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TROPICAL FLOWERS: ROMANCING NORTH QUEENSLAND IN EARLY FEMALE FICTION AND POETRY¹

*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.*

(Zora Cross. *The Lute Girl of Rainyvale* 50)

Interviewed in 1999, shortly before her retirement after many years of teaching literature at James Cook University, my late friend Elizabeth Perkins recalled her arrival in Townsville in 1970:

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. (10)



Associate Professor Elizabeth Perkins

Elizabeth's feelings about the tropical North match my own. I arrived in Townsville in 1968, and soon came to appreciate my luck to be living near

the Reef and rainforest and teaching in a new University College where the creative possibilities seemed limitless. For both of us as young women, North Queensland was where we could hope to develop our potential, in Elizabeth's case as a teacher, playwright, editor, theatre director and scholar.

However, decades before Elizabeth and I made our happy discoveries, a succession of female poets and fiction writers had already recognised tropical Queensland as a place where women might gain freedom and strive for fulfilment. I think of these writers as the flower tradition, because their romantic texts are crammed with allusions to flowers. My purpose in this essay is to celebrate these writers, whom I regard as our literary fore-mothers, by commemorating the lives and writings of a representative seven. The poetry and stories selected for discussion were written between 1899 and 1937, when romance writing and reading reached a peak of popularity in the English-speaking world.

Since the emergence of the feminist movement at about the time Elizabeth and I arrived in Townsville, a standard approach has condemned such writers for contributing to women's oppression. This idea over-simplifies the mixed messages in the flower authors' works. Their writings do often endorse gender divisions and roles, and they assume that a passionate union with a loved man is a woman's fulfilment and a magical solution for life's difficulties. However, they focus also on unhappy wives, and frequently challenge the constrictions that gender imposes on female characters. While some accept women's victimhood as unavoidable, others implicitly promote resistance and glorify escapes from oppressive marriages. Without exception, the flower authors encouraged their readers to think more deeply about women's choices. Moreover, several championed female freedom through their brave and rebellious lives.

The flower tradition's portraiture of tropical Queensland invites recognition as a divergent strand. In choosing to depict the region's unfamiliar land- and sea-scapes, the authors set aside the dusty outback Australia of the masculine *Bulletin* and pioneering traditions, and reverted to underlying Romantic perspectives on nature as dynamically beautiful, spiritual and creative. Their texts therefore claimed the region as an alternative feminised space. Although as romance writers they often avoided racial issues or replicated their era's assumptions, they sometimes replaced stereotyped responses with advocacy for Aboriginal people.

Nineteenth-Century Flower Writing

The earliest tropical flower, Harriet Patchett Martin, was born in England and resided mostly in England and France. Following her marriage to an

army officer, she lived in Queensland from 1867 to 1870. In 1886, after her first husband's death, she married Arthur Patchett Martin, an enthusiast for Australian literature. Harriet's small body of work includes two collections of Australian stories for English readers. The later, *Coo-ee: Tales of Australian Life for Australian Ladies* (1891), contains a story of her own which she expanded as the romantic novella, *Cross Currents*, and republished in Lala Fisher's landmark 1899 collection, *By Creek and Gully. Stories and Sketches of Bush Life by Australian Writers in England*.

Cross Currents takes place during Sir George Bowen's governorship. Alma Belmont, the unhappy wife of a gentlemanly but improvident army officer, voyages northwards by steamer from the capital, Bristowe (Brisbane), to Ellenborough (possibly Maryborough). She receives kindly hospitality from the Customs Collector and his family, but during a night spent alone in the Customs House a nearby corroboree so terrifies her that she faints. *Cross Currents* thus contrasts the delicate femininity of a visiting Englishwoman with what it sees as the savagery of an alien race.

Harriet's emphasis on Queensland's strangeness continues in the second section, when Alma, still unhappy in her marriage, is returning to Bristowe from an unnamed North Queensland town, again by steamer. One evening Hilarion Bingham, son of the Customs Collector family, entices her ashore at a northern port, where a wedding has just taken place. Harriet's description of the setting emphasises the uniqueness of the tropics, while paradoxically submerging details in romance tropes of magic and paradise:

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)

Immediately afterwards, Hilarion and Alma view from a distance the young couple's "close, long embrace" (20). They are drawn to replicate this consummation, but Alma rejects Hilarion's approach.

The final section of the picaresque story is set in the French Casino town of Beauplage. (Harriet lived as a child in Boulogne-sur-Mer.) Now freed from her marriage, Alma agrees to wed the Oxford University sportsman Hugh

Davenant. Assured of future joy, she looks back on girlish vanities and asks: "[W]hat had been the outcome of it all? Satiety, discontent, a reckless, unhappy marriage, exile, misery!" (25). Harriet's verdict on Queensland thus remains that of a cultivated European visitor — that this was a savage land of exile. *Cross Currents* associates the tropical North with danger and forbidden passion; sensitive people would be wise to avoid the temptations of such a place.

Turn-of-the-Century Flower Writings

The second tropical flower, Frances Campbell, is less well known than Harriet Martin. According to E. Morris Miller (vol. 2: 691), she was a "doubtful Australian author" who learned about Queensland only from relatives who lived there. Her first novel, *For Three Moons* (1900), follows *Cross Currents* in tracing the northerly steamer voyage of an unhappy, and in this case abused, wife, Angela Vivian. The opening description, which contrasts with Elizabeth Perkins' gritty arrival in Townsville, is surprisingly political in its support for a separate North Queensland and less sensuous than Harriet's comparable evocation of the romantic moonlit tropics:

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. (1)

