

Who Speaks Land Stories? Inexpert Voicings of Place¹

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This paper asks the question 'can the land have a voice?' in land stories and examines the relationship between subaltern theory and landscapes. It investigates how we make space for the voice of the land through various written genres. It draws upon the regional setting of the Sunshine Coast, using journals, local histories, nature writings, and land stories. These include Petrie's Reminiscences and the exploration journals of Green; nature writings such as Nancy Cato's The Noosa Story and the work of botanical painters; local histories; and Indigenous tales. How is land's voice heard – who speaks for and from the land, how do they speak, and who listens? Can the inanimate have a voice? Can the subaltern apply to the land itself? Who or what remembers the foot of the conquistador: the expert history or the amateur memories of the coloniser, the stories and art arising from the responses of those displaced, restructured post-colonial mythologies, or the land itself? The way we define edge voices determines how they might be heard. The subaltern is reflected, defined, denied, and created in written land stories. We are all colonisers of land, transforming it to differing cultured scapes.

The complexities of the subaltern

Subaltern theory tries to define edge voices, and show how they might be heard. The edge, the borderland, the liminal has been the metaphor for the subaltern and the playground of the academic. Academia in general, and the subaltern theorist in particular, has a fascination with notions of edges, boundaries, margins and borderlands. The theory of the subaltern is attractive for precisely these reasons. The subaltern, as the voice of the colonised, represents the emotional and wilder positives that lie beneath our more expert and rational histories and sciences. In political historical writing, the term 'subaltern' was first used by Antonio Gramsci as a coded way to refer to the proletariat, yet still get his writings past prison censors. It was adopted and developed by the Subaltern Studies Group, started in India in 1982 by Ranajit Guha.² This group used a third world perspective to expose and critique the attitudes, ideologies, and belief systems of dominant history, politics, economics, anthropology and sociology. It aimed to rectify elitist bias in research and re-examine events and themes from a more rounded perspective. The Group have influenced (and some would argue, driven) postcolonial thinking across the world.³ Those who espouse the development of the subaltern include Homi Bhabha, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Shahid Amin, Partha Chatterjee, and Gayatri Spivak. Spivak's pivotal paper 'Can the subaltern speak?'⁴ answered her own question with an unclear and densely argued 'no'. She argued that the role of dominant or colonial groups should be to make a space for emergent voices to be heard. Spivak was strongly influenced by Derrida, having translated *Of Grammatology* into English.⁵ Such thinking believes that discourse is more critical for change than action and rejects a pure definition of identity, so that boundary distinctions between cultures are not fixed.

Subaltern theory attempts to read colonial records 'against the grain' – a metaphor drawn from timber cutting. It is harder but also more sensible to cut across the grain, rather than with the grain, to get a good cut and a better view of the log's history. For most timber, the grain runs straight and unidirectional - you can trust the sturdy English walnut, it is easy to read and to cut. But in

southeast Queensland there is timber to be found that makes reading the grain a difficult art, if not an impossible task. Run your fingers up and down the wood of a spotted gum and it's hard to tell which way the grain lies. Nor does it split cleanly along the grain, but leaves jagged and complex edges. There are few smooth or simple stories in Queensland native timbers. Just as in nature, so too in culture.

Can land itself be considered a subaltern voice: can the land speak? While subaltern theory repositions the 'other' as more central, it has rarely been applied to the non-human. But subaltern methodology might be usefully applied to an otherwise voiceless nature. We might re-read the records of those who write about the land in an attempt to draw out the land's voice. A typology defined as 'land stories' is proposed here that tries to speak for the particularity of place and to write from the land. Subaltern theory and land identity, when applied to land stories, expose the relationships of memory and history, amateur and expert, fiction and fact. Critically, it draws out the relationship of loss between land and race relations, through examples of story. The role of the story has been commonly emphasised as a key post-colonial/subaltern strategy that offers status to the voices of marginalised groups. This paper compares the differing status of land story genres, including exploration journals and nature writing, Indigenous storytelling and rural women's local histories drawn from Australia's Sunshine Coast region. It attempts to show how the subaltern is defined, reflected, denied, or created in land stories, and how written story might make space for the voice of the land.

Land writings topography

There is a wide range of Sunshine Coast texts about locale. They range from historical documents to contemporary poetry. Often they are a method used to locate and site the author or editor who, through such specific choice of geographic writing, proclaims a spiritual rather than economic sense of place - a sense of ownership that is less about dominion over and more about responsibility for. By writing their environment's history, they declare an attachment to the specifics of a place, an interest in a particular land that is grander than mere resource economics. Turning memories of place into histories is a process of acquiring identity, a process of becoming owned by a place. In these writings, place is needed to evolve identity, subaltern or otherwise. At the very least place becomes the cultural signifier of identity. We attribute these land/culture relationships in the construction of Indigenous identity, but such an emotional (if not the spiritual) connection to place is commonly found across local and inexpert writings on land, independent of race.

A short attempt at a typology of these geographically based writings (perhaps a topography), based on written texts of the Sunshine Coast region, may help to define this land story genre. The process of history selects and privileges only a few of such local texts. Most are unsubstantiated tales seen by historians to lack validity. However, I do not want to privilege one text above another, whether black against white, old against new, or fact against legend. Rather than building a factual history of the Sunshine Coast by winnowing available texts through authorial provenance, I want to use these land stories to examine the linking role of memory to place.

Local histories⁶

Local histories often aim to record local memories before they are lost. They generally range from hand-printed short booklets of poorly presented type to self-published books with photos, maps, line drawings and cartoons. They include accounts of earlier settler lifestyles. A rare few are raised to the status of capital 'H' History (such as Constance Campbell Petrie's work mentioned later). The local history collections of public libraries and historical societies are the obvious source of such books.

