
Trauma, Memory and Landscape in Queensland: Women Writing ‘a New Alphabet of Moss and Water’

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At times one has to ask oneself . . . if Queensland is our own Gothic invention, a kind of morality play, the Bosch canvas of the Australian psyche, a sort of perpetual *memento mori* that points to the frailty of the skein of civilisation reaching out so tentatively from our southern cities . . .

One has to ask oneself: Does Queensland actually exist?
And one has to conclude: I think not. (Hospital 1995d 220)

The cultural association of Queensland with a condition of imagination or unreality has a strong history. Queensland has always ‘retained much of its quality as an abstraction, an idea’, asserts Thea Astley in her famous essay on the state’s identity (Astley 1976: 263). In one of the most quoted descriptions of Queensland’s literary representation, Pat Buckridge draws attention to its ‘othering’, suggesting that Queensland possesses ‘a different sense of distance, different architecture, a different apprehension of time, a distinctive preoccupation with personal eccentricity, and . . . a strong sense of cultural antitheses’ (1976: 30). Rosie Scott comes closest to the concerns of this present article when she asserts that this so-called difference ‘is definitely partly to do with the landscape. In Brisbane, for instance, the rickety old wooden Queenslanders drenched in bougainvillea, the palms, the astounding number of birds even in Red Hill where I lived, the jacarandas, are all unique in Australia’ (quoted in Sheahan-Bright and Glover 2002: xv). For Vivienne Muller, Buckridge’s ‘cultural antitheses’ are most clearly expressed in precisely this interpretation of Queensland as a place somewhere between imagined wilderness and paradise (2001: 72). Thus, as Gillian Whitlock suggests, 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’ (quoted in Muller 2001: 80). Queensland, in this reading, is subject to the Orientalist discourse of an Australian national identity in which the so-called civilisation of the south-eastern urban capitals necessitates a dark ‘other’. I want to draw out this understanding of the landscape as it is imagined in Queensland women’s writing. Gail Reekie (1994: 8) suggests that, ‘Women’s sense of place, of region, is powerfully constructed by their marginality to History.’ These narratives do assert Queensland’s ‘difference’, but as part of an articulation of psychological extremity experienced by those

living on the edges of a simultaneously ideological and geographically limited space. The Queensland landscape, I argue, is thus used as both setting for and symbol of traumatic experience.

Even a brief glance at the John Oxley Library's archives of literature about Queensland reveals the tradition of writing about the disturbed and disturbing landscape, especially the floods in this state.¹ The liminal space of the river and ocean, especially, offers a fertile symbol of memory and history. The 2011 floods in South-East Queensland, for example, demonstrated the temporal collapse of traumatic return, as in media and culture the precursor events of 1974 and 1893 were helplessly recalled. Queensland rivers thus offer an apt topography of the individual and collective psyche: 'What an amazing, complicated, unpredictable, enduring and fragile thing is memory. It is like a river. It can silt up and need dredging, it can flood and destroy, it can lose its way' (Hospital 2011: 224).

The Gothic strangeness Janette Turner Hospital at once mocks and exposes in her short story, 'The second coming of Come-by-Chance' (1995d), taken as the epigraph to this article, is often called upon to articulate this idea of Queensland's difference, conjuring the sense in which Queensland and its trauma figure both the terrible past and the inevitable future of the Australian condition. In the geography of Australia, Queensland fulfils the role of a kind of abject or unacknowledged past: it is perpetually represented not as it is, but rather as it is imagined – and represented only metonymically through its liminal or disaster-ridden topographies: the coast, the bushfire, the cyclone, the flood, the thunderstorm. In the Australian imagination, there is no stable site of Queensland representation. 'Queensland itself,' writes Hospital in 'Litany for the homeland' (1995c), 'is fluid in shape and size, it ebbs and flows and refuses to be anchored in space, it billows out like a net that can settle without warning, anywhere, anytime' (1994c: 422). The state constitutes an abjection from which the rest of the nation draws away in Gothic fear or revulsion, and yet towards which it inescapably travels, in a kind of fascinated fort-da play of national identity. David Carter (2010) asserts that the literary articulation of Queensland as 'a place of gothic haunting, guilty secrets, sexual repression, and violence – the other side of paradise – is a surprisingly strong theme in literature', but more importantly, that this 'buried guilt is often associated with violence, past and present, towards Aboriginal peoples or with alienation from the environment' (2010). If Queensland is indeed a Gothic landscape, I want to suggest that this is a result of its colonising past – a past that is always present, always threatening to burst forth like the heavy storm clouds or the rushing rivers of the narratives addressed here.