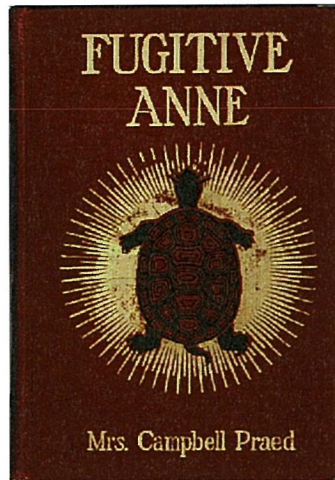
The narrator seems relieved to observe a Townsville softened by distance, and to this extent Frances's approach resembles Harriet's. Assorted female passengers on the England-bound *Ilonia* nevertheless encourage the reader to consider women's roles in the free nomadic environment provided by a ship transiting tropical waters, and *For Three Moons* consequently raises issues that *Cross Currents* does not address. Mrs Tredwin, a station owner and "the millionairess of Mt Coo-tha" (7), has become the richest woman in Australia by surviving a brutal marriage for the sake of her children: "...Mrs Tredwin was a strong woman, with a manly mind....Yet she had gone on living with her tyrant, till justice overtook him, and he went the way of all tyrants" (36). She disappoints as a role model, however, when she makes the Southern Cross a symbol for the passive endurance through which she has prevailed: "I often think it's set there above to show that it is the lot of all. We are born to it, Angela dear, we women

folks. We've all got a cross to bear, from ever we know what it is to feel" (38). *For Three Moons* is also disappointing in its rejection, through the blue-stocking governess Miss Tozer, of the "New Woman" — the Ibsen-inspired woman who strives to be financially and emotionally independent. Captain James MacDonald of the Scots Greys, who comes on board at Townsville, promises to resolve Angela's unhappiness as their ship steams onwards to Batavia.

Rosa Campbell Praed, the best-known and most prolific of the flower authors, grew up on rural properties on the Logan River, in Central Queensland, and near Moreton Bay. In 1872, aged twenty-one, she married Arthur Campbell Praed, and moved to his station at Port Curtis near Gladstone. Here she rebelled against the isolation and hardship of bush life, and in 1875 the couple sold up and settled in England, where Rosa quickly achieved fame as a novelist. Beginning in the early 1880s she published nearly forty long romances, an autobiography and biographies, and about twenty short stories. After separating from her husband, she lived between 1899 and 1927 with Nancy Harward, whom she believed to be the reincarnation of a Roman slave girl, and moved in Bohemian intellectual circles that included Oscar Wilde and Madame Blavatsky, founder of the Theosophical Society. Rosa was notorious for her occult beliefs and her opposition to the bonds of marriage.



Rosa Campbell Praed
(State Library of Queensland
Image No. 68050)



Fugitive Anne, Cover of Early Edition

In contrast with *Cross Currents* and *For Three Moons*, Rosa's novels *Fugitive Anne* (1903) and *The Lost Earl of Ellan* (1905–1906) incorporate extensive first-hand knowledge of tropical Queensland. Like their predecessors in the flower tradition, they feature scenes on coastal steamers but with heightened

romance and drama. In addition, the seas of the Far North provide their female protagonists with opportunities for heroism and revolt.

In *Fugitive Anne* the twenty-year-old Anne escapes from Elias Bedo, her drunken miner husband of four months, by pretending to swim ashore from a steamer between Thursday Island and Cooktown. Disguised as a boy Lascar (East Indian sailor), she journeys through the bush with Kombo, an Aboriginal youth befriended in childhood. She respects Kombo's miraculous bush knowledge, his strength and agility, but each evening confirms her status as Cloud-Daughter, intercessor with his creator-god, by singing *Ave Baiamè* in her beautiful contralto voice to the tune of Gounod's *Ave Maria*. Safe after a two-day journey to an abandoned sheep station, she records her feelings in notes that embrace the tropical bush as a place of women's freedom:

"Better death in the wild woods than life in chains."

"Anne Marley hails Nature, the emancipator."

"How sweet the taste of freedom! How intoxicating the joy of deliverance!" (31)

Anne revels in her revived bush capabilities, and in the small animals and birds. Naked, she takes a ritual swim in a "dug-out pool" in the heart of "her native forests" (38).

Anne and Kombo journey onward to her aunt's station, Kooloola, on the edge of known territory at the foot of Cape York. Here, in an event based on Rosa's childhood memories of the massacre of the Frasers at Horner Bank (Clarke 16–19), they find that the inhabitants have been murdered. However the perpetrators, the Maianbar clan, are seduced like Kombo into revering Anne as a goddess. By singing "God save the Queen," she survives a battle with a second Aboriginal group which ends in a cannibal feast (93–95). Later she is found by an admirer, Eric Hansen, an explorer-scientist embarked from Denmark on a study of Australian fauna, flora, geology and peoples.² Anne, Eric and Kombo are then taken up by the Red Men of Acan, a lost Mayan race descended from the drowned continent of Lemuria, the source of all civilisations.³ The Acan install Anne as high priestess of a virginal cult, and Rosa devotes much space to rituals, beliefs and emotional interactions in this fresh setting. A climax comes when Bedo, who has pursued Anne in hope of monetary gain, reveals their marital connection. The Acan retaliate by casting Bedo over a cliff. They are on the point of sacrificing Anne to their tortoise god, when a volcanic eruption allows Anne, Eric and Kombo to escape, to be later lionised in London as discoverers of the lost civilisation.

Fugitive Anne expands Harriet's and Frances's accounts of tropical Queensland with land- and seascapes that juxtapose the familiar with the fantastic. Anne's

love of the bush and sea, mixed with versions of Aboriginal lore gleaned from Rosa's childhood, create a pastoral romance to which Hansen's excited discoveries add a scientific dimension. Dangers parallel to the corroborree in *Cross Currents* further complicate Rosa's rendition of the region. The land of the Acans draws on the unexplored African plateaux popularised in H. Rider Haggard's imperial fantasies.⁴ For example, *King Solomon's Mines* (1886) sculpts the borders of Kukuanalana as Sheba's Breasts, extinct volcanoes where men starve and freeze to death. The elaborated equivalents in *Fugitive Anne* are the Acans' Crocodile and Tortoise Mountains. The Crocodile's phallic, skyward-pointing jaws, from which lava erupts, form an ultimate *vagina dentata*.⁵ The Tortoise Mountain's lapis lazuli mouth likewise exhales a lethal gas, while a giant phallic tortoise (Dixon 97) is the heart of Acan religious observance. Rosa therefore surpasses Haggard by embodying male as well as female anatomy in grotesque land forms and creatures. Her fusing of destructive animal life with weird topography hints at a sublimated dread of the inland tropics, actualised previously in Anne's discovery of her murdered relations.