In 1950 D.W. Bull (1872-1960) wrote memoirs of early Tewantin and district, called *Short Cut to Gympie Gold*. This was not published until 1982. He wrote: 'Before we all pass away, meagre as it is, I am recording some of my memories'.⁷ Like many storytellers, Bull appeared to value story over fact

but was also inclined to sentimentality. He mourns the old fig tree at 'Tea-want-im' (a story about Aboriginal requests becoming the place name of Tewantin):

Let us remember also that this grand old fig tree provided a meeting place for Blacks and Whites, when these two peoples lived in harmony, sharing what nature provided and the opportunity of learning whatever they could from each other's lifestyle.⁸

Bull may have learnt a few things from 'King Tommy' under the fig tree in the late nineteenth century, but one of the reasons for the professional rejection of local history is when such individual memory is generalised to universalised history.

Hessie Lindsell's self published *Eumundi Story: A Collection of Stories on the History of Eumundi*, was described as 'a series of chapters with photographs, illustrations, maps and cartoons ... to be kept as a record of past events ... as a help for the next generation'.⁹ Thirteen years later, Audrey Lowe used the same format to publish *A Country Childhood in the 1930's and 40's*, a nostalgic recording of her childhood memories of living at Ridgewood (ten miles west of Cooroy). She says: 'And so I have gone back to that other time when life was slower – life was simpler in my country childhood'.¹⁰

Amateur booklets are more often come upon by chance – passed on by neighbours knowing my strange passions or sold at local stalls. Esma Armstrong produced a short, small booklet called *Through Belli*,¹¹ a history of the difficulties in transport routes to the Gympie Goldfields that passed fifteen kilometres west of Cooroy. It is hand typed with a pasted in map and diagram and has no date or page numbers. Such amateur histories show how knowledge of the micro-local is valued. In *Through Belli*, a common reference is to Bottle and Glass Road, the steepest and worst part of the trip where passengers had to foot it up the ranges after Yandina. This was so named because a road worker or traveller (depending on the story) had carved the shape of a large bottle and glass on a box tree, giving hope to weary travellers that just over the next hill were refreshments and fresh horses.

Indigenous (written) stories

A long-term oral, art and performance tradition, Dreaming stories were often only written down in response to white versions or requests for authenticity. They are commonly presented as picture books for children that offer education in both ethics and the geography of survival. Olga Miller has written and illustrated many such books based on stories told by her father, Fred Wondunna, from the Butchulla tribe of Fraser Island. In 1964, with her brother Wilf Reeves, she wrote *The Legends of Moonie Jarl*.¹² By 1993, this was expanded into *Fraser Island Legends Retold by Olga Miller*. She explains that it was 'never envisaged that [these stories] would be of interest to anyone outside the family circle. However, now that the history of the Australian Aborigine is such an important part of school curriculums, I would like to share these stories with the children of today'.¹³ In her last book, *Wook-Koo*, she writes of the 'Free-ways' (Aboriginal tribes' common routes) and their 'Yerra' (gateways to Butchulla country) around Woocoo Mountain. It says: 'she wants all children, not just Aboriginal children, to be taught the stories and customs and skills'.¹⁴

Alf Wood, in *Along the Sunshine Coast, Dreamtime to now*, tells of a range of coastal/hinterland conflicts in the Dreaming,¹⁵ as well a history of place. He refers to white exploration as 'white man's walkabout' and added several fishermen's yarns, or 'whiteman's nonsense' in response to requests. He describes the book as 'a souvenir that will keep happy memories alive'.

Nature writings

Nature books generally describe place through pictorial and scientific accounts of geology, flora and fauna. They are studded with widely varied art of paintings and photos. As a subset, environmental histories tend to bemoan the impact of settler culture, recording the last of 'pristine nature' before development progresses.

In the tradition of Ellis Rowan, women botanical painters have described their place for posterity and for love. Elizabeth McDonald writes in her lyrical introduction to *Wildflowers of the Wallum* on the history of place:

As the wild things of the world return to the place of their birth, so our land possesses those born here ... here are some flowers I have saved for you; you will not find them in many places along the coast any more, but inland from Cooloom and in many corners between the "For Sale" notices you may come across a few.¹⁶

The forward suggests that:

The Wallum ... is fast disappearing to further the cause of so called progress ... [McDonald's] book will not only give much pleasure to people but will also stimulate interest and create an awareness of the need to quickly conserve as much of the Wallum as is possible before it is too late.¹⁷

Kathleen McArthur writes in *The Bush in Bloom: A Wildflower Artist's Year in Paintings and Words*, 'we have a problem in the fact that much of our flora is unfamiliar for the reason that it lacks associations in our consciousness'.¹⁸ They are not seen, and so not preserved for posterity. She continues, 'it is only when the mind opens that the flower blooms ... there is no time available to be patient and wait for natural changes when our heritage of flowers is being destroyed so fast'.¹⁹ The months of the year form the chapters of her book, accompanied by botanical paintings such as 'Bloodwood' in January.²⁰

More overtly environmental campaign writers include Michael Gloster, an ex-councillor and leader of Noosa Parks Association. In *The Shaping of Noosa* he writes of 'Paradise Almost Lost', presenting an insider's knowledge of a political battleground between environment and development.²¹ In 1979, Nancy Cato wrote the well-received book *The Noosa Story: A Study in Unplanned Development*, reinforcing the need to handle development differently. Cato (naively) concludes:

Surely the developers with their millions of dollars ... should be told to go elsewhere, and not use their money to destroy such a delicately balanced and fragile ecology as that of the Noosa estuary.²²

Perhaps ironically, these books led to Noosa's claimed/famed population cap, and the concomitant branding of Noosa as the playground of the rich.

