

Central Queensland University

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‘Is Boggabilla where Bill takes a dump?’ Writing an Australian literary regionalism: Stories and poetry published in *Idiom 23* literary magazine, 2016–2018

Abstract:

This article aims to explore the representation of what I argue identifies an Australian literary regionalism in stories and poetry published in *Idiom 23*, Central Queensland University’s literary magazine, over the past three issues, 2016–2018. As editor of *Idiom 23* during this time, I have detected in the contemporary writing of regional contributors a heightening interest in expressing a unique sense of place and history through literary elements including, but not limited to, an emphasis on local colour and characterisation, rurality and regional settings, and personal stories of time and place, as well as an idiomatic interest in literary tropes accentuating colloquialisms, regional traditions, dialogic ‘play’, personal and familial histories, Indigenous identity, and distinctive ways of mapping, representing, articulating, and celebrating cultural belonging. Exploring how contributions to Central Queensland University’s *Idiom 23* literary magazine over the past three issues, 2016–2018, construct a sense of regionalism and regional identity offers rich potential to not only identify the narratives, stories, or voices ‘naturally’ arising in regional writing practices, but also how perceptions of regionality impact on the ways regional writing is itself expressed through a unique form of Australian literary regionalism.

Biographical Note:

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Keywords:

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Both culturally and stylistically, the conception of an Australian literary regionalism requires a strange disconnectedness. Russell McDougall, for instance, in theorising about regionally based biases in Australia's cultural nationalism, cites as an example West Australian literary regionalism 'which asserts itself deliberately, as a reaction against the literary nationalism associated with an arrogant eastern assumption that "we" and "they" are the same' (McDougall 1985: 151). McDougall's claim brings to the fore the oppositional nature of literary expressions of regionalism against a broader *cultural* nationalism, but also an inherent responsiveness to a form of *literary* nationalism from which regionalism asserts its distinctions. So, what is 'regionalism' and why does it matter? Is there a difference between 'rural' writing and 'regional' writing? And, if so, what are their differences and in what ways do specific literary codes define and identify each mode: writing rural/writing regional? This article identifies some dominant literary codes shaping and distinguishing 'regional' writing, and examines how selected contributions to Central Queensland University's *Idiom* 23 literary magazine deploy these characteristic devices in complex combinations towards an Australian literary regionalism.

Before going further, however, it is important at this point to qualify some key terms and overview the literary movements, both domestic and international, which have influenced literary regionalism generally, and Australian literary regionalism specifically. In *The new diversity: Australian fiction, 1970–1988*, Ken Gelder and Paul Salzman (1989) have noted the emergence of a 'new diversity' of topical themes and styles falling within the broader category of 'middlebrow' fiction and view emergent examples of 'regional writing' (conventionally supported by regional presses) as fitting within that catalogue. David Carter determines that in *The new diversity*, Gelder and Salzman organise 'regionalism' into literatures concerned topically 'around issues of cultural difference and exclusion – gender and sexuality, politics and history, Asia ... the migrant experience, and Aboriginality' (1987: 282). John Kinsella goes one step further, coining the term 'international regionalism' to identify 'the creation of international communication conduits (if you like) between regional spaces, but with an emphasis on respecting regional integrity' (2013: 106). If, as Delys Bird suggests, '[a] contemporary interest in regions as locations of literary difference is matched by regional identification arising from the shared socio-economic problem of publishing from marginal locations' (2000: 194), then it follows that capturing a literary sense of regional identity, what Kinsella characterises as 'retaining a sense of immediate spatiality' (2013: 107), is fundamental to Australian literary regionalism itself. Ronald Draper too, in his introduction to *The literature of region and nation* speculates that a 'dual condition of belonging and not-belonging ... seems to be the hallmark of literary regionalism' (1989: 7).

