked like before timber-getters like her father cut down the red cedars and bunya pines, Jen reflects that the "great trees [are] gone. The first people, gone" (p. 57). Likewise, the bodies of two missing, murdered local children are hidden beneath the hinterland earth until uncovered by excessive flooding: "Long held beneath root and soil, gestating in decomposing plant matter, the hinterland delivered up its lost children" (p. 253). The scene positions the hinterland landscape as a protecting, maternal space where the children "gestate" and are "delivered", while also offering an uncanny reminder that all life "will always *become* vegetal matter, matter for vegetation" (Keetley 2016, p. 3; emphasis in original).

The human-made in *Nest's* landscape is aligned with violence and terror, particularly roads and tree-felling equipment. The “scream of a chainsaw” (Simpson 2014, p. 132) “rip[s] apart” (p. 132) the morning stillness and Jen’s peace of mind as council workers start cutting trees to widen the road near Jen’s house, threatening to bring the outside world to her door. Jen is not exempt from this violence either; she hits a kookaburra while driving and feels herself and her car are both killers (p. 123). Australian roads have been linked both to Gothic masculinity (Gelder 2007; Johnke 2009) and to colonial violence. Ross Gibson has a “hunch that some Australian roads channel the violence that has produced the nation” (2010, p. 6). Roads, as “the main infrastructure of nation-building [...] must cut through sinister territory” (p. 6). Roadside memorials are a frequent sight in hinterland regions, with their winding, treacherous roads that attract tourist drivers and, especially, motorcyclists. Roads are sites of danger in other hinterland novels as well. In Steven Lang’s *Hinterland* (2017, p. 94), the local doctor is killed when his car goes over the edge of the steep range road under mysterious circumstances. In a chapter of Kate Morton’s *The Secret Keeper* (2012) set on Mt Tamborine in 1929, the parents of one central character, Vivien, drive their car off a mountain road, a scene delivered only in recollection and in fragments, as an unspeakable horror: “*The Lizzie Ford ... right over the edge ... incinerated ... hardly recognisable*” (Morton 2012, p. 386; emphasis in original). And in Janette Turner Hospital’s *Charades* (1988), a local youth is paralysed after he drives his father’s car off one of the mountain roads that “[smash] through our shrinking forest” (Hospital 2015, p. 41). In hinterland texts, roads appear inextricably linked with danger and violence, historical and contemporary, colonial and ecological.

Landscapes of contrast and excess

Not only the manmade but also the natural environment can be presented as terrifying in hinterland texts, through metaphors of contrast and excess. Vance Palmer, in a series of newspaper articles exploring the Sunshine Coast’s Blackall Range in 1926 locates excess in the rainforest remnants that survived aggressive colonial clearing. The rainforest is likened to the Brazilian jungle, a closed Gothic space of obscurity, where “shadows are so deep that they fall on the eyes like a curtain”, “thick, glossy leaves [...] shut out the sky”, lawyer vines form elaborate “traceries”, and “giant nettles rise menacingly from the wet earth” (Palmer, 1926, p. 9). There is for Palmer a “magic” and yet also a “hostility” about this locally termed “Black scrub” (1926, p. 9). It gives rise to a sense of the ancient and the superstitious: “There is a touch of the medieval and Gothic about it, and the air around it is heavy with the folklore and legends of an older world” (1926, p. 9). Compared with the rainforest, a nearby farmhouse, surrounded by “bright, cleared hillsides” is rendered “fugitive”; it looks “thin, fragile, and insufficient” (1926, p. 9). Something here

“does not quite belong” (1926, p. 9), and it is in the excess of native plant life and its contrast to the orderly European built environment and traces of land-clearing that this sense of unease stirs. Palmer’s descriptions give rise to a sense of the uncanny in the collision of the native and the European: each in its own way is familiar and yet unfamiliar, in place and out of place (Gelder & Jacobs 1998, p. 24), at home and not at home (Punter 2000, p. 83) in the hinterland landscape.