Academic texts

Land stories, because of the requirements of locale and memory, have largely fallen to the perceived amateur. However, in the field of environmental history, there are now a number of historians who consciously seek to situate themselves in the local. Some Australian examples of this type of work include Tom Griffiths' *Forest of Ash*,²³ Greg Denning's *Beach Crossings*,²⁴ Mark McKenna's *Looking for Blackfella's Point*,²⁵ Peter Read's *Belonging*,²⁶ and Martin Thomas' *The Artificial Horizon*.²⁷ This is an emergent area of interest that at its most optimistic may contribute to future changes in academic process and the historiography of land writings. However, presently it is still too bound to a cultural tourist methodology. There are rare exceptions when expert historians discuss their own places of habitation.²⁸ Most often environmental historians continue to visit the 'other' place and write, perhaps more sympathetically, tourist guides of that culture.

More often than not, academic texts are transposed or raw theses, rarely able to contain themselves to the local. They are more than 'land stories' of place, and show the difficulty and uniqueness of combining the expert with the local without removing a sense of the land itself.

In 1910, John Mathew wrote of the country of the Kabi and Wakka tribes in *Two Representative Tribes of Queensland*. Mathews lived on his uncle's station in his early teens (1866 to 1872) and learned Kabi dialect, which he maintained while training as an ethnologist in Melbourne. He addressed the 'puzzle' of the origin of Australians particularly, using linguistic evidence, and wrote the book to address the 'exceptionally important information ... in solving anthropological difficulties'.²⁹

Elaine Brown's 1995 Master's thesis 'Nineteenth-Century Cooloola: A History of Human Contact and Environmental Change' is more of an environmental history. It emphasises how the natural environment of the Cooloola coast was perceived and used by both Aborigines and European

settlers in the nineteenth century. It was 'approached through the characteristics of the locality itself, then developed through descriptions and narratives that reveal salient aspects of the Aboriginal presence, the European invasion, and the occupation and abandonment of land'.³⁰

Bruce Elder writes of both positive and horrendous black/white relations in his description of arsenic murders at Kilcoy in the 1840s.³¹ The tribes of the area were the Nalbro on the eastern slopes of Blackall and Dallambara in the Connondales, both part of (T')Jinibara language group and more widely the Kabi Kabi language group. In 1822, the New South Wales (including what would become Queensland) Governor Thomas Brisbane sent out exploration parties to locate a new penal colony site. Brisbane was formed. Later two escaped convicts, Davis and Bracewell (or Bracefell), along with Andrew Petrie explained the Aboriginal importance of the Bunya tree as ceremony, food, and meeting place to Governor Brisbane. Consequently, the Sydney Colonial Secretary's Office proscribed the bunya and its land from white settlement and destruction because of its importance to the Aborigines on 14 April 1842.³² Such good intentions were forgotten in the conflicts that resulted in another 1842 event. The first settler in Kilcoy was brief but destructive; Evan MacKenzie arrived in 1841/2 and returned to Scotland in 1845. The 1842 tales at the Bunya Festival³³ acted out being poisoned by white man's flour at Kilcoy Creek and the loss of one whole group (around fifty people) who normally attended as a result.³⁴ A later unnamed Aboriginal memory recalls: 'That blackfeller been eatim damper. Then plenty that been jump about all the same fish, when you catch im, big mob been die – him dead all about'.³⁵ Elder dubs Kilcoy with the dubious distinction of being the start of a regime of terror in Queensland, as Aboriginal people at Baroon who saw the re-enactment swore vengeance on all Europeans. He cites William Cootes who argued that 'very many of the murders perpetrated by the blacks for years afterwards were more of less in direct consequence, or in revenge, of the wholesale poisoning at Kilcoy'.³⁶

In 2002, Christine Halse published *A Terribly Wild Man*, based on her long-term interest in Ernest Gribble. Gribble was a passionate and paternalistic advocate for Queensland Aborigines over the first half of the twentieth century. Among other things, he was responsible for the meeting of his sister Ethel and Butchulla man Fred Wondunna through his work for the Fraser Island Mission School. When it was clear Fred and Ethel were in love, Gribble married Ethel off to his compliant right-hand man, William Reeves, in 1903. When Reeves died in 1906, Fred returned hoping for marriage. Gribble and the family were horrified (Gribble all the more so because of his own liaison with an Aboriginal servant), especially when Ethel became pregnant. Ethel was sent to Sydney to hide the scandal, but Fred managed to follow and finally, in 1907, they found a priest willing to marry them. The couple retreated to the sanctuary of Fraser Island and all mention of Ethel was censored from public documents.³⁷ Legally, relationships between white men and Indigenous women were proscribed, but the opposite was unimaginable. We cannot know their frequency of occurrence, as relationships such as that between Ethel and Fred were not recorded in either legal response or historical documentation. As such, relationships between white women and Indigenous men became truly invisible. It is only through the memory of their family that Ethel and Fred's relationship re-emerged as history. Olga Miller and Wilf Reeves (the storyteller 'Moonie Jarl') are the children of Fred and Ethel, and the first people to write down Indigenous stories of Fraser Island and its surround. Perhaps it was their parent's passionate black/white relationship that allowed for the cultural crossover of written word and oral story traditions. Perhaps too it was the sanctuary of place in the face of social erasure that ensured the evolving importance of telling and writing their particular land's story.