The Lost Earl of Ellan, Rosa's second romance set in tropical Queensland, offers overall a more benign and idealised view of the region. The plot hinges on contrast and rivalry between the sisters, Susan and Oora Galbraith, who both fall in love with the lost earl, James Wolfe. Susan dominates the first third of the novel, which recounts her lonely life on the northern station of 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)

Except in its domestic details, this account, which balances efficiency and purpose with crudity, deprivation and the threat of death, reverts to the pioneering traditions of literary Australia. Susan is a perfect lady of the period, Madonna-like, "slim, graceful, pure-looking" (3), with complicated clothing and a perfect coiffure, a rational scion of northern Europe at odds with her surroundings. By contrast, her sister Oora, so named by the station Aborigines, is a bush girl like Anne Marley. A passionate descendant of warm southern

Europe with unruly coal-black hair, she embodies the spirit of the hot new colony. She is associated, not with the dry inland like her sister, but with the watery environment favoured by the earlier flower authors, Harriet and Frances.

Oora and James embark on the *Quetta*, which struck an unsurveyed rock and sank near Cape York on 28 February 1890, with the loss of 134 lives. In a gripping episode, Oora heroically saves the Earl, who cannot swim, from the sea. Her feats of endurance follow the newspaper exploits of Alice Nicklin and Emily Lacy, young survivors from the *Quetta*. During a terrible night and day in the sea, protected by a shark-tooth amulet given to Oora by childhood Aboriginal friends, Oora and James discover that they are twin souls, destined to meet through the centuries in successive reincarnations. Later scenes sketch Thursday Island, Somerset (Acobarra), and Rosa's in-laws the Jardines, renamed the Aisbets. As James gazes at his "sea-witch" in a beachside grove at Acobarra, Rosa's underwater imagery creates tropical Queensland as a magical land of undefined edges and mythical beings, in contrast with the dangerous sculptured landscapes of *Fugitive Anne*:

He gazed at her with melancholy ardour and something of bewilderment..... This was not the world he had known — this world of green luminosity, of fantastic forest growth, where the wind s-s-rred in the tops of the palms and through the intertwined creeper-withes and branches of the trees, making a sound something like the sound of the sea, if one could imagine one's self far down below the crests of the waves, and hearing them break as they swept along to an enchanted shore. It was a world of fantasy. And the sprite-woman was part of the fantasy, with her cowrie-shell lips and her strange eyes and her alluring smile. (324–325)

Rosa's portraits of Oora in *The Lost Earl of Ellan* therefore affirm female strength and courage and call on Aboriginal, Pythagorean, and Eastern spiritualities to validate a passion that transcends middle class and colonial sexual restrictions. This transcendence remains, even after the romance plot has legitimated Oora and James's relationship by marriage.

Rosa's presentation of Aboriginal people is, as Belinda McKay claims, "ambiguous and inconsistent."⁶ Her tropical Queensland novels may however have functioned in part to destabilise racial assumptions in a discursive environment otherwise controlled by the pioneering mythos. *Fugitive Anne* dwells on Aboriginal violence, but also confronts colonists' raping of Aboriginal women and the poisoning of a peaceful clan with Christmas pudding (66–67). While both novels profess enthusiasm for Aboriginal languages and culture, they end by subsuming Aboriginal spirituality in occult beliefs. In fact *Fugitive Anne* supports the Theosophical Society's inter-faith mission by forging synergies among Catholicism, the so-called druidism of Stonehenge, and

ancient Mayan and Indigenous Australian beliefs and practices. Finally, Anne's friendship with Kombo while alone in the bush threatens the separation, strict in colonial societies, between white women and black men. The plot ultimately upholds this division and defends white supremacy, but side comments draw attention to the underlying injustice: "Anne almost cried sometimes when she thought of the treachery which pioneering Whites had dealt to his race" (66)

The Flower Tradition between the Wars

By no means in the front rank of Australian poets and story-tellers, Nancy Francis was born in England in 1873, and settled at Rossville south of Cooktown with her family in about 1910. She and her husband later



Nancy Francis, 1953

retired to Herberton, and Nancy was buried in the Herberton cemetery on 28 June 1954. The "Writing the Tropical North" *AustLit* team has so far located 417 poems, short stories and essays that she contributed to *The Cairns Post*, *The Northern Herald*, the *Sydney Bulletin*, *The Australian Woman's Mirror* and other newspapers between 1914 and 1941. Her serial "Queensland Luck" appeared in *The Northern Herald* between August and October 1923, and in 1947 *The Cairns Post* published her anthology, *Feet in the Night and Other Poems*.

Nancy's love of tropical Queensland shines through her published work. "Queensland Luck" tells how the first-person narrator, Harry Prince, matures to confident manhood and finds love after he sets out from Sydney for the Tableland tin fields. His first experience of the Far North in Cairns (Torreston) evokes surprise and delight:

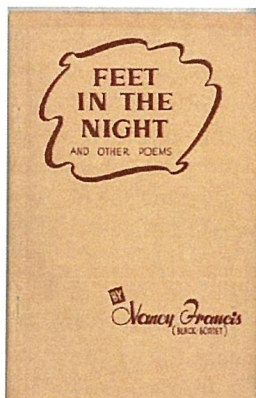
I had never been so far north before and was accustomed to hear my Sydney friends speak of North Queensland as a dreadful place impossible for white people and only fit for black or coloured folk. I found a delightful climate, a summer that lasted all year round, grand and beautiful scenery, healthful 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: 28)

On the tin fields a dying miner directs Harry to a fabulous find of alluvial gold. During an arduous treasure hunt led by his Aboriginal companion Pluto, he feels trepidation in the "twilight of the jungle scrub....a woven wall of lawyer vines, stinging trees and all manner of monstrous tropical growth" (*The Northern Herald* 5 September 1923, p. 29), where the travellers come upon

signs of a cannibal feast. Above all, however, they are awed by the beauty of the rainforest, which is a home for tree kangaroos, snakes, and many species of birds (*The Northern Herald* 29 August 1923: 28–29).