Rather than simply asserting Queensland's 'difference', or even what that difference might mean for Queensland women, I want to consider what we can do with that difference. Specifically, I think it offers an understanding of a limit space (variously called, in extant criticism, the 'contact zone', the 'warm zone' and the 'littoral zone') where established codes of power can be destabilised. Jessica Anderson, Janette Turner Hospital and Vivienne Cleven appropriate the limit space for (at least) two reasons: first, to map and narrate (rather than silence) traumatic memory; and second, to claim it as their own – that is, as a space outside the domestic structure that typically bounds thought and behaviour. It is for this reason that the 'under the house' space of the traditional Queenslander home is used to different effect in work by Jessica Anderson and male Queensland writers like

David Malouf. While in the latter ‘this space is gothic, outside of language and time . . . reached after the more civilised spaces above are mapped out’, in the former, ‘The wilderness is not *under* the house but *outside* its boundaries, down by the creek’ (Whitlock 1989: 177).

This essay seeks to take up the intoxicating Gothic fantasy of Queensland’s difference, and to explore how that cultural narrative is put to work as part of an exploration of gendered and racial trauma in women’s writing by Jessica Anderson (1916–2010), Janette Turner Hospital (1942–) and Vivienne Cleven (1968–). All three writers grew up in Queensland, but Anderson and Hospital both left the state in early adulthood. Nevertheless, those narratives in which Anderson and Hospital deal with themes of memory and the past are primarily set in Queensland. Both writers appear to play with the nostalgia that colours their perception of the state in order to draw attention to Whitlock’s ‘image-making process’. Jessica Anderson and Janette Turner Hospital are examined together quite frequently, usually alongside their contemporary, Thea Astley, but I want to bring Vivienne Cleven into this tradition in order to think about the disruptive and radical potentialities of late twentieth and early twenty-first century Queensland women’s writing about race and gender.

Anderson’s work constitutes a tentative resistance, in the late 1970s and 1980s, to established patriarchal order; because she writes of and within such ideological structures, her fantasies of opposition, and of the freedom offered by the wild Queensland landscape, are curtailed by traumatic narrative disruptions. Hospital’s fiction similarly proposes the river, ocean or creek as a natural space for the establishment of a female order. Belinda McKay (2004: 60) notes the shift in twentieth-century Queensland writing,

from outback to northern coastal settings – reflecting the pattern of colonial expansion. Where outback fiction features arid landscapes and conflict between pastoralists and displaced Indigenous people, coastal fiction explores the possibilities of wet and fecund environments, and their more closely settled, multi-ethnic communities.

It is because of Queensland’s colonial history, Muller (2001) notes, that later women’s writing is especially alert ‘to the inequalities and injustices of the social organisation of class, race and gender differences’ and, moreover, that these are ‘often expressed in terms of space and place’ (2001: 76). Like McKay, I see the ‘wet and fecund environment’ in Queensland women’s writing as a progressive location that moves away from the colonising past. However, the hope offered by these sites of possibility in Anderson and Hospital’s work is always and everywhere disturbed by an insistent – usually male – discourse of violence and perceived rationality. It is for this reason that they become trauma-scapes. Cleven, on the other hand, refuses this kind of patriarchal disruption of the female limit space. In *Her sister’s eye* (2002), an Indigenous woman mobilises the landscape as a means of protecting both herself and the elderly white woman from the violence of the possessing male.

The shift to the Indigenous voice in Cleven’s work demonstrates where gendered and racial forms of trauma come into contact in Queensland’s literary history, so that the movement from Anderson to Cleven models the increasing association of gendered and racialised histories of marginalisation. For example, even as Hospital’s fiction participates in a task of recovery with regard to the stories of

violence perpetrated against white women, this is often bound up with the trauma experienced by Indigenous communities. Throughout the entire collection of *Isobars*, David Callahan (2009) points out, ‘we have scenario after scenario in which characters need to interpret violent or distressful events, whether in the form of direct aggression, of oppressions occasioned by ethnicity, gender or class, or of the disruption brought about by anguishing loss or death’ (2009: 154).