Unlike terms such as 'environment' and 'place', expressions such as 'rural' and 'regional' are not generally used synonymously. In fact, as Ndungi Wa Mungai notes, '[d]espite interest, only imprecise definitions of "rural" or "regional" Australia exist' (2014: 150). Gray and Lawrence, for instance, assert that the difference between metropolitan Australia, and rural and regional Australia, is not limited to matters of population or distance; while identifying 'regional' Australia as being 'that part of Australia and its population which has a distinctive relationship, sometimes

incompletely described as dependency, with metropolitan Australia' (2001: 2). Such a definition, however, bears little if any relevance to discussions of an Australian literary regionalism because, when writing about region as a creative enterprise, 'regional' and 'rural' are not necessarily tantamount. Perhaps the most cautionary claim with respect to the danger of conflating terms such as 'ruralism' and 'regionalism' is that asserted by Scott Herring:

While we should be wary of collapsing metropolitanism with modernism and regionalism with ruralism, this scenario remains commonplace in contemporary literary criticism. Through guilt by association, regions become sites of eradications and regionalism – as a genre – becomes a discarded literary mode. (2009: 1)

Gail Reekie, on the other hand, discerns a gender element in writing about the region, arguing that 'women's sense of place, of region, is powerfully constructed by their marginality to History' (1994: 8). The poems and stories under discussion here do assert regional 'difference', but most commonly as part of an expression of place-ness – sometimes, sometimes not – from the perspective of a marginality to history. Gillian Whitlock suggests, for instance, that such differences are primarily fictional constructs that feed 'an image making process founded more on nationalist debates about city and bush, centre and periphery, the Southern states versus the Deep North than on any "real" sense of regionalism' (qtd in Muller 2001: 80). I aim, however, to adopt an alternative position, arguing that the concern with specific histories and incidents of specific places identifiable in the stories and poetry of the women writers examined here, are not merely, or simply, 'fictional constructs' feeding 'an image making process' founded more on debates about cultural nationalism. Rather, I read these pieces as literary attempts to enact a 'real' sense of regionalism, imbued with layers of contained and highly particularised places, of distinctive yet distinguishable geographies, and of interplaying lineages, both historical and ancestral. That three of the four writers under discussion here are women also emphasises to some degree how intertwined are the concepts of gender and identity in writing the region. For these female writers, representations of specifically regional geographical locales, I argue, is thus utilised as both the context for and the language of regional experience. In this respect, I adopt Cecilia Tichi's concept of 'the "regionalism" of female consciousness' to approach gender itself as 'a significant category of analysis for our understanding of regionalism' (1988: 598).

Because of the limitations of space, for this article, I will analyse selected stories and poems published in Central Queensland University's *Idiom 23* literary magazine between 2016 and 2018. Works under discussion include; Chrissy Hansen-Doherty's 'Ancestors, breastplates, fate' (2016), selected poems from Paul Summers' 'Capricornia suite' (2016), Susan Zela Bissett's 'Speaking country' (2017), and Jeanette Delamoir's 'Yeppoon, 1942: Death and the circus' (2018).

Named after the Tropic of Capricorn (Latitude 23°), *Idiom 23* is the oldest continuously published literary journal in Queensland (first published in 1987). Together with T. C. Phillips' *Specul8: Central Queensland journal of speculative fiction*, and JCU's *LiNQ Journal*, *Idiom 23* aims to promote regional writing while

ensuring an ongoing commitment to making writing from the regions accessible. The magazine is published annually and is dedicated to encouraging writing in Central Queensland and throughout Australia. As *Idiom 23* is also listed on the international small magazines market and in compendiums such as *Novel and short story writers market 2018*, and *Writers' handbook 2019* as well as The Australian Writer's Marketplace, it receives a variety of submissions from both domestic and internationally based writers. *Idiom 23* publishes short stories, poetry, creative nonfiction, book reviews, and photography.

Literary regionalism and Indigenous stories

This story has been passed down through my Woppaburra family for generations, our living history, and our traditional knowledge of ancestors. In 1896, my ancestors, Yulowa and his son Paddy, Woppaburra Men of the Keppel Islands, had set out to sea with four other men, a crew of six in the dark of night, when their boat overturned then capsized throwing all of them into the ocean. My ancestors were brave and courageous men, Yulowa and his son Paddy. They swam that swollen sea, the open ocean of Keppel Bay in pitch darkness, for long hours to reach the mainland in the hope they could get help to rescue their friends, the four men who stayed with the capsized boat, still hanging on for dear life. (Hansen-Doherty & Wilkins 2016: 32)

Thus begins the story by Chrissy Hansen-Doherty (and Trish Wilkins) entitled 'Ancestors, breastplates, fate' (2016). In 2015, a chance encounter between these two women resulted in the discovery of a remarkable shared history, the consequence of a boating incident in Keppel Bay on 10 April 1896. As Chrissy is a traditional Woppaburra woman, a traditional storyteller within her tribal group, and has worked as a primary researcher for Queensland government assisting Aboriginal families to trace their histories, hers is a particularly significant form of Australian literary regionalism. What is especially striking about Hansen-Doherty's piece is that it re-reads the story of this real-life incident against three different texts: Woppaburra 'living history', the newspaper account of the day, and the version of the story attributed to the surviving granddaughter of Charlie Wilkins, one of the rescued non-Indigenous men.