North Queensland nature is the most frequent subject also of Nancy's poetry, which is heart-felt rather than accomplished. Her perspective is romantic and deeply Christian. First published in the Sydney *Bulletin* in March 1932, "Cedar Bay" is one of her more successful poems:

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. (*Feet in the Night* 63)



Nancy Francis' Poetry Anthology,
Feet in the Night, 1947

Compassion for Aborigines inspired both the title poem and the first section of *Feet in the Night*. Although patronising, some of these poems, such as "De Profundis, The Cry of Black Brother of the North" (10–11), protest powerfully against abuses, which they list comprehensively as enslavement; poor food; the chaining of young black men; white men's sexual exploitation of black women, including the transmission of sexual disease; the stealing of children fathered by white men; and the exploitation of black labour on pearling boats. In contrast with Rosa's balancing of attitudes in *Fugitive Anne*, Nancy's protests against racial

injustice occupy a prominent place in her *oeuvre*, elaborated as they are in four essays that she contributed to *Aussie* in 1925.⁷

“By Forest, Scrub and Shore,” her late series on Aboriginal culture published in *The Cairns Post* between 1939 and 1940, includes five essays⁸ that seek both to confirm the historicity of cannibalism, practised from necessity and for ritual purposes, and to excuse it by referring to ancient atrocities in Europe and more recent ones in tropical Queensland:

It all sounds very shocking and horrible, but it must not be supposed that the blacks were alone in perpetrating murder most foul. There were barbarous white men in those early days who were actors in abominable crimes against the natives, both wholesale murders and unnatural cruelties that only live in the memories of aged white people and have been handed down through the few native survivors of these horrors. (*The Cairns Post* 28 March, 1940: 11)

The three later essays summarise tales from Carl Lumholtz’s *Among Cannibals* (1889), including an alleged “native” preference for black and Chinese over white flesh, and for kidney fat as a supreme delicacy. Together with the reference to cannibalism in “Queensland Luck” and Nancy’s often-expressed regret that Aboriginal people were doomed to extinction, the series reveals how far she had assimilated her era’s racial myths. Even so, though somewhat lacking in dignity, her portrait of Pluto in “Queensland Luck” is more trusting and affectionate than Rosa’s portrait of Kombo. “King Pluto,” an old man forcibly transported to the Hull River Mission, and Nancy’s major concern in an open letter to the Protector of Aborigines published in Queensland newspapers in December 1919, probably became the model four years later for the fictional Pluto. The letter is an eloquent protest on behalf of Far North Queensland Aboriginal parents and children, separated from each other and their ancient way of life by the ruthless execution of government policies:

I have decided to write you, as I think it unlikely that you will come to Rossville, and I feel that I must speak for those who are dumb — to plead for those who are without a pleader. I have lived here for ten years, and am most interested in the welfare of the blacks, and on their behalf would ask you, if it is within your power, to stop the deportation of the black and half-caste children, which is taking place even now.

I had the unhappiness of seeing the last police raid on these innocents several years ago, and shall never forget it. The police rode up and demanded the children, who were torn from their heart-broken mothers, to be taken by strangers, amongst strangers, to a strange district — from freedom into servitude. Several of these were living in respectable households, learning domestic duties, and their employers in every case treated them with the greatest kindness, and they were happy. They

were herded off into Cooktown — one girl had her collarbone broken in the process, and, it was reported, died of it. I say reported, because from the moment these poor creatures (little children of seven were amongst them) were taken away, nothing more was heard of them by their parents or white people who knew them, and it is believed that few of them have survived. For the blacks will not survive this parting from all they love, and the curtailment of their freedom! I have noticed the effect of the raid I have referred to: the blacks have decreased in number; they have become melancholy; and they are afraid all the time of the police, of the law, of the Protector.⁹

The mellowing of racial attitudes apparent in the contrast between Nancy's and Rosa's writing reflects northern settlers' increased security, the authors' ethical differences, and generic factors, including a declining popular interest in Haggard-style imperial romances.

Nancy Francis lived, as far as one can tell, an exemplary family life, but the next tropical flower, Zora Cross (18 May 1890–22 January 1964), was an independent woman and a passionate fighter, whose life and writings, like Rosa's, braved the marital conventions of her era. Zora was born at Eagle Farm, Brisbane, and educated at Gympie and the Ipswich Girls Grammar School. During World War I she toured tropical Queensland with a concert party in aid of war funds, but spent most of her adult life in New South Wales. After bearing two children, one of whom died, to unnamed fathers, and marrying an actor, Stuart Smith, but refusing to live with him, Zora and David McKee Wright, the literary editor of the Sydney *Bulletin*, established a lasting *de facto* relationship. They had two daughters, and the family lived at Glenbrook in the Blue Mountains. After Wright's sudden death in 1928, Zora maintained outward good spirits while battling to support her three children by writing and freelance journalism, supplemented by a Commonwealth Literary Fund pension of £2 a fortnight.



Zora Cross

In 1917 Zora had scandalised literary Australia by publishing a poetry collection, *Songs of Love and Life*, which embodied her defiant passion for Wright in language that was both erotic and spiritual. Sixty sonnets in the collection, modelled on Shakespeare, demonstrate what Miller recognised in 1940 as “originality” and “vigour,”¹⁰ and what the distinguished critic Dorothy Green later described as Zora's “true lyric gift” (*ADB*). These gifts surface in “Home-Sickness,” which views Queensland, and especially the north, from the poet's Blue Mountains cottage. The naming of a

dozen or more Queensland places makes this work an appropriate quotation in the state's sesquicentenary year:

STANZA 1

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 hoy blossom pale....

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...

STANZA 7

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.

(Stable and Kirwood 85–87)

The conclusion, however, dissolves home-sickness in another feeling: “all I long for leaps into my eyes/ With every blossom-look Love’s glances give.”

In addition to nearly 450 poems and forty short stories, Zora’s *oeuvre* includes *An Introduction to the Study of Australian Literature* (1922) and about forty essays, among them an innovative series on Australian women writers in the *Australian Woman’s Mirror*. Four novels appeared only as newspaper serials,

but *This Hectic Age*, set in Sydney during World War II, and two Queensland novels achieved volume publication. McKay has analysed *Daughters of the Seven Mile* (1924), set in and around Gympie (Hillborough), as demarcating racial boundaries at a time when the vanishing race theory was giving way to assimilationist trends (2004: 62–63).