Arthur Groom, a visitor to Mt Tamborine in 1925, also describes the rainforest in terms of contrast and excess. It is a “standing wall of jungle; hundreds of acres of giant trees, entwined and held with a tangling mass of vines and creepers, some of them as thick as a man’s body” (quoted in Blair 2007, p. 181). The Gothic emanates in this description in the form of excessive nature that threatens through sheer mass. Like the Gothic labyrinth or castle, the subtropical rainforest is monumental, overwhelming, perhaps annihilating. In the same passage, Groom looks ahead hopefully to a future where the excess of the rainforest has been brought under control through cutting and burning, grass seeds have been sown, weeds controlled and cattle installed on the new cleared acres.

In her 1959 work, *Lantana Lane*, Eleanor Dark also locates a Gothic contrast and excess in the Sunshine Coast hinterland’s subtropical plant life, particularly the imported invasive weed lantana which conflicts with the orderly lines and plans of the farmer—in the form of pineapples. Both grow excessively in the region where, as Dark puts it, “if you are not looking at pineapples, you are looking at lantana” (2012, p. 95). Today, lantana is a common—even iconic—part of South East Queensland’s hinterland landscapes. This imported ornamental shrub grows naturally in Mexico and South and Central America, and is classified as “one of the worst weeds in Australia because of its invasiveness, potential for spread, and economic and environmental impacts” (Cooperative Research Centre for Australian Weed Management 2003, p. 1). In Australia’s subtropical hinterlands, lantana flowers and fruits almost all year. Its berries are poisonous to livestock, and it competes with and overruns other plants, even releasing chemicals into surrounding soil to prevent other plants’ germination (CRAWM 2003, p. 2). A hardy plant, lantana can resprout (or resurrect) even when apparently dead. It is almost impossible to eradicate. Like the Gothic, lantana thrives on boundaries, flourishing along fence lines and at the edges of creeks. A contemporary weed guide characterises it in quite Gothic terms: “Lantana invades disturbed sites, especially open sunny areas such as roadsides, cultivated pastures and fencelines. From there it can invade the edges of forests” (CRAWM 2003, p. 2).

In *Lantana Lane*, a Gothic contrast is evident in the comparison between lantana and pineapples, but also within lantana itself; beneath its canopy of bright “silly little flowers” (Dark 2012, p. 99) lies a tangled netherworld that Dark likens to “the twilight of the unconscious” (p. 97). Lantana is a kind of “aberration” (p. 96) that Dark links to ideas of madness, the subconscious, and excess. Like Frankenstein’s monster, “Nature [has] informed it with life, and then left it to its own devices. The result—as one might expect—is frightful” (p. 95). Outside human intervention or control, lantana “simply keeps alive, and grows. And how it grows!” (p. 95). Lantana exceeds both physical and conceptual boundaries; it grows not according to any discernible pattern but instead “sprouts upwards, downward or sideways at will, guided only by an eager, blundering vitality, a fervent, planless exuberance” (p. 97), like a Gothic labyrinth. This chaotic growth makes it impossible to classify the plant’s parts according to standard terms: “Does this shrub (or should we say creeper? ...) consist of a great many stems and no branches, or a great many branches and no stem?” (p. 97). The only option, for Dark, is to abjure categorisation altogether and resort to an excess of terms instead: “stem, stalk, bough, branch, limb, twig and even peduncle” (p. 98). The wild unclassifiability of lantana leads to an excess of language that results from trying to fill the void of the unspeakable. In this way, lantana is related to the unspeakable and the liminal: to what is unruly and exceeds ordinary forms of language and classification. For Keetley, this is one of the key sources of vegetal horror; plants, monstrously, are “[n]ever completely accounted for by humans’ efforts to categorize them” (2016, p. 8).