Hansen-Doherty suggests, with reason, that the newspaper account of the day entitled 'Boating Accident at Emu Park', published in Rockhampton's *Morning Bulletin*, underplays considerably the role played by Yulowa and his son Paddy in this maritime incident off Keppel Island. While the report credits Yulowa and Paddy with securing oars, and praises Yulowa for rescuing Henry Clark, who could not swim, and positioning him where he could hold on by the keel of the boat (thus saving his life), the report abbreviates the narrative by stating that Yulowa and Paddy (seemingly straightforwardly) encountered local residents McKinlay and Tommy Dodd, to whom they related details of the incident, and that McKinlay and Dodd then conveyed the information to Constable Johnson, 'who at once consulted with Mr. B. Long,

schoolmaster, and they formed a rescue party' (1896: 4). This seems a clearly corrupted account based on the version of the story attributed to the surviving granddaughter of Charlie Wilkins:

One Saturday night while the Lady Mayoress's ball was in full swing this Aborigine bursts into the ballroom, screaming. They couldn't work out what he was saying. But eventually they realised he was screaming 'Billy, Charlie Bung! Billy, Charlie Bung!', over and over ... My father's sister was in her late eighties when I asked her what she knew about it [the story]. She remembered it well and had a shocking new detail. Nobody in the ballroom ever worked out what the commotion [was] about so they threw him in the lock-up for the night for causing a disturbance. He screamed and yelled 'Billy, Charlie bung' all night in the lock-up till they finally decided to find someone who could speak to him in his own language. Only then was the rescue mounted. (qtd in Hansen-Doherty & Wilkins 2016: 36-37)

The recovery of this story demonstrates the profoundly complex terrain in which regional stories and the circulation of Indigenous 'living history' operate. Indeed, the fact that the story survives today in four historically disparate texts – Woppaburra 'living history', the newspaper account of the day, the version attributed to Wilkins' grand-daughter, and most recently, Hansen-Doherty's own account – calls important attention to the impact and consequence of Hansen-Doherty's piece as a contemporary form of Australian literary regionalism. For instance, in April 2016, at the launch of *Idiom* 23 (25), the special 25th anniversary issue, Chrissy-Hansen Doherty performed a Traditional Welcome and delivered a few words as a Woppaburra woman to show respect to the Dharumbal People, past and present. Gabriel Solis argues that the power of Traditional Welcomes (or 'Welcome to Country' ceremonies) lies in performance, an occasion where 'Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, experience at least a momentary transformation of power and social space in the ceremony' (2018: 208). The figurative power of Hansen-Doherty's Traditional Welcome at least in part subordinated not only the state 'narrative to an Indigenous one' (Solis 2018: 208), but established an alternative history, one privileging the story of her ancestors, into the regional narrative of the Keppel Island region. It is the assertion here that this performance thus represented an example of Australian literary regionalism in action.



Figure 1 Cover of *Idiom* 23 (25)
special 25th anniversary edition 2016
(themed issue: ‘CQ then & now’)

Hansen-Doherty’s story itself also experienced a wider circulation: it was published in Rockhampton’s *The Morning Bulletin* (Gately 2015), and *CQUniNews* (Barnbaum 2016). Later, in February 2017, I was contacted by Katrina Goudkamp, Senior Policy Officer, Environmental Assessment and Protection, at the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. At the time, Katrina was writing guidelines on the values of Woppaburra Traditional Owners in the Keppel Island region, and had become aware of Chrissy Hansen-Doherty’s piece. Katrina requested an electronic version (or hardcopy) of the publication in order to reference Hansen-Doherty’s story in the policy guidelines, which Katrina did (Goudkamp 2017). This is significant for several reasons, most notably perhaps, the privileging of Hansen-Doherty’s own account as Indigenous living history, and showcasing how, in the process of writing regionalism and environment, the importance of this kind of Australian literary regionalism can find new currency as ‘writing back’ to a form of cultural nationalism. What is clear in Hansen-Doherty’s conclusion to the piece is the discourse of according her ancestors the commemoration and acknowledgement of the enduring heroism they rightly deserve:

I am proud to share it with you now and give thanks to Yulowa, Paddy and all his descendants for their bravery and the kindness that lives on in them. May their generosity of spirit now receive the honour and recognition they have truly earned, sincere acknowledgement never really extended to them, their special bond with their island homes no longer subjected to the whims of others. To honour this is to honour ourselves. (Hansen-Doherty & Wilkins 2016: 38)

Another contributor to *Idiom 23*, who draws on Indigenous ancestral heredity and regionalism, is Susan Zela Bissett. Bissett was born on Butchulla Country in Maryborough and has worked as an artist, permaculture gardener, and educator. In her piece, entitled ‘Speaking country’ (2017), she recounts a conversation with her husband on a recent trip to inland Queensland. He had expressed amusement at the town names of Boggaabilla and Goondiwindi, jokingly asking ‘Is Boggaabilla where Bill takes a dump?’ A clear play on the Australian vernacular ‘bog’ (slang for toilet) in ‘Boggaabilla’ coupled with the name ‘Bill’ (‘Bogga**abilla**’), together with the addition of ‘dump’ (slang for defecation), completes the pun, thus offering an example of dialogic play characteristic of an Australian literary regionalism. But beneath what seems like a banal gesture of humour is a far more serious engagement with the Indigenous origins of regional terms. Bissett confides that ‘[o]nly days later, after seeing a sanitised account of the meaning of Goondiwindi as “resting place of the birds”, I uncovered in the local historical museum that, as I had suspected, the original name was *goonawinna*. Or, as my tour guide the next day confided, “Crapping place of the teal duck”!’ (Bissett 2017: 19). Thus, ‘Speaking country’ takes as its central themes naming regionalism and traditional usage of the country, persisting well into the present day:

The late Butchulla elder, Olga Miller, told an important story of the warrior Bauple who gave his name to a mountain and the wild nuts that grew there. She finds a similarity between a current use of a peak lying behind Mt Bauple and its historical role in the legend. Mount Kanigan (Kanigne) was regarded as the place from which white cockatoos sent smoke signals to Bauple’s people to warn them that he lay injured on the mountainside. A transmission tower now relays messages from the peak above the Gunalda gap. She writes, “Important messages are still sent from where Bophal had his first camp, but today there are tall television masts and radio telephone masts reaching up into the sky”. (Bissett 2017: 18)

As evidenced above, a clear leaning towards literary regionalism is tangible and indeed privileged in Bissett’s piece. Fundamental to this sense of regionalism is the identification of specific regional groups. Bissett’s ‘Speaking country’ reminds us that regional groups have their own stories of legend and myth that accord not only a sense of region and regionality, but call to mind ancestral spirits and the Dreamtime. By extension, understanding the myths of the Butchulla people is ‘the key to understand not only how members feel toward their group but how they think and feel about a great deal else’ (Reed 1982: 27). In conceptualising the region in this way, Bissett also carries forth the idea that particular performative acts underlie expressing relationship to country:

Aboriginal elder and knowledge-holder Eugene Bargo admonishes me to ‘speak its name’ while walking Country: and this I strive to do, because in saying these words, mostly names of places and/or people, I pay my respects to Country and hope that a certain energy is returned to the place that hears its name. (Bissett 2017: 18)

The persistent stress on naming, saying and reclaiming places and traditional sites, renders moot any question of an equivalency between ‘rural’ writing and ‘regional’ writing. In her stress on place-naming, which utilises distinctive and regional terms, Bissett is not speaking about rurality. Rather, she deliberately asserts, identifies, and locates a specific and definitive point of regionalism, not just geographically, but historically, ancestrally, and generationally.