The Lute Girl of Rainyvale, which survives in rare copies dated to 1925, follows the adventures of an eighteen-year-old naive heroine, Melise Hargreaves, who lives in Brisbane. Melise's lover drowns; and after her mother simultaneously dies from being struck on the temple by a falling Buddha statue, Melise flees northwards on a voyage of escape. Aboard the by now predictable steamer she forms a friendship with Lili the Lute Girl (player), who invites her to visit her merchant father's town of Rainyvale. The fictional name and later descriptions reveal this to be Innisfail. Melise meanwhile falls in love with the ship's purser, Dale Acton, and the couple battle other characters for possession of two ancient jars of Chinese porcelain bequeathed to Melise by her mother. These gradually reveal themselves to be a source of blessing. Melise's northern odyssey brings her maturity and emotional fulfilment. Descriptions progressively associate tropical Queensland, not only with nature and naked passion as in the epigraph above, but also with beauty, romance, adventure, ease and contentment:

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 unforgetting 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. (49)

At Townsville:

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. (55)

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. (62)

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

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! (125)

As if reinforcing the ethnic boundaries established in *Daughters of the Seven Mile*, Zora's idealisation of tropical Queensland nevertheless seeks to exclude blackness and racial mix. Dale avers:

"The North's like a fire in my blood. The islands sicken me because they are black, black, black, whichever way you look at them. Here it is different — brown if you like, but somehow cleaner, fresher, and wilder." (53)

Melise's first view of Rainyvale's people seeks both to conceal the region's multi-racial composition, and to counter the prejudice which habitually derided tropical Queensland as "Queensmongreland" (Reynolds 145):

It was a novelty to Melise to find herself being drawn through the centre of Main Street, Rainyvale. But more novel still was her welcome when stopping, just as a tram might stop, at the Star Hotel, Melise became aware of a crowd of people, prominent among whom were an exquisitely dressed Chinese lady and a tall man, apparently in evening dress. The others in the crowd were just ordinary people such as she would have met in Brisbane. She could not find a black or Oriental face among them. For though the population of Rainyvale may number many hundreds of Chinese, Rainyvale does not parade the Orient, and it was to good Aussie laughter and the sound of her own tongue that Melise entered the town. (126–127)

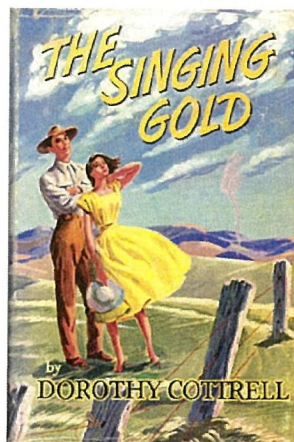
Zora's descriptions repeatedly contrast Lili's Chinese with Melise's Caucasian features, but other passages acclaim Chinese philosophy, art, history and wealth. Mainly through Lili's family, the novel therefore ensconces positive aspects of Chinese culture as part of the North's mystique, again in refutation of accounts that numbered the Chinese among Innisfail's poorest citizens.¹¹

Dorothy Cottrell, the next writer in the flower tradition, was born on 16 July 1902 at Picton in New South Wales. Her parents soon moved to Ballarat, where, aged five, Dorothy contracted polio, which confined her for the rest of her life to a wheelchair. After her parents divorced, Dorothy was brought up by her grandmother at Picton and on her maternal uncles' Queensland properties of Elmina, near Charleville, and Ularunda, near Morven. Here she trained cattle dogs to pull her wheelchair, "and was good at most things that could be done sitting down" (Ross 1997: 56). In Sydney she lived with her Aunt Lavinia and studied sculpture and painting. In 1922 she secretly married Walter Cottrell, book-keeper at Ularunda, and eloped with him to Dunk Island, arriving in February 1923. Edmund James Banfield, author of *The Confessions of a Beachcomber*, died on the island in June, while the Cottrells were visiting Townsville, and they finally left the island on 29 July. After a poverty-stricken interlude in Sydney, Dorothy and Walter returned in 1924 to Ularunda, where Dorothy wrote four novels, one of which, *The Singing Gold*, proved to

be a bestseller, serialised in America, England and Australia and published as a book in London in 1928. In the same year the Cottrells migrated to the United States, where Dorothy wrote further novels, children's books, stories and articles, some with an Australian theme.¹²



Dorothy Cottrell



The Singing Gold, Cover of Early Edition

Dorothy's romantic flight to tropical Queensland scorned disability and dramatically proclaimed her adult autonomy. For her, as for the earlier flower authors Rosa and Zora, the region stood for romance and freedom. In *The Singing Gold*, a tom-boyish bride and sweet but incompetent husband spend their early married life bedevilled by humorous *contretemps* as they battle fauna and the weather on an island which is clearly Dunk,¹³ before moving to Sydney where the husband is tragically killed. Descriptions of the island vividly evoke the colourful landscapes and tranquillity of the tropics. Detachment is evident however in Dorothy's deployment of tropical tropes, which Banfield had filled out with amateur science and which earlier flower authors had whole-heartedly embraced:

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. (120–121)

Banfield devoted much of his writing to anthropological and archaeological study of Coonanglebah's (Dunk Island's) Aboriginal people, but *The Singing Gold* limits Indigenous reference to a canoe visit by "soft-skinned brown natives from the Palm Island Missions" (142). Dorothy admires the Islanders' manual proficiency and local knowledge, but complains of theft. When they chant a mission hymn, "Grant us when we come to die,/ Light at eventide," she comments: "It seemed the cry of a people dispossessed, being driven back into the old sea" (141).

Dorothy's unpublished novel, the colourful fantasy *Nika Lurgin*, is also set on Dunk Island (Ross 1997: 66). In addition, she based thirteen stories on her youthful experience of tropical Queensland. The marital humour of *The Singing Gold* recurs in "A Matter of Comparison," set in the Gulf region and the Northern Territory and published posthumously. In 1932 and 1933 she published six sentimental stories about Dickie, a boy born in America, but orphaned and brought up in "Eolian," a far North Queensland town, by four elderly maiden aunts. In the same period appeared "Into This World" and "Racing Abe Goes Home," tales of heroic rescue from flood and fire in the Gulf, a theme further elaborated in "The Gauntlet of Flames," published in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1952. Finally, she drew on thirty-year-old memories of coastal North Queensland for "The Reef" (1947), "Shark Bait" (1950 and 1951), and "The Pit in the Jungle" (1951) (Ross 1997: 66, 67, 70). These are her best stories, suspenseful, well-paced, and carefully observed. When, in "The Reef," a downed pilot at last summons help, he reflects:

It was just a matter of time until man fished man out of trouble. Nothing in the great and teeming Reef could have done that! Defying time and space to bring help to its kind. (15)

Like her early south Queensland novel, *Earth Battle* (1930),¹⁴ and like Rosa's account of station life in *The Lost Earl of Ellan*, Dorothy's late stories predict the triumph of human moral and emotional life, and of civilised intelligence, over tropical Queensland's rainforests, reefs and vast unknown spaces.