The subaltern voice

Such localised and particular accounts have connections at least in geography – they are 'land stories'. And perhaps because of the joint emphasis on locale and on the local, the line between fact and fiction, history and story, seems thin indeed. Arguments move back and forth across authors and over time about, for instance, the real story behind the naming of Noosa. Is it an Indigenous word, 'Noothera', meaning 'shade' as Cato writes,³⁸ or a politely taught response to settler culture

questions: 'No sir!' as Bull suggests?³⁹ Many academics would prefer to believe the former - to believe in the resilience of Indigenous culture, to believe that it does not always have to be about or in response to us. But such arguments can never be fully laid to rest, because alternative histories are rarely written in ignorance of the extant dominant version. Noosa naming stories epitomise the problems in finding the subaltern voice.⁴⁰ White misunderstandings of black responses to white invasions have become the reductionist history of the last 200 years.⁴¹

The history of the colonising and colonised voice is a confused one that does not neatly separate into oppressor and oppressed. Local histories are a selection drawn from inexperienced memories; it is only in the professional process of selection and the cross-substantiation of documentation that expert conclusions can be entered into. If, as Nora claims, memory must die to become history,⁴² how is it that under similar conditions only certain memories are elevated into history? How is one textual source privileged? In the Sunshine Coast region, the source most often used by historians is probably Constance Campbell Petrie's 1904 *Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland*.⁴³ It is recognised as the earliest settler account and is valued for its informative and sympathetic view of local Aborigines. Other sources are viewed less reliably. Brett Green's transcripts of his great-grandfathers and grandfathers' diaries⁴⁴ have been reported as frauds.⁴⁵ Green and Petrie make for interesting comparisons. A subaltern reading would suggest both have authenticity despite (and perhaps because of) their differing reception. Both books are about ancestral memories of Indigenous lifestyles. Green is a living resident of Gympie of questionable roots; Petrie is a past historian from a respectable and noted family. Petrie's original text is in contemporaneous papers; Brett's originals were lost in transit to the Oxley library. Petrie's history is prefaced with a sense of loss of traditional Indigenous lifestyles; Green's is more of an informed but rollicking yarn. Across both mainstream media and historical considerations, Petrie is considered genteel and Green is suspect. It is Petrie (without a doubt the voice of the coloniser) who most acceptably supports and gives status to the colonised voice. She does so within the contextual limitations of her time. Roth, the Protector of Aborigines, encouraged her to think of her work as a record of a dying race. She did so, though with less consequent Victorian sentimentality than one might expect. And, rather than disparaging the naïve rituals of the noble savage (a more common but perhaps believable flaw in Green), Petrie often makes direct comparisons with what she points out are similar European customs. If Petrie is the voice of the coloniser, then she also presents the approved voice of the colonised – her portrayal of Aborigines has agency. Petrie is accepted as historical record whilst Green is relegated to fiction. Petrie writes a more acceptable, respectful Indigenous history than Green, but who represents the subaltern voice?⁴⁶

The unifying sense of loss in land story

The grain of these land stories is hard to read indeed. If generalisations are possible, then it is that they are motivated by a sense of loss. Constance Campbell Petrie writes of the lost way of life for local Aborigines; Audrey Lowe writes of a lost way of life for early settlers; Kathleen McArthur and Elizabeth McDonald paint the disappearing wildflowers before they are all gone; and Nancy Cato writes of the loss of the natural around Noosa Heads. They record a past lifestyle or place before it is forgotten. And it is loss that appears to be a primary motivator for local histories. Historical societies are eternally recording the memories of the last generation whilst libraries are scanning in old photos - stories of before become the nostalgia of today. It is the past that is seen by local historians as the subaltern, in the face of the ever-threatening present. It is the particular and the local fighting for a voice within the universalising global future of unstoppable progress. And it is the loss of memory that forms the basis for such inexperienced histories. Chakrabarty shows that Western societies are characterised increasingly as societies in which memories die faster than history, or in which memories die and produce history.⁴⁷ Stories of the inexperienced and the local are generally nostalgic, keeping keep memory alive, even if it has little historical basis. Indeed, perhaps we have no better combined past to remember. As Haydie Gooder and Jane Jacobs ask, 'when the settler nation fantasises about co-existence, is it engaged in remembering or in forgetting?'.⁴⁸ Perhaps

moving forward to a reconciled future requires just such an exercise in imagination, more likely to be found in memory than in history. In any case, most local histories rely upon inexperienced memories that reflect loss, not gain. If I may be allowed a poor pun, subaltern local history is not about reading against the grain, but about reading against the gain.

The land and its scape

There are as many possible understandings of landscape as there are cultures. The discourses are varied. Naively speaking, land to the coloniser is historically an object of resource (of interests not values). Land to the colonised has been portrayed (by popular culture at least) traditionally as a source of myth/story. But there are more complex readings. Paul Carter's 'Naming Place' cites Barron Field who, in his 1825 *Geographical Memoirs*, lamented the unsuitable Australian ground for poetry because of 'the eternal eucalyptus' (in particular its non-deciduous nature and lack of contrast).⁴⁹ Contrast this with Les Murray's 1986 poem, 'Louvres':

to the bush, or as we now say the Land,
the three quarters of our continent
set aside for mystic poetry.⁵⁰

Simon Ryan compares Paul Wenz's European perceptions and Rhys Jones' description of an Aborigine's perception of a city landscape. Ryan shows how we cannot understand a new landscape with a displaced culture, and how new cultures change the landscape to become a new thing.⁵¹ In this sense, the view of 'the mountain' is always changing. But as Carr points out, just because the shape of a mountain appears different from differing sides, this does not imply it has either many shapes or no shape.⁵²

Landscape is a cultural overlay, a description of place. The provocative question of land remains. We generally assume that the mountain exists independent of its descriptors and their visions. There is a realist core to our theoretical notions of environment. The words we use, the discourse or the story we apply to the mountain, may limit our understanding of a place, but they also reinforce the assumption that the place can be wordless. The mountain might be 'bad' (inaccessible or filled with dangers and ghosts) or 'good' (affording pleasant views and clean air). It may look different - a Feng Shui dragon, a Dreamtime warrior, an ore resource to be levelled, a place for orientation, or a marker of home - but we experience the place as more than a metaphor.