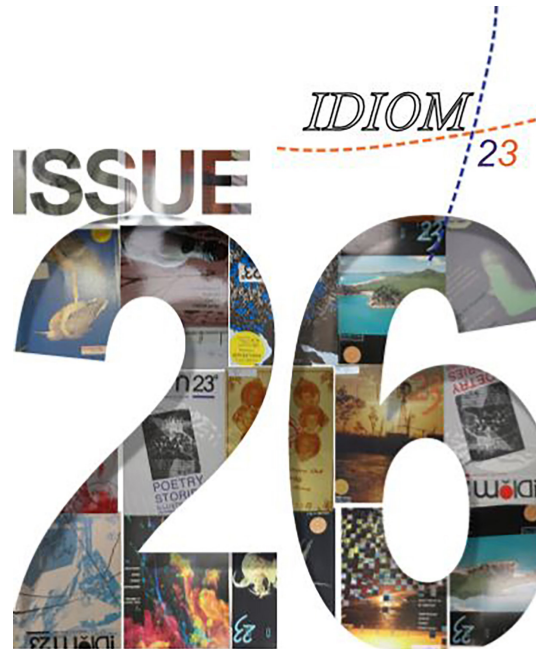


Figure 2 Cover of *Idiom* 23 (26) edition 2017

Regional terms, as characteristic of Indigenous texts and narratives (Van Toorn 2000: 45), cast an erudite light on not only the very regional-ness of these terms, but their indelible imprint across a complex tapestry of Indigenous memory, dreaming, and storytelling. These terms and their utterance articulate ‘conceptual frameworks of time, country, life and death [which] shows that Indigenous concepts of human identity allow forms of ecological respect, restraint and recognition which the dominant culture has either lost sight of or never achieved’ (Plumwood 2007). Deliberately asserting, identifying, and proclaiming specific and definitive points of geographical, historical and ancestral regionalism thus becomes characteristic of the idiomatic features of an Australian literary regionalism. Take as an example another passage from Bissett’s ‘Speaking country’:

As we drove into the Mary Valley we passed Coonan Gibber Creek ... Next I saw a sign saying Brooloo, Imbil, Kandanga, Amamoor, Dangun. A string of Kabi words, although I knew the meaning of only two. Despite the impacts of 200 years, energy and power is still indwelling in place, and my friend Eugene Bargo likes to say that when we say the name of places we feed and revive it. That’s why I sing to Tibrogargan when I pass him, and why I never cross the *Durrumboi* crossing north of Gympie without feeling a small thrill, even if I just say it in my mind. (Bissett 2017: 19)

Bissett's term 'indwelling in place' perfectly articulates how the operation of name-saying, either outright as vocal utterance, or silently, privately, as internal dialogue, characterise the dynamic and complex operations of the performance of regionalism in '[s]peaking country'.

Literary regionalism and regional-ness

In early 2015, I invited Northumbrian poet Paul Summers, who was then living in Central Queensland, as a guest contributor to the *Idiom 23* 25th anniversary edition, and he agreed. Summers' work had appeared in *Cordite Poetry Review*, as well as *Westerly*, and he had read in the Queensland Poetry Festival's Riverbend Poetry Series. As well as having his poems published widely for over three decades, Summers had also performed his work all over the world. A founding co-editor of the 'left field' magazines *Billy liar* and *Liar republic*, he had also written for TV, film, radio, and theatre, and collaborated many times with artists and musicians on mixed-media projects and public art. His collections include: *Union* (2011), *Three men on the metro* (2009); *Big Bella's dirty café* (2006); *Cunawabi and the last bus* (2003); as well as a collection, *primitive cartography*, released by Walleah Press in 2014. Summers' contribution to the 25th anniversary issue of *Idiom 23*, entitled 'Capricornia suite', included 16 poems: 'obbligato', 'malbooma (cyclone marcia, 2015)', 'the man who mourned trees', 'march fly sonata', 'fugue', 'the life of clouds', 'the river-men', 'drouth', '8 count', 'curriculum', 'cane toad blues', 'on these days', 'the lucky country', 'fan ho's vehement lens', 'threnody', and 'the shortest day'. While I am limited to only discussing three of the poems within his suite, each in their own way engages with an Australian literary regionalism.

the river-men

rockhampton, qld.

all history blurs

toonoooba slurs

her sacred song

induced to trance

her skin a throng

of dervish loons

a maelstrom dance

of fractured moons

the river-men

reclaim the shore

each toke, each mis-told
joke invokes a roar

the river-men
reduced to shapes

the twilight drapes
in analgesic fog

the petrichor
of smoke & grog

their catch un-bagged
their song-lines snagged

on the burr of their throats
they dream themselves

they dream themselves
invincible in dingo-tail coats

(Summers 2015: 11)

