

INDIGENOUS

New staff ask me where I'm from: that I'm not from anywhere, I'm local, takes them by surprise. They assume everyone who can read must have ventured into this northern wilderness to bring the gift of literacy: acquaintance with my accent and my attitudes soon rekindles their missionary fervour.

It is a different topography: for Australians of the Sydney strip the land is over the hills, they dwell by the sea. Here there are hills, but going two hundred miles west is more of the same: gravel ridge, sandy flat, clay plain; brigalow, box, and ironbark with always a line of hills blue on some distant horizon. The sparse and sunburned dirt that for them is elsewhere and inland here comes down to the shore.

So I stay here, saying 'I'm local' while they retreat south with their travellers' tales. Still, they're beginning to unsettle me: I find myself on holidays heading north, begin to dream of living in Proserpine.