Should we even ask 'does land remain without the discourse?' Does a tree falling in a human-free forest make a noise? It seems a very human-centric question. Land has been conflated with truth in postmodern and postcolonial eyes, so that it represents the unfashionable positivist (the ontological reality). But it is the mapping - the linguistic and metaphoric constructions of land, the multiple layers of meaning and understanding - that may literally shape our view (but maybe the mountain also shapes that which is possible?).⁵³ Perhaps the land's voice is the truly subaltern, perceived as the always colonised, always object, never active force. Is there ever an active land? The popular understanding of land as real, or independent of people and human culture, is still far from discourse theory that argues that without language overlay there is no land, and that the world is imagined into existence through discourse, the language and culture of human beings.

In *Just Relations*, a story of a fictional small Australian township built on gold, Rodney Hall suggests that it is people who create the landscape and the land:

Whitey's Fall perches halfway up a mountainside, the mountain the people created. Year by year they accumulated the knowledge, the experience. They have the words so they know how to live with it. By their toughness they survived to heap up its bluffs, by scepticism they etched its creekbeds. They've lived and spoken every part of this mountain, they've dreamed it and cursed it, looked to it for salvation and penance. Its outcrops of granite are the very ones the people named, quarried and picnicked on before you could say there really was a mountain in this place at all. And the forest covering tells of its secrecy.

So, the mountain came to be there and indifferent to the people, those clinging whittlers in mud burrows. The mountain stood up, hunched and massive ... cliffs crashing one by one down the mountainside in a flurry of gold dust. And the mountain created a wind appropriate to its shape, so the wind set and that's how it remained.

In those times the Aborigines of the region, the Koories, had no knowledge of any such mountain. Neither did they know nor care about gold. And but for gold, who would have stayed here at all?⁵⁴

The mountain is not only physically created by gold mining and forest clearing (so that it becomes visible), but also metaphysically by the settler culture's views of the conquering nature of hard labour and the importance of money over other resources. According to Hall, the culturally changing view of the landscape does more than change the land - it literally creates the land. It is a view I am increasingly persuaded by. It is in the collaborative telling of such tales, in the collation of land stories that the mountain starts to take its form. It is in the intersections of such tales that a new view becomes possible. But it is a difficult shared history when our differences extend beyond the shape of the mountain, to its very existence. Nevertheless, it is this discourse that shapes the land into landscape.

The voice of the land in land stories

To find the voice of the land in Sunshine Coast land stories requires a reading against the grain of the loss that they express. But perhaps it is only through stories of loss that land is structured and understood. I am interested in the ways that memories and histories talk of land, how storytellers literally situate themselves, and how writers use words to locate themselves in locale. How does, or indeed does, land itself get heard in these land stories? The writers discussed above write about the landscape, the things that lie imposed upon the land, rather than the land itself. The underlying land, like earlier notions of the 'noble savage', remains a pure thing. It is impossible to describe or understand without the sullying of whichever colonising culture holds power. While in subaltern histories, that which constitutes the subaltern voice is debatable, the distinction is clearer in human/nature relations: the land is always the colonised.

My analysis of nature writing, diaries, and exploration accounts – the cultural records of land colonisations - especially in the regional context of the Sunshine Coast, shows that such land stories do not generally imply an active land. Rather, land is passive. Humans do things to land, but land is very rarely written about as something that shapes humans. Of those cited, only Elizabeth McDonald says, 'our land possesses those born here'.⁵⁵ If any part of the environment is given an active voice, it is the landscape of land. The overlay of cultural signifiers – flora, fauna, buildings, people - are occasionally given agency. But even this is rare. Mostly these land stories speak a language of loss – the loss of landscape through human action or inaction. As W.J.T. Mitchell claims, landscape remains 'the dreamwork of imperialism'.⁵⁶ Land stories write about the passive things that live in or lie upon the land, but rarely about the land itself.

How else might the voice of the land be heard? It is voiceless with few obvious mechanisms to gain standing in the process of history. Land is the truly subaltern; its interests can only be voiced by its colonisers. Environmentalists have claimed to speak for the environment (a key component of which is land) for the last few years. Courts such as the New South Wales Land and Environment Court have given trees standing through proxies.⁵⁷ These are predicated on the notion that the land is a powerless and passive resource that we must shepherd, husband, or control. Our present day view of land is much the same as our past colonial views of colonised peoples. The historical building blocks have similar patterns. It is to be defeated and won over; it is a resource to aid us in our endeavours; it is a helpless thing to be protected; and a dying thing to be mourned. So maybe there are things to be learnt from subaltern theory that can be applied to land. Perhaps land is not entirely passive in the face of such attitudinal onslaughts. Perhaps land too, like the subaltern, has a

way to manipulate its colonisers. And perhaps it is never possible to write directly on land, but only to read against the grain of such land stories – to read for memory rather than history.

Maybe the land's voice best emerges when the Western archival emphasis on the written word is avoided and preference given to the role of the creative and the visual in the arts, performance, or meditation techniques. Perhaps Australia has already developed such metaphors for land through more Indigenous imaginings.⁵⁸

Conclusions?