Here, Summers might be occupying a ‘littoral zone’ – a space that ‘plays with the national-regional tensions in an island-continent’ (Lewis and Wigen qtd in Robin 2012: 284) – for a number of reasons. First, to call attention to ‘toonoooba’ – the word for the Fitzroy river as known by the Indigenous Dharumbal people of the region since the Dreamtime – to evoke the significance of the banks of the site as a meeting place. Second, to expose the power of the site as a place of repossession, ‘the river-men reclaim the shore’ – that is, as a site of dreaming existing beyond the limitations of time and place. Summers shows us how the littoral represents a site ‘where place meets language’, in the words of Zeller and Cranston (2007: 22). For instance, ‘petrichor’, that piquant scent produced by rainfall on dry soil, is tinged with the darker underside of the colonial aftermath, ‘the twilight drapes/in analgesic fog/the petrichor/of smoke & grog’. Summers unites the literature of place (‘toonoooba’) with the place itself (Fitzroy river) and in so doing, not only strengthens the figurative associations between region and country, but also ‘one’s sense of what it means to be in communion with place’ (Buell 1995: 337). From this perspective, Summers’ poem maps the complexities of the site as a literary form of memory as much as it represents an example of Australian literary regionalism.

cane toad blues

a cane-toad sings the blues
 a belching confessional
 of lonesome self-loathing

of existential torment
 his unrequited verses
 hanging from a bridge

& the mozzies play jazz,
 choking on the high-notes
 of their own importance

their blood-soaked horns
 lamenting the confinement
 of every bitter form

this air an anthem
 for the misunderstood

(Summers 2015: 12)

The metonymic power distilled in the figure of the cane toad makes clear the allusions to ‘Queensland-ness’ within this poem. Summers calls upon the motif of ambiguous strangeness surrounding the cane toad, introduced and released in areas of Queensland in the 1930s as a once-useful coloniser to become a devastating ecological pest, figuratively uttering its own disavowal in ‘belching confessional[s]/of lonesome self-loathing’. The cane toad ‘sings’ but the song is one of estrangement and ‘existential torment’, unrequited, ‘hanging from a bridge’. Here, Summers evokes complex ideas of change, of a kind of metamorphosis in the sense of regionalism, personified and stimulated in a remote figure emblematic of the inevitability of its ongoing and widespread colonisation, both within and beyond the ecology of Central Queensland. The changing life-phases of the cane toad seem to allude to the idea that this concept of place is not continually characterised as it is, but instead perpetually reimaged and refashioned. It is in this way that the metonymy of the cane toad alludes to regionalism’s own cultural geography and specificities of topographical place. Symbolically, the cane toad thus gestures towards the broader adverse ecological and atmospheric conditions which persistently reek environmental havoc across the region: bushfires, floods, and cyclones.

malbooma
(cyclone marcia, 2015)

grievous as the scour of
 a cello’s loosened strings

the vehemency of threnody
announces the approach.

skewered on a shard
of her furious breath

the scent of petrichor
& fractured gum, the prick

of an ocean's pillaged salt,
the ferric lick of static.

& crudely stitched in indian file,
a hundred head of hunch-back

steers have taken their leave;
sought shelter in the hollow

of the billabong's nadir.
the birds are grounded,

the insects too, their thatch
of song drowned out or muted.

one fierce whip
of her raging tongue

sees spastic foliage
shredded to a pulp;

its morning gloss reduced
to drifts of powdered jade.

contorted boughs capitulate,
their lumbering age undone.

& wrapped around the straining girth
of whitey's paddock's sturdiest tree,

a clump of opaque kangaroos
commit themselves to parliaments

of dread & doubt, bipartisan & silent,
resign themselves to fragile fate;

to marcia's prerogative of callous indifference,
the pang of malbooma's recalcitrant wrath

(Summers 2015: 9)