The latest tropical flower, Marie Bjelke-Petersen, grew up near Copenhagen and migrated to Tasmania with her family in 1891 when she was sixteen. Her first job was as a teacher of girls at her brother Christian's School of Physical Culture in Hobart. Her eldest brother Carl moved on to New Zealand where he fathered Johannes Bjelke-Petersen, later Premier of Queensland. Marie turned to writing commercial fiction when illness ended her teaching career. Her first novel, *The Captive Singer* (1917) sold over 100,000 English and 40,000 Danish copies. She ventured into remote regions on foot and in a variety of conveyances, and enjoyed painting trips and holidays with her housemate

and friend, Sylvia Mills. Her leading passions throughout life were female friendships and Christianity. Marie's biographer, Alison Alexander, praises her as a forerunner of Second Wave feminism, concluding: "She was not openly rebellious, but she was quite determined to run her own life without male interference, and in her quiet, courteous but definite way she did" (238–39).

In *Jungle Night* (1937), Marie's eleventh and last published novel and the only one set in tropical Queensland, the hero, the wealthy timber magnate, Tony Valmont, lives in a dazzling white Tableland mansion, Marble Hall. He falls in love with Robin, the eighteen-year-old daughter of his manager Walter Lockhart. Drawn from popular historical fiction, Valmont's "castle," the leading characters' names, and Robin's costuming as an eighteenth-century page boy (213) impose on the rainforest a romanticised version of old Europe, while the lovers' characterisation and relationship owe much to Georgette Heyer's bestseller, *These Old Shades* (1926).

Obstacles to their love include the murderous machinations of the timber thieves Brood and Rudder, and the contrivances of two mature, beautiful ladies who are determined to marry Valmont themselves. Good and evil characters finally receive their just deserts, and Valmont, Robin and Lockhart are improved by becoming practising Christians.



Marie Bjelke-Petersen,
Wearing Velvet Hat with Leaf Motif

Robin is most closely identified with the Tableland "jungle," and for her as for Anne, Oora, and Melise, tropical Queensland is the site of both sexual chase and of independent spiritual quest. Raised in the rainforest, Robin roams there freely in her boy's clothes — a defiance of gender categories that a commentator interprets as indicating "a crisis of category itself."¹⁵ Disorder is overcome and boundaries re-established only when Robin flees to Brisbane, where she dresses and tries to behave like a girl and finally accepts Valmont's proposal.

Presented alternately as sinister and alluring, the "jungle," dominates the narrative. Like other flower authors, Marie is addicted to adjectives, but, unlike some, she is an accurate observer whose lists of plants and animals reflect both her careful research (Alexander 194) and the evolving ecological consciousness of the 1930s:¹⁶

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.... 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. (28–29)

Love for wild nature and its creatures, such as bower birds (85–86) and cassowaries (240), is fundamental to Marie's descriptions, which, however, are often blurred by the approved romantic aura. As in earlier flower fiction, perspectives obscured by mist, moonlight and darkness, mixed with the fluidity of water, create the rainforest as a mysterious, dangerous place, a conception that is heralded in the novel's title. Marie's portrayal of Cairns, so unlike the pragmatic observations by early residents, nevertheless exemplifies her weaving of fantasy, even when the doors of perception are unobstructed:

Cairns, the capital city of the North, lay in the white, glistening sunlight like a lovely dream, a thing too exquisite, too perfect to be of earth. It looked utterly insubstantial, elusive, remote. It was a mirage city, conjured up by a magic blend of rainbow hues and the hot, scintillating sunlight — a vision of beauty which might vanish at any moment as a mirage disappears on the sands....

Yes, the North was full of surprises. In this sun-scorched land marvellous things took place. (24–26)

Despite its observance of romance conventions (Smith 90), *Jungle Night* departs from its predecessors in the flower tradition by focusing on settings in a defined district, a feature that invites recognition by residents and by tourists, whose numbers had increased since the 1920s. For example, Marble Hall takes its name from Alfred Bunn's popular song in Balfe's opera, *The Bohemian Girl*: "I dreamt I dwelt in marble halls," which is performed by a suitor of Valmont's (137), but ethereal descriptions of the Hall (134) also recall "Joe Paronella's Spanish extravaganza at Mena Creek Falls outside Innisfail" (Smith 94).

Beyond such opportunistic uses of place, *Jungle Night* claims Cairns and the Tableland for Christianity through a wholesale mythologising which some may read as a fictional foreshadowing of the planned commercial expropriation of the Daintree in the 1980s supported by Marie's nephew Joh.¹⁷ Preluding this is an excision from the text of Aboriginal people, of their ancient spiritual shaping

of the land, and in fact of the district's whole non-Anglo-Australian identity. The only exception is a brief mention of Chinese servants, insulated inside the Marble Hall fantasy (73–74). In thus depicting the Far North as white, Marie goes further than Zora in *The Lute Girl* and Dorothy in *The Singing Gold*.

The Christian mythologising in *Jungle Night* reproduces the simple medieval cosmos of heaven above, middle earth, and hell mouth below. Sky patterns suggest heaven, “clear and stainless, forming a vast expanse of unearthly azure” (102). The Curtain Fig Tree, still an attraction on the outskirts of Yungaburra, becomes the “Cathedral tree” “a mile or so out of Bourburra” (191), where Robin first experiments with prayer and where she and Valmont at last stage their wedding (192). Marie makes the tree a symbol for a Tableland nature participating in the worship of Christ. Listening at a crack in the wood, Robin hears

...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 (192).