Hospital’s (1995d) ‘The second coming of Come-by-Chance’, for instance, tells of the violent gang rape of a young teacher, Adeline Crick, by two policemen, who then attribute the crime to men from the local Indigenous community, fathers of the teacher’s young pupils, whom she had been visiting prior to the attack. When the lost township of Come-by-Chance strangely emerges from the drought-ridden dam in the wake of the ‘[p]ost-traumatic hysteria’ (1995d: 211), the event provokes the truth of the past similarly bursting forth from the ‘clumsy tongue’ of the now-aged teacher (1995d: 220). Demonstrating women’s troubled position as both victim and perpetrator in the history of colonisation, Adeline does not attribute guilt to the policemen, but rather to herself: ‘I have the blood of innocent men on my hands,’ she says (1995d: 220). However, this acknowledgment is elided as ‘lurid and gratuitous confession’ by the Melbourne journalist in whom Adeline confides (1995d: 220). Even as Adeline accepts complicity in the silencing of Indigenous trauma, this fails to be presented as worth bearing witness to – or even anything more than ‘primitive’ fantasy in the dominant discourse of southern rationality.

As Callahan notes, the voice of the ‘other’, whether Queensland, female or Indigenous, is marginalised:

No matter how far-fetched or biased, men’s interpretations constitute the majority of public discourse . . . men largely own language in rural areas, and women’s versions are reduced to ‘micemutters’. (2009: 160)

Yet Adeline’s words have been read, if not by the readers of *The Age*, who ‘[shake] their heads’ (Hospital 1995d: 221) in dismay at the atavistic threat of Queensland’s landscape and inhabitants, but by us – the real reader who, in the present moment, is provoked to response and responsibility. This is how these women writers teach us how to read: not romantically, through the filter of *les belles lettres* represented by the journalist’s ‘photo-essay that was given prominent space in the *Age*’ (1995d: 220), but critically, reading the truth of Queensland history rather than its simulacrum in the Australian imagination.

These narratives, then, are part of a (post)colonial project I term ‘responsible reading’, in which the reader is called into dialogue with a text through postmodern strategies of decentring. In his essay, ‘Toward a theory of cultural trauma,’ Jeffrey C. Alexander (2004: 1) examines the ways in which taking responsibility for ‘trauma creation’ can ‘expand the circle of the we’. For Alexander, this process of both recognising and suffering with the ‘other’ can be part of a reparative project in societies scarred by a history of trauma. ‘Difference’ in Queensland women’s writing is not (just) a mode of cultural identification and division, but the site of its undoing. Anderson, Hospital and Cleven all claim the landscape and its disturbances as a topographical narrative of their own response to trauma and oppression.

Anderson’s novel, *Tirra lirra by the river* (2010) describes Nora Porteous’s return to the Queensland home of her childhood. As Nora’s ‘globe of memory’ (2010: 201) spins, the narrative anachrony reveals not only the trauma of her

individual gendered experience of early twentieth-century Australia, but a collective women's history that transcends the specific cultural moment. Anderson's use of the Queensland landscape in this novel is initially complicated by the romantic colonial discourse that fails to recognise the real:

I shut my eyes, and when, after a few minutes, I open them again, I find myself looking through the glass on to a miniature landscape of mountains and valleys with a tiny castle, weird and ruined, set on one slope.