Dark’s pineapples are also excessive, and described via metaphors of conquest and invasion that implicitly remind of the colonial processes in which these plants are embedded—even as there is no mention of the Aboriginal people whose land *Lantana Lane*’s smallholders now farm. The imported pineapple thrives excessively in Queensland’s subtropics, and in *Lantana Lane* it activates a sense of the overwhelming sublime. Like lantana, pineapples are notoriously difficult to work with or control; their sharp leaves score long scratches up the arms and legs of those who seek to harvest them. Dark’s pineapples grow in “orderly” (2012, p. 100) rows, marching “in perfect formation, never breaking ranks, evenly deployed over the surface of the ground” (p. 100). Walking past a pineapple field creates an “overpowering illusion that its long rows are wheeling and turning” (p. 100)—excessive order becomes chaotic kaleidoscope, mazelike. And the plants’ uncanny duplications, “each plant like every other plant, all the same height, all the same colour, all the same shape” (p. 100), causes a breakdown of boundaries: “identity merge[s] into slowly turning spokes of *red-green-green*, *red-green-green*, *red-green-green*, till the head swims, the eyes blur, the ghostly drums beat out a marching rhythm.... Trrrrum-tum-tam, tttrum-tum-tum...” (p. 100; emphasis in original).

Here, as with the description of lantana, Dark's sentences mimic excess, piling on clauses and repetitions, until finally language fails altogether and there is only the ghostly military—or is it tribal?—drum beat. Visually overwhelming and invested with movement and agency, Dark's pineapple fields are as uncanny as her lantana.

In the Tamborine Mountain of Janette Turner Hospital's *Charades*, lantana is also a common sight, but it is the native rainforest—a site of contrasting vitality and decay—that generates the strongest Gothic effects. Here, the boundaries between life and death blur, as in the image of a fallen tree, “given over to creepers, [...] softly collapsing, and along its jellied spine [...] a flock of new saplings has a toehold” (Hospital 2015, p. 38). Boundaries between plant, animal, and human bodies blur as well; in the rainforest, young Charade Ryan feels that if “she sits still long enough, the philodendron will loop itself around her ankles and kingfishers will nest in her hair” (p. 38). When she finds the corpse a swaggie, Charade imagines this icon of the Australian bush decaying in the rainforest is her father and she visits “swinging down the dangling roots, all the way down to the curtain fig and the bone man [who] was getting smaller and smaller, [...] some of his parts were missing, his white geometry in disarray” (p. 56). The bone man is linked to the colonial as well as the patriarchal, as Charade imagines him telling stories of a princess who stepped ashore from the First Fleet and was “the great-great-great-grandmother of my mum, Bea, the Slut of the Tamborine Rainforest” (p. 58). Charade's mother Bea is the embodiment of excessive female sexuality, and Hospital activates strong connections between the colonial and the patriarchal in this text, as does Simpson in the figure of Jen's timber-getter father in *Nest*. Further analysis remains to be done into the connections between patriarchal oppression, female bodies, and sexuality in Hinterland Gothic, as it falls outside the scope of the present paper.

Keetley argues that in forcing plants into the foreground and investing them with agency, “vegetal horror takes aim especially at the foundational categories of visible and invisible, present and absent. In the process, what is perennially relegated to the margins looms to the fore” (2016, p. 12). In the case of Dark's lantana and pineapples, the traces of ecological imperialism that refuse to be backgrounded and instead intrude upon human awareness point to those silenced histories of violence and colonisation that accompanied the arrival of lantana and pineapples in the Sunshine Coast hinterland. In Hospital's *Charades*, the colonial is inextricable from the patriarchal and both are gestured towards by the lush, excessive landscape of the Gold Coast hinterland that looms to the fore in description.

Conclusion

Frequently sites of danger, decay, and secrecy, the excessive and sublime landscapes of South East Queensland's subtropical hinterlands appear in the works of writers across the last century as Gothic spaces, set apart from the everyday life of the urban coast. In these liminal Other zones, what the hinterland seems to "hint" towards is the repressed matter of regional and national histories, particularly via the uncanny simultaneous presence and absence of the Indigenous in the landscape. Unruly and untameable, the hinterland in these texts is as often menaced as it is menacing—the victim rather than the perpetrator of acts of violence and terror. Where excessive subtropical nature comes to the fore, refusing to be mere backdrop, Hinterland Gothic texts gesture towards hidden and unspeakable regional histories. Contrasting sunshine and shadow, sublime and picturesque, native and European, Hinterland Gothic texts activate a Gothic language to describe the local environment, pointing towards a distinct subtropical variation of Australian Gothic.

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