On 20 February 2015, a severe tropical cyclone dubbed 'Marcia' made landfall at its peak strength over Central Queensland, near Shoalwater Bay, thereafter severely affecting various other regional areas including, but not limited to, Yeppoon and Rockhampton. In the case of 'malbooma (cyclone marcia, 2015)', instead of hypothesising about Cyclone Marcia's devastating consequences on the Central Queensland region, the cyclone's difference as a climatological event, or even its geographical distinctions as Central/Queensland phenomenon, I would like to explore some of the literary motifs Summers uses in writing regionalism through this phenomenon as a real-life event. In 'malbooma (cyclone marcia, 2015)', Summers tacitly emphasises Central Queensland as a regional setting. By tacitly, I mean that because Summers includes no specific terms designating place, the regional specifics of the event speak for themselves as much as gestures to region. Summers' 'malbooma (cyclone marcia, 2015)' is a personal story of time and place told in part-occasional poetic form. Summers expresses a number of idiomatic interests characterising literary regionalism; accentuating colloquialisms (contorted boughs 'wrapped around the straining girth/of whitey's paddock's sturdiest tree'), dialogic play ('a clump of opaque kangaroos/commit themselves to parliaments/of dread & doubt, bipartisan & silent/resign themselves to fragile fate'), and a distinctive way of mapping and representing ecological phenomena in terms of their regional impact ('the scent of petrichor/& fractured gum, the prick/of an ocean's pillaged salt/the ferric lick of static').

This idiomatic interest in a literary style accentuating colloquialisms, regional stories, local histories, and a distinctive way of mapping and celebrating regional difference is also observable in Jeannette Delamoir's 'Yeppoon, 1942: Death and the circus' (2018):

Yeppoon is a Central Queensland farming and fishing village that, in 1941, had just 1,800 permanent residents. But its beaches lured flocks of temporary visitors, who lounged on guesthouse verandahs, admired the sparkling Coral Sea, and at night drifted off to salty sunburned sleep. Everything changed in 1942, when the United States Armed Forces

arrived. The entire area – centred on Rockhampton, 41 kilometres inland from Yeppoon – became an important training and recreation area, with close to 60,000 troops camped in acres of tents. This “invasion” coincided with the arrival of a small circus. Their trucks had been requisitioned for war use and, anyway, petrol was rationed. They were stuck. This is the bittersweet story of the interactions of circus, community, American troops, and popular culture. During this period, in this beautiful place, danger intertwined with pleasure, death with sex, loss with unexpected gain. (Delamoire 2018: 25)

Rather than simply theorising Yeppoon’s ‘different-ness’, or even its geographical distinctions as ‘a Central Queensland farming and fishing village’, I would like to consider what Delamoire does with that difference. It is not simply a general concept of Yeppoon that interests Delamoire, but a specifically temporal and historical conception situated in the past but based on real-life incidents. Delamoire, like the other women writers under analysis here, is a practitioner of regionalism in Tichi’s sense, that is, Delamoire approaches regionalism as a littoral space in which to chart regional life, including women’s lives, ‘regions both without and within the self’ (1988: 598). Here, Delamoire’s treatment of Yeppoon offers an understanding of a littoral zone where it is possible to destabilise established conventions of representing the regional. Delamoire might be appropriating the littoral zone for (at least) two reasons: first, to record and re-count a memory of place; and second, to claim that memory and place as her own – that is, as a site beyond the historical structures that typically bind narrative and fact. As such, Delamoire introduces this story into a collective memory of region. As Bruce Bennett argues in *An Australian compass*, ‘the study of actual places and regions, writers’ relations with them, and depictions of them, should be inserted into our national consciousness’ (1991: 16-17).

Yeppoon remained a wistful counterpoint to combat. McCartney’s official history of the 41st Infantry asked: “and who will ever forget Yeppoon, the blue-surfed vacation spot with its golden and sandy beaches and milk-bars that ran out of everything except sarsaparilla by 1500 hours each Saturday afternoon?” (McCartney qtd in Delamoire 2018: 29)

Delamoire’s piece presents a remedy to what Millgate identifies as a problem of regionalism, the sense that ‘regionalism is forever trying to free itself from the trivialisation of “local colour” and from the widespread view that regionalism itself is a limiting term’ (1989: 78). Metaphorically, if not literally, the fact that William F. McCartney chose to particularise Yeppoon in *The jungleers: A history of the 41st infantry division* (1948) casts the inherent regionalism of this real-life incident well beyond the realms of both local colour and a kind of terminological inertia towards a form of historical regionalism. Delamoire, like Hansen-Doherty, Summers, and Bissett, asserts a regional difference from the standpoint of a marginal location in relation to history. Thus, Delamoire’s piece, together with the contributions of Hansen-Doherty, Summers, and Bissett, makes a valuable addition to an Australian literary regionalism in offering rich potential for understanding how perceptions of regionality impact on the way regional writing itself is expressed in the Australian context.