That is what I was looking for. But it is not richly green, as it used to be in the queer drenched golden light after the January rains, when these distortions in the cheap thick glass gave me my first intimation of a country as beautiful as those in my childhood books. I would kneel on a chair by this window, and after finding the required angle of vision, such as I found just now by accident, I would keep very still, afraid to move lest I lose it. I was deeply engrossed by those miniature landscapes, green, wet, romantic, with silver serpentine rivulets, and flashing lakes, and castles moulded out of any old stick or stone. I believe they enchanted me. Kneeling on that chair, I was scarcely present at all. My other landscape had absorbed me. And later, when I was mad about poetry, and I read *The Idylls of the King* and *The Lady of Shallot* [sic], and so on and so forth, I already had my Camelot. I no longer looked through the glass. I no longer needed to. In fact, to do so would have broken rather than sustained the spell, because that landscape had become a region of my mind, where infinite expansion was possible, and where no obstruction, such as the discomfort of knees imprinted by the cane of a chair, or a magpie alighting on the grass and shattering the miniature scale, could prevent the emergence of Sir Lancelot. (2010: 12–13)

At 'the required angle,' Nora sees a fairytale world through the window – a world of her imagination called up by the fiction of the poem. She at once absorbs and is absorbed by that 'other landscape', casting it as a space of freedom, or 'infinite expansion'. However, Nora's 'miniature landscape' is not a space of liberation; rather, she has internalised the social structures that privilege the construction of romantic love and traditional gender roles, and that therefore now shape not only Nora's everyday life, but her imagination as well. This romanticisation of the view from her window means she cannot – indeed, chooses not to – see the Queensland landscape as it truly is.

The intertextuality of Anderson's novel with Tennyson's poem about the doctrine of separate spheres therefore invokes more than sexual romance: it privileges the romantic perspective of the coloniser (Tiffin 2001: 381). Yet the 'real river' – that which is not 'silver' and 'serpentine' but 'broad, brown, and strong' (Anderson 2010: 13) – escapes even this wilful revisioning, and becomes the site of Nora's brave expression of self-determination. This river firmly occupies the realm of the real, and is 'never used . . . as a location for [Nora's] dreams' (2010: 13). Importantly, it is beside this river that Nora tries to experience true freedom from the strictures of her social environment, as she lies naked in the 'prolonged trance' of a passionate embrace with the 'sweet grass' (2010: 14). This does not signify a desire for romance, for a Lancelot. In fact, Nora asserts, 'I don't believe I was looking for a lover. Or not only for a lover. I believe I was also trying to match that region of my mind, Camelot.' (2010: 15) By stripping herself of the accoutrements of cultural restriction and rubbing herself in the dirt, Nora seeks to return to a more 'natural'

state – not an idealised pastoral vision of nature, but a real Camelot embodied in her own self.

Tirra lirra by the river starts to probe at the sense of woman's gendered experience as traumatic, even though the form in which it is explored remains fairly conventional (Gilbert 1988: 2). Anderson's later work, however, does not offer such hopeful reintegration with the natural, healing environment. Even as her writing endeavours to establish the liminal landscape as a 'potentially liberatory site', it simultaneously disorders this 'utopia' with realist recognition of the patriarchal discourse that prevents such liberation, thereby figuring through the landscape both that which is desired and its traumatic disruption.

Like *Tirra lirra*, Anderson's short story, 'Under the house' (1989b), is set in the past. It describes a period of revelation in the narrator's young childhood, as the veil of awe through which she regards her older brother and sisters falls away. Whitlock (1989) presents a fine discussion of the way in which this story uses the architecture of the Queenslander house to evoke both state and gendered difference. She argues that the house figures a 'sense of living on the edge of a wilderness, the makeshift quality of the built environment, the mannered, genteel settler culture', so that the 'qualities of Queensland as a marginal space are accentuated [in Anderson's short fiction]', while the creek to which Beatrice secretly escapes works as 'a space beyond the house and outside of her mother's influence' (1989b: 176–7). I agree with Whitlock's (1989) analysis, but I think an understanding of the space under the house can be extended beyond the sense in which it is 'imbued with [Beatrice's] mother's presence' and is thereby brought 'within the domestic domain' (1989: 177).

Like the creek, the space under the house is liminal, and the characterisation of the narrator as both a child and youngest of her siblings works, in part, to highlight woman's marginalisation and infantilisation. In this story, Beatrice is left behind by her sisters – '[f]eeling imprisoned, put away, discarded' under the house, accompanied only by a few broken and forgotten household relics: 'Broken cobwebby flowerpots', the collar of a family dog 'who had had to be shot', 'the leg irons dug up by my grandfather, relic of "some poor fellow" from the days when Brisbane was a penal colony' (Anderson, 1989b: 202). The ineffectively buried detritus under the house is part of the domestic present, even as the family attempts to hide it. These remnants metonymically signify Australia's shameful history – respectively, drought, disease and colonial history – so that this small landscape comes to figure a wasteland of cultural trauma called up by the story's ostensible act of individual memoir.

