

Editorial

A few years ago, when the idea that there might be a worthwhile literature in North Queensland had only just entered my head, I did a tour of western and coastal towns in search of (of all things) writers. After a while my actions on arriving in say, Proserpine or Cloncurry, fell into a pattern. I would call first at the shire offices. Here I was always met with courtesy—though the staff must often have had their own thoughts about the hobbies of university types away from their reserves—and usually presented with a copy of the local history book. (These were available because many of the towns had just passed their centenaries.) Then I would go on to the newspaper offices. I learned to allow plenty of time for the second visit, because I usually found kindred spirits, and the meeting was likely to be shifted to the pub or to someone's home. I can remember some entertaining chats with proprietors and reporters in Cairns, Ingham, Bowen, Mackay and Emerald, just to mention a few. These people were interested in local history; knew all the writers round about, whether permanent or visitors, past or present, and what they had written; and were often writers themselves, either cupboard poets or more extroverted yarn-tellers, or historians. They showed me that whatever mental indolence was being created by the electronic media, and however much supermarkets and computers were limiting opportunities for creative activity and the joy of work, writing as a simple pen-and-paper or at least typewriter craft was still going on. They showed me too that the historical connection between creative writing and journalism in Australia was unimpaired. One has only to think of the *Sydney Bulletin*, publishing Lawson and Paterson in the seminal 1890's, of Marcus Clarke and Rolf Boldrewood, whose novels first appeared as serials in newspapers, for this historicity to become obvious.

By celebrating its centenary with a short story and poetry competition, the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* has therefore proved its solidarity with Australian literary tradition, and at the same time it has acted as spokesman for all those literary journalists

in towns throughout the region. More tangibly, it has provided a stimulus for writers in North Queensland either to produce new work, or to submit work already written so that it can be recognised. As I've already implied, the art of writing in the region is not dead or dying—not even much disturbed.

A few comments on this issue of *LiNQ*: *LiNQ* usually publishes a mixture of creative and factual writing, and draws on the region and the rest of Australia and (rarely) overseas. (The name is meant to suggest that North Queensland is not culturally isolated.) This issue is more limited geographically and as to genre, and consequently the absolute aesthetic standard is more variable. My feeling is, however, that this is compensated for by the spontaneity and inherent liveliness of many of the contributions, and by their individualistic responses to life in the region.

The literature of North Queensland has always been various, and the *Bulletin* competition has shown that this tradition too is still maintained in 1981. To see this, one has only to compare the prize-winners in the various sections printed here. In the senior poetry, "Rainforest N.Q." and "Painting in a Café Restaurant" share a reflective tone, but their subjects and settings could hardly be more different: from the primeval bush rich in aboriginal lore to a civilised indoor scene, with emphasis on the white man's art and feelings. The first prize winner in senior fiction, "Old Whiskers," focusses on a long-established North Queensland type—the beachcomber—and the mood is comic pathos, but "Belonging" deals romantically with a newcomer to the region, who is of a type unknown here up to a few decades ago. In the junior poetry section "Aquarians" has love, beauty and happiness, as expressed in the natural world, as themes, while "Violence" concentrates on the dangers of modern urban life. Of the junior short stories, "A Time of Change" seems to be based on deeply-lived experience and has a recognisable country setting, while "Haunts" is a highly imaginative tale, which touches only here and there on what most of us regard as reality.

All the judges found the reading of entries in the competition educative as well as pleasant. It was an opportunity to come to grips with the attitudes of other people in the region; an act of unification, if you like; and for the four of us, definitely a break-out from the ivory tower. For instance, Barbara Henson's poem, "North," seemed to capture what must be common feelings among Townsvillians: regret at not living in wilder northern parts and consolation at the thought of the sunlight and green leaves that are here. I was grateful to Elaine Lockhart for capturing the tone of the offices of provincial cities, which I had never grasped so vividly before; to Milton Kayes for his detailed portrait of the Cluden races; and to the writers who revealed so much about the past in the outback and the town—"Sandra," "Mab," and B. Stanley. Jill Mather's "Rosie" and George Watson's "Snowie" were rewarding to proof-read and edit. "Rosie" is sentimental in parts, but the characters are vital, the social set-up clearly analysed, and the approach to old age refreshingly positive. In "Snowie" mateship and manhood are portrayed conventionally, but the events and characters and above all the dialogue carry an air of truth: words like "chippie" and "mouse"—in its special context—caused fluttering of dictionaries and animated discussion among my colleagues. I can only hope that the North Queensland writing in this issue gives as much entertainment and information to readers as it has to judges and editor.

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