Figure 3 Cover of *Idiom 23* (27) edition 2018

Conclusion

This article has explored the representation of what I argue identifies an Australian literary regionalism in stories and poetry published in *Idiom 23*, Central Queensland University's literary magazine, over the past three issues, 2016–2018. Throughout this analysis, I have called attention to the contemporary writing of regional contributors as tracking a heightening interest in expressing a unique sense of place and history through a variety of literary elements. Exploring how the contributions examined here construct a sense of regionalism and regional identity offers rich potential to not only identify the voices and stories 'naturally' arising in regional writing practices, but also how perceptions of regionality impact on the ways regional writing is itself expressed through a unique form of Australian literary regionalism. Noted Central Queensland writer Mark Svendsen suggests that '[l]iterature from regional communities ... shows how enduring and meaningful local literature can be' (2016: 76), an idea that connects the language of place with communities defined by their regionalism. Andrew Vann agrees that 'there is a far greater sense of authenticity and connection in regional and rural areas, people matter, individuals matter and there is a much greater opportunity for a sense of genuine contribution to community and to feel you have made a real difference' (2014: i).

The existence of *Idiom 23*, and other journals like it, offers a compelling case in point regarding how publishing continues to evolve and change to open up more and more opportunities for regional writing. In the case of *Idiom 23*, in particular, editors past and present recognise its reputation as the first port of publication for many new and

emerging regional writers. Editors past and present also foster its ongoing influence as a port of publication to which many repeat contributors continue to publish stories and poems evocative of an Australian literary regionalism. Each of the works explored here – Chrissy Hansen-Doherty’s ‘Ancestors, breastplates, fate’ (2016), the poetry of Paul Summers’ ‘Capricornia suite’ (2016), Susan Zela Bissett’s ‘Speaking country’ (2017), and Jeanette Delamoir’s ‘Yeppoon, 1942: Death and the circus’ (2018) – highlight in their own way the appealing challenge of ‘preserving one’s regional identity’ while simultaneously ‘conversing with other regional identities’ (Kinsella 2013: 57). The works are imbued with layers of contained and highly particularised places, of distinctive yet distinguishable geographies, and of interplaying lineages, historical and ancestral, which map, represent, articulate, and celebrate a uniquely regional mode of Australian literary regionalism. These and many other works published in *Idiom 23* show the literary presence of a characteristic literature of place, a place where language and region meet. Much of this writing contains ‘significant original responses to landscape or society, which together build a distinctive picture of place, conditions and atmosphere’ (Bennett 1984: 79).

Throughout this examination, I have resisted utilising a definition of regional writing limited to only writing about a particular place in favour of a more inclusive conceptualisation of regional literature as writing in/about the language of a region. This shift in approach makes possible an analysis of the unique and idiomatic literary characteristics used by regional writers writing the region. These writers deploy an interest in the language of region to link identity to belonging against a contextual backdrop in which, it has been argued, ‘regional identity is based on limitations of technology, on limited options or choices to effect changes to the environment, or on one’s ability to move freely from one place to another’ (Hough 1990: 58). Yet, as we see in the works of Hansen-Doherty, Bissett, Summers, and Delamoir, each writer’s movement beyond the supposed limitations necessarily diminishing a sense of regional identity. For Hansen-Doherty, it is a movement beyond the limitations of conventional histories in navigating the profoundly complex terrain in which regional stories and the circulation of Indigenous ‘living history’ operate. For Bissett, it is moving beyond the limitations of mere ‘place-naming’ in asserting the idea that regional groups have their own stories of legend and myth that accord not only a sense of region and regionality, but call to mind ancestral spirits and the Dreamtime. For Summers, it is a movement beyond the limitations of time and place in exploring the littoral as a site ‘where place meets language’ (Zeller & Cranston 2007: 22). For Delamoir, it is moving beyond the limitations of ‘regional’ as a term towards engaging the ‘regional’ as a site beyond the historical structures that typically bind narrative and fact. Thus, in the final analysis, the stories and poems under discussion here each carry forth the idea that particular performative acts underlie expressing relationship to country. By extension, each writer’s contribution advocates, at least to some degree, a kind of call to arms in the movement of an Australian literary regionalism. It is a call to arms richly articulated in the sentiment underscoring Susan Zela Bissett’s ‘Speaking country’: ‘let the **literacy of Country** be accorded its appropriate status as the greater context within which the much more specific skills of decoding texts find meaning’ (Bissett 2017: 20, emphasis in original).

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