Dennis Lee writes in 'Cadence, Silence: Writing in Colonial Space' that a colonised writer's home is to find words for their space-lessness: 'Instead of pushing against the grain of an external, uncharged language, perhaps we should finally come to writing with that grain ... a thoroughly edgy, uncertain homecoming'.⁵⁹ A similar thoroughly edgy, uncertain homecoming is offered here.

There are a number of possible conclusions. There are inverse links between globalisation (the concomitant of post-colonialism and subaltern theory) and the local, and between a notion of an active landscape and a literature of loss. There also seems to be at least an historical divergence between levels of expertise and writings about a particular knowing of place, so that only the inexpert speak local land stories. The subaltern theory that privileges creative/global discourse over the realism of land object may inadvertently silence the very voices it hopes to hear, for instance the active land expressed in Dreaming metaphors of Aboriginal Australia. So too might the written 'land story' genre that mourns loss rather than celebrates gain. Perhaps now, if we return to notions of a more active land, we might have (local) histories that focus on gain, rather than loss. If so, is the notion that we create the landscape through discourse compatible with the idea that the land is an active and influencing agent?

The specifics of a particular locale are reflected in its disrupted literature. There are cores and peripheries both within and without that subaltern dynamic. We are all colonisers of land, transforming land to differing cultured scapes. It is the active (identifying) influence of land, as well as fear of its loss, that impels the writing of local land stories. Regional and grander histories are often collated from such inexpert and under-acknowledged voices and show the complexities of Indigenous/settler interactions that both reinforce and un-define notions of the subaltern voice. But these wider histories are more removed from the particularity of place, and the suggestion of an active land voice is subordinated in land's role as a (passive) site of resource conflict. The land encapsulates a form of pure subaltern theory – it is always colonised, so that the voice of the land is only heard through the voice of its coloniser. In Australian history, that voice was most commonly given active agency through spoken and artistic stories, often based on land topography. Today however, where the written word dominates, it is this settler form of communication that is understood and gives status to stories of and from the land. And those stories tend to be nostalgic, focusing on loss and set in a passive landscape. The land cannot have a voice, because it does not exist in such a wordy way without humans. No-one can effectively write stories for the land, but there are better and worse interpretations or cultural overlays. The regional stories examined here mostly fall within the passive land paradigm. Perhaps the active land paradigm is missing from written land stories exactly because of their written form. Perhaps there are other forms of communication – meditation, mythologies, or the visual and performing arts - that lend themselves more readily to differing (more active and positive) notions of land and its scapes?

Does place shape identity? Is identity only completed through place? The regional writers analysed here have used place to evolve identity. Perhaps turning memories of place into history is the process of acquiring identity, of becoming owned by a place. In any case, it seems that identifying self through place is the part of the inexpert. Talking about the local is the realm of the amateur. The expert, or professional, has historically been beyond place, objectifying the land/human relationship. By acknowledging and writing about an identity shaped by place, the storyteller is cast into the role of the inexpert. But perhaps it is these inexpert voicings, or memories, that start to more closely approximate land stories, to speak the subaltern voice of land.

Notes

- ¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Memory and History Conference run by the Centre for Popular Culture and Ideas at Griffith University in October 2003.
- ² The Subaltern Studies Group has produced a journal titled *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society* since 1982.
- ³ See Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, Routledge, London and New York, 1998.
- ⁴ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and The Interpretation of Culture*, Macmillan, London, 1988, pp.271-313.
- ⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (trans.), John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1976.
- ⁶ An interesting aspect of these local histories is the process of de-professionalisation. Those who take on the writing of a local history, no matter how qualified, become reduced to simply another amateur. Expert historians write about places they do not inhabit or love, perhaps then to retain their expert status; the fear of going native is kept at bay through a cultural tourism of the other.
- ⁷ D.W. Bull, *Short Cut to Gympie Gold: Short Stories of Tewantim and the Sunshine Coast*, Self-published by Mrs F.H. Watson, 1982, p.1.
- ⁸ Bull, Postscript.
- ⁹ Hessie Lindsell, *Eumundi Story: A Collection of Stories on the History of Eumundi*, Self-published, Eumundi, 1989, Author's note.
- ¹⁰ Audrey R. Lowe, *A Country Childhood in the 1930's and 40's*, Newlyn Publication, Redcliffe, 2002.
- ¹¹ Esma Armstrong, *Through Belli*, [undated, unpaginated].
- ¹² Moonie Jarl [Wilf Reeves and Olga Miller], *The Legends of Moonie Jarl*, Jacaranda Press, Queensland, 1964.
- ¹³ Olga Miller, *Fraser Island Legends Retold by Olga Miller*, Jacaranda Press, Sydney, 1993, Forward.
- ¹⁴ Olga Miller, *Wook-Koo*, Moonie Jarl publications, Queensland, 2001, Cover.
- ¹⁵ Such hinterland/coastal conflicts are still reflected in today's politics - the coast man (being stronger because of better resources) continues to win the fight. A repeated Dreaming story is that of Teewah (the hinterland rainbow man) and Burwilla (the coast wind giant) fighting over the maiden Murrawar. They fought for days causing a tremendous storm - the beach and sand dunes eroded away, leaving only steep cliffs stained with the colours of the rainbow. The loser, Teewah's body forms the coloured sands and the fight is followed by a long drought with no rainbow. (See Alf Wood, *Along the Sunshine Coast, Dreamtime to now*, Booralong Publications, Brisbane, 1988. Enlarged from *Tales of the Sunshine Coast* (1982); Hector Holthouse, *Illustrated History of the Sunshine Coast*, Reed, New South Wales, 1982.). The similar Ninderry/Coollum fight over Maroochy might be a rare exception to hinterland loss since both men suffer the wrath of the gods.
- ¹⁶ Elizabeth McDonald, *Wildflowers of the Wallum*, Booralong Publications, Queensland, 1980, p.12.
- ¹⁷ Harold W Caulfield, 'Forward' in McDonald, p.5.
- ¹⁸ Kathleen McArthur, *The Bush in Bloom: A Wildflower Artist's Year in Paintings and Words*, Kangaroo Press, Sydney, 1982, p.8.
- ¹⁹ *ibid.*
- ²⁰ McArthur, 'Bloodwood', p.11.
- ²¹ Michael Gloster, *The Shaping of Noosa*, The Blue Group, Noosa, 1977.
- ²² Nancy Cato, *The Noosa Story: A Study in Unplanned Development*, Jacaranda Press, Brisbane, 1979.
- ²³ Tom Griffiths, *Forest of Ash: An Environmental History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001.
- ²⁴ Greg Denning, *Beach Crossings: Voyaging across Times, Cultures and Self*, Miegunyah Press (Melbourne University Publishing), Melbourne, 2004.
- ²⁵ Mark McKenna, *Looking for Blackfellas' Point*, University of New South Wales Press, New South Wales, 2002.
- ²⁶ Peter Read, *Belonging: Australians, Place and Aboriginal Ownership*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000.
- ²⁷ Martin Thomas, *The Artificial Horizon: Imagining the Blue Mountains*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2003.
- ²⁸ Perhaps McKenna or Thomas, although both spend much of their time in nearby cities - Canberra and Sydney respectively.
- ²⁹ John Mathew, *Two Representative Tribes of Queensland*, T Fisher, Unwin, London, 1910, pp.xxii-xxiii.
- ³⁰ Elaine Brown, 'Nineteenth Century Cooloola: A History of Human Contact and Environmental Change', unpublished MA Thesis, University of Queensland, 1995, Abstract.
- ³¹ Bruce Elder, *Blood on the Wattle: Massacres and Maltreatment of Aboriginal Australians since 1788* (1988), New Holland Publishers, Sydney, 1998.