'Against the wall' (1989a) is a continuation of the semi-autobiographical narrative begun in 'Under the house'. In this story, too, Beatrice finds 'treasure at the creek': broken china, fragments of glass, a mysterious 'little rubber bag' (1989a: 221). Although these objects do not seem to correlate as strongly with the recurring influence of the colonial past as the relics in the former story, Anderson remains preoccupied with secrets that refuse to remain buried, and are disinterred with disastrous consequences: Bea's mother burns her 'treasures' in disgust, insisting on a kind of unknowing that her daughter's memoir repudiates. In 'Under the house', the family moves, soon after, to the suburbs, with its members immediately referring to their previous home only as 'Old Mooloolabin' (1989a: 211). In the new, modern environment, there is no space under the house, and the spectres of the

past encrypted by the old house and its surrounds are forgotten. Yet, each time the story is read they return, insistently refusing negation, always already recalled in the memory of the young girl. It is in this way that Anderson constructs the past as a kind of blockage – rather like Beatrice’s stammer, something that disrupts linearity as it insists on representation. In a rudimentary sense, Anderson’s work begins to explore the possibilities of representing Queensland trauma in narrative. Callahan says of Hospital’s work that it is this sort of ‘involuntary component of memory, working beyond conscious control that connects more authentically with the past’ (2009: 121), but it is clear that his comments apply equally to other Queensland women writers.

Hospital’s concern with the connections between individual memory and shared history – especially where these address trauma – is most evident in the short fiction she sets in Queensland. ‘The Last of the Hapsburgs’ (1995b), like ‘You gave me hyacinths’ (1995e), describes a teacher working in North Queensland. Both characters seek to escape a repressive or secret past, and find solace in the company of young female students and in watery environments – the gorge in the former story, the ocean and the rain in the latter. These are just two examples of Queensland narratives by women that display what Muller calls the ‘transformative effects of wilderness’, the permission of freedom and imagination the natural landscape offers (2001: 73–4). Both stories, moreover, testify to the importance of connecting with the ‘other’ in a project of responding and understanding.

In ‘The last of the Hapsburgs’, Miss Davenport has left a private girls’ school in Brisbane after an unspecified ‘messy event’ (1995b: 192) – a trauma of exile never named in the story. Invited to dinner at the home of Russian emigrants who have escaped the horrors of war, she learns of ‘the words of silence and the silence of words’ (1995b: 197), as Mr Weiss lectures her on the work of Isaac Babel, who sought to represent the horror and brutality of war and trauma, and she listens to the ghostly strains of a violin played by Leo, Mr Weiss’s strangely absent son (whether he is, in fact, alive and well upstairs neither Miss Davenport nor the reader can be sure).

The Weiss family thus represents, in a very real way, the irruption of the traumatic past into the present. What is interesting about Hospital’s story is the way in which the language of silence associated with traumatic representation is used to articulate both state and gendered difference. Miss Davenport, eager to show Rebecca Weiss and her shy, Indigenous friend, Hazel, opportunities beyond the regular afternoon sport prescribed by the education board, takes the two girls to swim in the gorge. This is a space of ‘[g]reen coolness’ (1995b: 200) and ‘safe[ty]’, a place ‘where we have escaped to’ (1995b: 201), she thinks, in echo of Rebecca’s earlier insistence that Queensland is where she and her family ‘have escaped to’ (1995b: 199). The water of North Queensland, Miss Davenport thinks at the beginning of the story, is a space beyond available language, a landscape of silence to match Babel’s literature:

Surf rises from her ankles to her knees. *Sing me North Queensland*, it lisps with its slickering tongues.

I can’t, she laments, hoisting up her skirt. *I can’t*.

She would need a different sort of alphabet, a chlorophyll one, a solar one. The place will not fit into words. (1995b: 190)

But this utopia is not safe for long. Some boys discover the girls, and shout mocking and lewd comments at their naked forms, before one boy defecates into the pristine pool.