Inside hangs a gleaming white cross, “formed by thick branches” (192), “even here in Nature’s own temple!” (192). Finally in *Jungle Night*, Tableland descends into watery depths in the image of a hell-mouth. Encountered in inky blackness, bottomless Lake Eacham with its terrifying ghost-seal, approximating to the devil, foreshadows the green slime lying at the foot of the drop into the Mount Hypipamee crater, “the very portals of — hell” (243). A vengeful Rudder lures Brood into the Devil’s Pool below the Barron Falls, where a crocodile, another Satan-proxy, seals his fate. Marie’s many descriptions develop the connotations of the Pool’s European name: “The sunset had caused the rock and hill-sides to catch fire, and the whole deep Barron gorge was aglow with lurid flames” (284).

Conclusions

The seven preceding vignettes have uncovered variations and inconsistencies in the flower tradition, yet the arguments for remembering these writers with affection and respect can be summarised as follows:

First, in giving a voice to white women travellers and residents, their writings create a tropical Queensland distinct from the region that the male pioneering hegemony constructed on an economic base, the ideological weight of which has constricted dissident voices since colonisation. Flower fiction and poetry focus, not on manmade technology and buildings, but on the natural

environment, especially the Far Northern seas, the inland wilderness, and the rainforest, for which these female texts are unconscious but eloquent advocates. Although stories by the “bush girls,” Rosa and Dorothy, revert on occasion to settlers’ antagonistic perspectives, the flower authors’ presentation of the Queensland tropics is generally uplifting. For them it is a place of romance and adventure, a “fairyland” where “anything at all might happen,” but where the overcoming of challenges leads inevitably to happiness. Harriet and Frances base tropes of moonlight, paradise, and flowers on a judgment of the region as ungoverned and dangerous. Rosa fills the unexplored north-west with a fantasy of a forgotten people, and the far northern seas with tales of female heroism. A long-term resident, Nancy writes of the North with an intimate appreciation for its multifarious wild beauties, while Zora and Dorothy express a more distanced affection and desire. Like them a visitor, Marie offers incisive descriptions of the rainforest, misted over with romance and a Christian mythologising of named places.

Secondly, the flower authors see tropical Queensland as a place of liberation for women. For them it is a playground of the imagination, where young female characters assert an identity freed from parental or marital restrictions. In the North they escape from disability or dependence, embark on hazardous journeys, experiment with forbidden passions and undertake spiritual quests. Moreover, the warm coastal seas and unspoiled “jungle” are spaces of uncertain boundaries where, in Rosa’s and Marie’s works, gender definition likewise becomes fluid; here women escape from loneliness, recover from loss, and aspire to heroism or athletic self-fulfilment. By revealing such female potential and hope of freedom, the flower writings encouraged their women readers to take an expanded view of their life options.

Thirdly, these authors deserve credit for displaying a striking independence in spiritual matters. They embody this in their heroines, most of whom engage in an individualistic search for meaning. While the flower authors’ descriptions transpose the essential Romantic veneration for nature as beautiful, joyous and infused with divinity into the fresh tropical setting, they go further in seeking to sanctify the landscape for European possession through a creative synthesis of spiritual traditions. In doing so they use the language of romance, especially tropes of magic and enchantment, to draw together Christian, Aboriginal, Chinese, Buddhist and Mayan spiritualities into new configurations. We have seen that Marie’s evangelical fiction is an exception to this. However, the open-minded syncretism displayed by other members of the flower group generally counters the region’s dominant Manichean discourse, which portrayed Christianity, the colonisers’ religion, as white, light and rational, and its binary opposite, Aboriginal spirituality, as the dark unknown, inherently filthy and abject.

Partly as a consequence of this, the flower tradition departs from most tropical Queensland writing in expressing affection and support for Aboriginal people, though it retains some of the era's racial assumptions. Dread of an alien race is paramount in *Cross Currents*, and Aborigines are absent from the shipboard narrative of *For Three Moons*, but *Fugitive Anne* mingles distrust and ingrained contempt with advocacy. Advocacy, compassion and a growing respect are evident in Nancy's poetry, essays and fiction on racial themes, though she also accepts contemporary beliefs about Aboriginal cannibalism and inevitable decline. Reflecting the accelerating assimilationist trends of the 1920s and '30s, *The Lute-Girl of Rainyvale* simultaneously concedes and denies the region's racial mix. Dorothy's depiction of Palm Islanders gives elegiac shape to the vanishing race theory, while *Jungle Night* omits reference to the region's non-white races.

With qualifications chiefly in respect of race, therefore, these arguments generally establish my case for celebrating the flower tradition of tropical Queensland writing.

Endnotes

¹Earlier versions of this article were presented as a public lecture at the Perc Tucker Gallery, Townsville, on 3 August 2009, under the auspices of the Foundation for Australian Literary Studies, and as a keynote address at "Tropics of the Imagination," a conference hosted by the Cairns Institute at James Cook University, Cairns, on 2 November 2009. The author thanks James Cook University, the Australian Research Council (ARC), and the Foundation for Australian Literary Studies for travel and research grants supporting this project. I am also grateful to the "Writing the Tropical North" *AustLit* team at James Cook University for research assistance.

²Rosa modelled Hansen on Leichhardt, whom her father had accompanied on a journey to Moreton Bay in 1843 (Clarke 11), and on the Norwegian zoologist Carl Lumholtz (Macainsh 10).

³Macainsh (12–13) finds the main source for the Lemurian fantasy world of *Fugitive Anne* in Ignatius Donnelly's popular work, *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World* (London: Harper, 1890).

⁴See Robert Dixon's analysis of this trend, *Writing the Colonial Adventure*, Chapter 4: 62–81.

⁵Crocodile Mountain with its spewing lava may be a nightmarish rendition of the unlimited child-bearing which had destroyed Rosa's mother's health and which her other female relations dreaded (Clarke 22, 24, 36, 105).

⁶McKay 2001:34; McKay concludes that in her memoirs, *Australian Life: Black and White* (1885) and *My Australian Girlhood* (1902), "Praed exercises the colonial power to control representations of the contact zone, and undermines her self-representation as a sympathetic, knowledgeable and detached spokesperson...for her 'old [Aboriginal]

friends” (“Writing from the Contact Zone,” 2004: 57). In her fiction, however, according to McKay, “Gradually...Praed begins to subject colonialism to critical scrutiny, not as an advocate for Aboriginal rights, but rather to seek moral redemption for the white race” (“‘The One Jarring Note,’” 2001: 34).