³² The Statute reads: 'No Licenses be granted for the occupation of any Lands within the said District in which the Bunya or Banyan Bunya Tree is found. ... remove any person who may be in the unauthorised occupation of Land whereon the said Bunya or Banyan Bunya Trees are to be found. His Excellency has also directed that no Licenses to cut Timber be granted within the said Districts'. Elder, p.115.

³³ I prefer the term Bunya Festival over the more commonly used Bunya feasts. To me, these three yearly events had the flavour of the Woodford Folk Festival. They were a ritual opportunity to camp together on someone else's land full of plenty to share news, performances, music, dance, and food.

³⁴ This poisoning is supported by missionaries and by Stephen Simpson, Crown Lands Commissioner, in reports to the Colonial Secretary, based on evidence from Bracewell. Simpson writes that at a meeting of a great number of Blacks belonging to different tribes, a story was told by Blacks from the Bunya Scrubs to the south about a group of thirty men, women, and children dying. Their death is keenly described: 'swelling of the head, foaming of the mouth, violent retching and thirst, trembling of the limbs and sudden prostration. These tribes vowed vengeance'. Quoted in Stephen Jones, *Four Bunya Seasons in Baroon 1842-1845, Vagabond Ventures, Maleny, 1997, p.12.*

³⁵ Elder, p.119.

³⁶ Arsenic poisoning was not uncommon. There are many examples. Raymond Evans writes of fifty or sixty Aborigines being killed by poisoned food at Whitesides Station on the Upper Pine River at around the same time. Raymond Evans, Kay Saunders and Kathryn Cronin, *Race Relations in Colonial Queensland: A History of Exclusion, Exploitation and Extermination* (1975), Queensland University Press, St Lucia, 1993. Other more direct forms of murder were commonly disguised as Kangaroo shooting or Dispersal. One pictorial subaltern record from Cooktown is a lead pencil sketch by Oscar, a young Aboriginal boy, showing four Native Police shooting at three wounded and fleeing Aborigines. The drawings are held in the National Museum of Australia and are discussed in Kim McKenzie and Carol Cooper, 'Eyewitness? Drawings by Oscar of Cooktown' in Ian McCalman, Alexander Cook and Andrew Reeves (eds), *Gold: Forgotten Histories and Lost Objects of Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, pp.157-163. Oscar's forty drawings were sent by Henry Glissan, manager of a Rockhampton cattle station, to Melbourne friends as children's entertainment in March 1899. Other pictures include 'Some Maytown Swells Doing the Block' (three white women in full paraphernalia and three bearded white men with pipes), 'Palmer Blacks Preparing for Battle' (some twenty two Aboriginal men each holding a woomera and numerous spears), 'Camooweal White Ladies' (five in hats and bustle dresses in blue and one with red polka dots, possibly holding handbag, parasol or handkerchief), and 'Police Boys doing Duty (Lynch Law)' (three Native Police with red boots, caps and epaulets, standing around a tree to which two Aboriginal men are chained by hands, feet, and necks). Oscar drew and Henry captioned the drawings to give this unique documentation of north Queensland colonisation.

³⁷ Christine Halse, *A Terribly Wild Man*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2002, pp.82-85.

³⁸ Cato, p.3.

³⁹ Bull, p.13.

⁴⁰ Not least of which, in Elizabeth Povinelli's words, is the white longing to 'ghost' an Indigenous mythic past. See Elizabeth Povinelli, *The Cunning of Recognition: Indigenous Alterities and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism*, Dale University Press, Durham & London, 2002.

⁴¹ Here is yet another reason why Australia is a long way from a more multicoloured multiculturalism. The focus on black and white conflict means we often ignore, for instance, the long history of the Chinese or the role of the post-colonial immigrant.