That steaming fact, dropping stolidly into the pool, spoke a thick and dirty language. The acts of men, even when they are boys, Miss Davenport thought, are shouts that rip open the signs that try to contain them. We have no access to a language of such noisiness. Our voices are micemutter, silly whispers.

We will have to stay here in the pool forever, she thought. We are dead ends, the last of a line, masters of the genre of silence. We will have to invent a new alphabet of moss and water. (1995b: 202)

In one sense these final comments suggest a kind of resignation to the silencing of women, reducing their voices simply to ‘micemutter’ – or, as Callahan (2009: 158) puts it, ‘If men, from an early age, occupy noisiness, what language is available for women other than micemutter, even for the teacher who supposedly commands wisdom and language.’ However, I think this conclusion also indicates a resolve to persevere in using silence as a form of representation. A ‘new alphabet’, perhaps, is one that can both narrativise the trauma of exile and celebrate this experience as autonomy.

Hospital’s more recent work, including her short story collection *Forecast: Turbulence* (2011), continues to explore traumatic experience through topographical representation, and in ways that more clearly intersect with the fiction of Cleven, whose novel, *Her sister’s eye* (2002), was also published after 2000. In Hospital’s recent (2011) collection, ‘Blind date’ and ‘Salvage’ use water and weather to describe the experience of trauma, and while both use perspectives gendered male, the protagonists are to some extent made vulnerable by physical and psychological impairments. Thus, in ‘Blind date’, the blind child, Lachlan, remembers his father’s departure as occurring amid a raging, cyclonic storm, even though his mother assures him this memory is not accurate:

And he does remember. He remembers water churning. He remembers deluge. He sees his father suspended in weeping, taking in air through his gills . . .

‘It was pouring,’ Lachlan whispers. ‘It was a cyclone. Dad had to swim for his life.’ . . .

Lachlan can hear a roaring in his ears. There are rocks and spray and everything is green and dark and he is floundering and then everything is black. (Hospital, *Forecast: Turbulence* 10–11)

The overwhelming flood, the sensation of drowning in a trauma that forms an unrepenting ‘deluge,’ becomes a powerful metaphor for the way in which trauma is coded in memory, and is repeated in several stories in this collection.

I will now conclude by turning to Cleven’s novel, *Her sister’s eye*, a text that allows me to trace the connection between female and Indigenous trauma in a Queensland context. While fiction by Anderson and Hospital struggles to articulate a gendered and racialised experience of Australia, implying it as secret or silent, Cleven deals with this issue directly. Her novel describes the revenge the marginalised people of Mundra seek against their oppressors, the abusive property owner, Donald Drysdale, and the vicious society, the Red Rose Ladies. I do not

wish to suggest that Cleven's novel finds entirely new ways to narrativise trauma, since in this novel it is represented primarily in conventional metaphors of ghostly return, scar tissue, unexplained fears and disconnected cinematic images. For example, Archie is not 'Archie' at all; he is Raymond Gee, a boy who has suppressed the traumatic memory of his sister's violent death at the hands of one of the white townsmen because it is simply too terrible for him to know. He adopts the identity of his dead friend, Archie Corella, and forgets his former life until, like a *revenant*, he is drawn irresistibly back to Mundra in an act of compulsive return. Thus, Archie decides that, 'The truth was something he could not tell [Caroline] because he didn't even know it himself. There was no memory to prompt why he came to be so scarred. A hard lump grew in his throat' (Cleven 2002: 15). He admits that 'images come to him like a flickering film, fuzzy and distorted at the edges' (2002: 88), while Nana Vida asserts that, 'When you're numb from pain and can't take it anymore, your mind tells ya many things. That poor, poor boy put it away so far that he lost himself, lost all or part of his memory. A lotta people survive by forgetting the sorrow in their lives' (2002: 224).