⁷ “The Spirit of Australia Extended to the Aborigine.” *Aussie* 15 September, 1925: 29; “The Australian Aborigines — Can They Be Saved?” *Aussie* 15 October, 1925: 31; “The Decimation of the Australian Aborigines.” *Aussie* 14 November, 1925: 26; “Has the Aboriginal No Claim on Australia?” *Aussie* 15 December, 1925: 31.

⁸ “By Forest, Scrub and Shore. More about Cannibals.” *The Cairns Post* 28 February, 1940: 9; “By Forest, Scrub and Shore. Cannibals.” *The Cairns Post* 19 March, 1940: 10; “By Forest, Scrub and Shore. Cannibals and Boongarries.” *The Cairns Post* 28 March, 1940: 11; “By Forest, Scrub or Shore. Cannibals.” *The Cairns Post* 13 October, 1939: 11; “By Forest, Scrub or Shore. Cannibals.” *The Cairns Post* 18 December, 1939: 10.

⁹ The letter concludes:

There is no fear of [Aboriginals] being short of food here; the scrubs abound with their natural food, and so long as their adults are allowed to keep their natural birthright — freedom — the camps are well supplied. They are honest and interfere with none. The bush is wide enough. Why should they be hounded like criminals, their children stolen from them? I have no axe to grind. I employ neither boy nor gin, except for an occasional errand, although I know most of them in the district. I am writing in the name of common humanity, and again beseech you, if you have the power or influence to use it, to really protect the little children, whom a mistaken policy is hurrying to their doom. If you have children of your own, picture what I have briefly described to you.

Ask any people in the North who are disinterested, who have an understanding of the aboriginals and their temperament, and they will agree with what I have written.

There is one particular case I would draw your attention to: it is that of King Pluto. He was taken to the Hull River Mission Station to see his daughter there, on the distinct promise made by the police, that he should return. The old man was nervous about going, and consulted both myself and R. Hislop, J. P., of this place, and we told him he could trust the promise made by the police. Soon after his arrival the cyclone occurred, which destroyed that establishment, and Mr. Kenny, whom we knew and trusted, was killed; and the present authorities refuse to let Pluto return, although we are told he is fretting to death. Once he escaped and tried to make his way home, but was “re-captured.” May I ask that you will inquire into this poor exile’s case?

I hope I have not trespassed too long on your time and attention. I feel so sure that it is the desire of those in power to do the very best for the vanishing Australian aboriginal, and their present action is due to a misconception of their needs. (*Townsville Daily Bulletin* 17 December 1919: 6; *North Queensland Register* 22 December 1919: 34; also published *Daily Mail*)

¹⁰ “Zora Cross is probably the most vigorous woman poet that Australia has produced. She writes with marked originality, revealing a deep intensity of imagination, and a passionate emotion....The images have an atmosphere of homeliness, ringing true to the sentiment of love as the unifying power in human life. As so many men in their writings on love do not free themselves from a masculine bias, a woman’s interpretation has a distinct literary value” (E. Morris Miller. *Bibliographical Survey of Australian Literature* vol. 1: 192).

¹¹ Racist descriptions published in the *Bulletin* in 1902 denounce the poverty of Innisfail's Chinese population: "Across the bridge the Chow and Malay carry on fan-tan....Filthy half naked Chows and Japs lounge about all day long....You can see here piebalds of every nationality it would take an expert ethnologist to define" (quoted Reynolds 147).

¹² See Barbara Ross, "Drawn by 'Dossie'." *Voices* 1.4 (1991–1992): 21–27, for a more detailed account of Dorothy Cottrell's life.

¹³ "To return to our island: it was small, some two miles in length and about a mile wide, and it sat amongst the gaily dotted isles of the Family Group, about five miles from the peak-set Queensland coast, and forty from the Great Barrier Reef, and the friend who sold it to Clippings had said that there was 'a compact little cottage' on it, 'perhaps in slight disrepair'" (*The Singing Gold* 123).

¹⁴ Dorothy wrote *Earth Battle*, published in America as *Tharlane*, before *The Singing Gold*, during her 1924–1927 creative years at Ularunda. These, with the unpublished novel, "Wheel-Rhyme," "make a loose trilogy" based on the Grey Country of south-west Queensland (Ross 1991–92: 29).

¹⁵ Jeanette Delamoir analyses Marie Bjelke-Petersen's *Jewelled Nights*, partly by applying Marjorie Garber's view of transvestitism as an attack on categorisation itself (120).

¹⁶ "Ways of seeing the rainforest began to shift in the 1920s from the Romantic view of nature as a collection of fascinating curiosities and grand and sublime landscapes, to an ecological paradigm which views nature as a systemic interrelationship between all living things including humans, and their environment. In the 1930s the North Queensland Naturalists' Club lobbied for language change, seeking to replace 'scrub', often used in a derogatory manner, by 'jungle', in a bid to change community attitudes to the rainforest." Queensland Government Environment and Resource Management, 28 December 2009 <<http://www.epa.qld.gov.au/chims/placeDetail.html?siteId=30615>> The title and usage of "jungle" throughout *Jungle Night* adopt the Club's advice. The plot is poised between conservation and exploitation. Valmont's fortune comes from felling rainforest timber, but Brood and Rudder are condemned as timber thieves. Valmont wants to shoot pigs and turkeys, but refrains from shooting parrots and pigeons. Robin opines: "Birds should belong to themselves, just the way we do" (86).

¹⁷ From 1981 the developer George Quaid, backed by the Joh Bjelke-Petersen State government, planned to build a road north of Port Douglas, through the Daintree River rainforest, with a view to residential subdivision of adjacent land. Legal battles and dramatic physical confrontations between conservationists and police took place over the next few years. The road opened in October 1984, but determined efforts by conservationists, supported by the Federal government, ensured the listing in December 1988 of the Wet Tropical Rainforest of North Queensland as a World Heritage conservation area. Most of the remaining Daintree land was thereby protected from development.

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