⁴² See Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, vol. 1, Columbia University Press, New York, 1996, 'Introduction: Between Memory and History'.

⁴³ Constance Campbell Petrie, *Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland (dating from 1837). Recorded by his daughter, Watson, Ferguson & Co., Brisbane, 1904.*

⁴⁴ Brett Green, *Tales of a Warrior: Legends and Stories about the Kabi Speaking Peoples of the Gympie/Cooloolo/ Fraser Island/and Sunshine Coast Regions of S.E. Queensland (Transcribed from the Diaries and Notes of John and James Green 1840 to 1938)*, 6 vols, Self-published, Gympie, 1996.

⁴⁵ Partly I think because of four explicit descriptions of sex, relying upon a claimed Indigenous use of a Viagra precursor – information not usually incorporated into the accepted texts of history books. Green's ancestors also happen to have met every person mentioned in other histories (convenient but possible) and their journals are perhaps overly comprehensive. See the debate 'The Green Diaries' in *The Gympie Times*, Saturday, 25 April 1998, pp.4-7. Historian Elaine Brown argues that they are 'highly improbable', while an elder Green family member offers a different memory, claiming that the ancestral Greens never visited Queensland. Green claims the accusation of fraud is politically motivated. In any case, the information is well researched and provides an alternative interpretation of history (whether actually true or not).

⁴⁶ This is a very complex question. Perhaps the fact that Petrie has been privileged by historians as the acceptable text should make it suspect in subaltern terms. However, she sympathetically champions an Indigenous voice. Green has been more accepted by amateur locals (both Indigenous and settler) than by historians or institutions, although, and perhaps because, he records a much more colonialist attitude. Green epitomises the wild – a rough and rollicking voice that is too often missing in strait-laced histories. Ironically, he does not serve the current Indigenous agenda of mainstream historians; perhaps his records of a (sometimes appalling) colonial attitude have now become the unheard subaltern voice? Petrie's history is popularly preferred over the nastier and more violent conflicts recorded by others. In his history of black/white relations in the hinterland of the Sunshine Coast, Raymond Evans, obliquely referring to Petrie, concludes that conflicts have become 'agreeably shrouded' under the stories of Bunya feasts. Raymond Evans, 'Against the Grain. Colonialism

and the Demise of the Bunya Gatherings, 1839–1939', *Queensland Review*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2002, pp.47-64 & 60. However, the Bunya festivals can also recover subaltern history, as Evan Mackenzie's 1842 tale (discussed previously) demonstrates. In the murky details, a clear definition of the subaltern is bedevilled!

⁴⁷ Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Reconciliation and its Historiography: Some Preliminary Thoughts', *UTS Review*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2001, pp.6-16 & 11.

⁴⁸ Haydie Gooder and Jane Jacobs, 'Belonging and Non-Belonging: The Apology in a Reconciling Nation' in Alison Blunt and Cheryl McEwan (eds), *Postcolonial Geographies: Writing Past Colonialism*, Continuum, New York & London, 2002, p.213.

⁴⁹ Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History*, Faber & Faber, London, 1987, p.43.

⁵⁰ Les Murray, 'Louvres' in P.R. Eaden and F.H. Mares (eds), *Mapped but not Known: The Australian Landscape of the Imagination: Essays and Poems presented to Brian Elliott LXXV, 11 April 1985*, Wakefield Press, South Australia, 1986, p.221.

⁵¹ Simon Ryan, *The Cartographic Eye: How Explorers Saw Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996.

⁵² E.H. Carr, *What is History?*, Penguin Books, London, 1961, pp.26-27.

⁵³ The closest environmentalists come to this understanding is through a sort of green postmodernism, in which land is 'the fundamental yet never fixed plane of immanence on which the constitution of multiplicities takes place'. See G Deleuze and F Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, B Massumi (trans.), Althone, London, 1988, p.34. Land still needs some fundamental (if never fixed) ground and I have to wonder if the 'plane of immanence' is just a postmodern-ism for reality.

⁵⁴ Rodney Hall, *Just Relations*, Penguin Books, Australia, 1982, pp.19-20.

⁵⁵ McDonald, p.12.

⁵⁶ W.J.T. Mitchell (ed.), *Landscape and Power*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1994, p.10.

⁵⁷ For a general discussion of these issues, see Christopher Stone, *Should Trees have Standing?: Toward Legal Rights for Natural Objects*, W Kaufmann, California, 1974.

⁵⁸ The written story may be an insufficient mechanism to capture the voice of the land, to describe ways of knowing land, or to describe a more active landscape (at least in the history of written story to date on the Sunshine Coast). Other ways to hear land might combine oral traditions and more creative cultural and artistic practices into a form of story through the use of metaphor and land myth. There is an important place for mythology, oral traditions, art and ritual, in land story. These issues form part of my current PhD research. See also Tamsin Kerr, 'As if Bunyips mattered ... Cross-Cultural Mytho-Poetic Beasts in Australian Subaltern Planning', in Elizabeth Hartrick, Richard Hogg and Sian Supski (eds), *Write/Up: New Talents*, Australian Research Institute and University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 2004, pp.14-27.

⁵⁹ Dennis Lee, 'Cadence, Country, Silence: Writing in Colonial Space', *Boundary*, vol. 23, no.1, 1974, pp.151-168.

The Land of Stories is a series of children's fiction, adventure and fantasy books written by American author, actor and singer Chris Colfer. The first book, *The Wishing Spell*, was released on July 17, 2012. The sixth and final book was published in July 2017. Chris is writing many other books as well. During a live video chat, he said that he is working on a prequel series. The books are described by Colfer as a "modern day fairy tale", following twins Alex and Conner Bailey as they fall from the