However, Cleven's representation of trauma is more interesting, and more effectively develops the tradition of Queensland women's writing traced here, when she codes the decay of the past, as well as the event of traumatic return, in the Queensland landscape. The land in Mundra is arid and dead: 'Everything that was once alive and green died a long time ago . . . The dirt seems to have some sort of sickness' (2002: 38). But this land is not merely barren, destroyed by the choking influence of the past; rather, it is personified, and enacts on the inhabitants of Mundra a determined revenge. Thus the air here is filled with a 'killing frost' (2002: 23), trees are 'skeletal' and reach out with 'talons' (2002: 38) and wiry branches (2002: 53), while the river that dominates the landscape is violently rushing 'torrent', which 'spins and whirls as it bashes into the muddy banks. Small tea-trees snag underneath the greedy, sucking mouth of the water. The noise is deafening' (2002: 54). A coming storm makes Archie's mysterious scar ache, threatening the irruption of traumatic return (2002: 22). Even Sofie's terrible nightmares figure 'a fragmented landscape inhabited by a chorus of bruised whispers' (2002: 56). In this novel, the buried or unacknowledged past comes back to haunt, not as a spectre but, inescapably, as the sublime landscape. Cleven uses the furious landscape to express rather than silence the insistent cry of dispossessed populations – especially when she literally gives voice to the avenging river, which encourages Sofie to lure her rapist to his death:

Gone bubblyoo crybabby crrrybabbyyy that's right cry that old boo outcha system wash his white asshole away up river he done with hurtin black girls white girls he snake cut off right at the top cry now gone cry him right outcha sofie. (2002: 60)

The river's 'stream' of consciousness looks more like *écriture féminine* than what may be described as phallogocentric narrative. In this way, *Her sister's eye* seeks to express the 'new alphabet' Hospital had envisioned almost fifteen years earlier, and voices the difference of gendered and racialised Queensland history. Not only does the landscape work as a metaphor for cultural trauma, but *writing* trauma through the landscape becomes a way for Cleven to 'recuperate a lost or silenced history', to borrow Carole Ferrier's terms (2008: 38).

Allison Ravenscroft (2003) argues that Cleven's first novel, *Bitin' back* (2001), 'practises strategies around knowing and unknowing throughout, placing the white reader now in a place of familiarity, now in a place of strangeness; now comfortable in the powers of her own knowing, and now discomfited by the gaps between her knowing and unknowing' (2003: 188). Ravenscroft suggests that Cleven uses the expected familiarity with Indigenous cultures to destabilise the white reader's sense of authority, and therefore to engage with the position of 'otherness' usually occupied by non-white Australians. Ravenscroft's terms recall those of trauma theorist Cathy Caruth (1996), who recognises the important point that trauma is defined by its unknowing: 'trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past,' she says, 'but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely not known in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on' (1996: 4). Cleven's strategy in both novels is important because it imposes the central condition of trauma – that it is unknown until its unbidden return – on the white Australian reader, so that the experience of reading her work mimics (to some degree) the experience of traumatic remembering. Her narrative strategies aid Alexander's process of recognising and suffering with the 'other', and therefore become part of a project of reparation and responsibility. In fact, *Her sister's eye* is careful to point out that a failure to do so will mean damage to national cultural identity; in Nana Vida's wise words, 'People need to know their history, otherwise there's this terrible feeling of being lost' (Cleven 2002: 140).

This exploration of Queensland women's writing produced over the past forty years has sought to consider the Queensland experience as a kind of limit space for postcolonial revision and responsibility. Along with Muller, I note that the Queensland landscape can often be seen to yield 'a metaphorically ambivalent lode' for writers like Anderson and Hospital, who explore gendered experience, so that even as they construct 'liberatory sites', their narratives recognise 'that such freedoms are more fictional than factual, more romanticised than realised' (Muller 2001: 76). The addition of Cleven to this tradition, however, casts a new perspective, since her symbolic landscapes revise the emancipatory fantasy as site of revenge rather than escape, and her narratives reposition the reader as sympathiser rather than empathiser. Narrative representation of turbulent landscapes is clearly not the only way in which trauma is articulated in the Queensland, or even Australian or postcolonial, traditions more broadly. However, this reading of the way in which the land offers modes of expression for Queensland writers of marginalised experience, and 'a new alphabet' of symbolic representation, may help to forge new understandings of reparative strategies in narrative.

Endnote

- 1 A digital version of this archive, the 'Literature map of Queensland', is available at <http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/coll/lit/iwmap>.

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