The North of the South

By Wayne Bradshaw

A little over five years ago, I was in the middle of a PhD candidature in literature at James Cook University in northern Queensland. With the relative security of a scholarship, my submission deadline felt like an eternity away and I had the good fortune of being part of a lively cohort of doctoral candidates in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Together, we had reintroduced annual postgraduate conferences in the college and established weekly meetings on the Townsville campus where eager researchers gathered to discuss ideas, politics and literature. At the college level, there were regular critical theory workshops, reading circles and seminar sessions. I encountered impressive and generous minds—many of whom have appeared in volumes of this journal. These were times before deep funding cuts and a global pandemic ravaged universities across the country. I worry that a new generation of postgraduate students—particularly those at regional institutions—won't be afforded the time, funding or intellectual climate to take risks like starting conferences or establishing postgraduate little magazines like this one. Out of more than mere vanity, I hope the little stone we have thrown continues to roll on for a while longer until it is replaced with something more

fitting for the times. This short essay purports to provide a retrospective of the first three volumes of *Sūdō Journal* and an assessment of its place among the various journals and little magazines of northern Queensland that have been published over the decades. It is adapted from a presentation I delivered on this subject at the James Cook University College of Arts, Society and Education postgraduate conference in 2020.

Over fifty years ago, John Heuzenroeder began an essay about Townsville's cultural

development—and lack thereof—by observing that "[t]he trouble is you promise to write something for somebody, and then—what is there to say? Something about Townsville? All right then. After all, they don't have to print it. Do they?" (34). Well, Heuzenroeder's essay did make it into print, in the very first number of *Literature in North Queensland*, better known as *LiNQ*, in 1971.[1] His sentiments reflect not only the long history of punters bemoaning the fact that there are, as he suggested, "no books in the library, no facilities on the campus, and no student revolution to put them there" (35), but also the perceived challenges that have historically faced north Queensland's efforts to establish and maintain its own literary life. The observations that follow are well outside the scope of my own research; I don't claim to be an expert on print culture, let alone the vagaries of little magazines in regional Australia. My doctoral research focused on manifesto writers on the other side of the world, working more than a century ago. My interest in regional literary publications is one borne out of practical concerns because I have skin in the game. The dilemmas identified by editors of the North's literary journals in the past are ones that I, like many others in the regions, am still grappling with today.

For the most part, the difficulties here are the same ones that confront literary magazines around the country; chiefly the related concerns of maintaining the quality, quantity and diversity of submissions that are received and published. I imagine that similar challenges face editors of much larger journals, even if they don't always have to worry about the *quantity* of submissions. What is unique to Australia's regional context, however, and acutely felt in northern Queensland, is the fact that, outside so-called metropolitan Australia, journals must also contend with a heightened sense of parochialism that continues to dominate the cultural consciousness. In Australia, we continue to conceive of the "North" as an aberration to be measured against a normalised "South." There is a persistent impression that in writing *for* a regional publication one should be writing *about* regional Australia. And while on one level this sense of connection to the local landscape and community can serve as a driving force for the formation of a journal, it can quickly become a liability once contributors begin to ask themselves, as John Heuzenroeder did, "what is there to say? Something about Townsville? . . . After all, they don't have to print it. Do they?" If

[1] John Mathwin Heuzenroeder taught English literature at James Cook University early in the institution's comparatively short history. His work is published in several volumes of *LiNQ*, where I first encountered them while assisting with the digitisation of the journal's back catalogue. Following his death in 1973, a memorial appeared in the pages of the journal. In it, Ross Smith—another notable figure in the history of James Cook University—observed that Heuzenroeder had "taught at Adelaide Boys' College, Western Teachers' College, the University of Adelaide, James Cook University of North Queensland, and the University College of Newcastle" (6). He had died at the age of forty-one, a year older than I am at the time of writing and already far more accomplished.

Don't get me wrong, I am as thankful for the existence of *Southerly*, *Overland* and *Meanjin* as I am for the existence of the *Académie française*. These are crucially important cultural institutions, but we should not feel beholden to their model.

they are looking to sustain the publication of their journal history has shown that, at some point, they invariably do.

Some journals have handled the challenge of northern-ness remarkably well; *LiNQ* managed forty-two volumes under its own masthead, in a run that included almost ninety individual numbers. All but one was published in hard copy. Moreover, the entire back catalogue has been digitised and is available through the James Cook University Online Journal System—a feat I was lucky enough to have been able to help with. Another publication, *eTropic*, is an online, open-access journal founded by Professor Stephen Torre in 2002, which continues to produce new numbers regularly. In its own words, "*eTropic* disseminates new research from Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences and allied fields on the variety and interrelatedness of nature, culture, and society in the tropics" (*eTropic* np). Both *eTropic* and *LiNQ* have a history of peer-review and *eTropic* is doing a stand-up job of making the best of a bad lot for national literary journals. At the time of writing, it is the most highly-ranked Australian literary journal on Scimago—make of that what you will. *eTropic* casts a wide net in terms of submissions, and regularly publishes articles on architecture, literature, sociology and anthropology, alongside a selection of creative fiction and nonfiction. It's guiding theme is a preoccupation with the tropical world, whether that be Latin America, Equatorial Africa, or even northern Australia.

Other journals, however, have not weathered the tropical climate quite so admirably. One example is *Expression*, which began as the newsletter of the Writers Guild of Queensland in 1962, before it rebranded itself as the quarterly publication, *Expression Australasia* in 1966, relocated to South Australia in 1969 and ultimately ceased publication in 1974. Another is the unfortunately-named *Westlife*, with the equally unfortunate subtitle of "The Quarterly Magazine from the Back-Country." It primarily published prose nonfiction and bush poetry criticism along with some original stories and poems. In the intervening years, most records of the journal's existence have disappeared. Other northern literary magazines and journals that have fallen to the ravages of time and cultural climate are *North*, which ran from 1963 to 1968 and *In Print*, which was established in 1972 but, like *Westlife*, has since faded into the shadows of cultural memory.

In 1972 another literature scholar at James

Cook University, Cheryl Taylor, surveyed this landscape and made a rather dire assessment of the history of northern literary publications. She proposed that:

> It is an unfortunate fact of literature that little magazines, particularly when they are at the teething stage, are more often expressive of the egos than they are of the talents of their contributors. This fact holds true for most of the magazines that have been produced in North Queensland in the past ten years. I must confess to having read them with a degree of fascination, but it was of the sort which a budgerigar feels for a taipan. What is bad is sometimes intriguing. (18)

It is hard to disagree with the sentiment, but I do think it deserves greater consideration and context. Rather than as an indictment, I would like to consider the "badness" of the little northern literary magazine as, in fact, its greatest strength. It is not always a good idea to measure the success of a journal by the standards of its longevity or—even worse—by its field-weighted citations.

By conventional measures it can seem like there is no real hope for regional efforts this far from the perceived hubs of Australian culture. Despite fantastic programs like *Borderlands* at Charles Darwin University, it is unlikely that there will ever be a "Northerly" to compare against *Southerly* and *Westerly*. In my mind, however, aspiring to such lofty heights is entirely the wrong vision of what literary publications at their best are capable of. As I have already mentioned, my own research was focused on late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Europe and Britain, during the great flourishing of avant-garde and modernist literary journals. Notions of establishing century-old institutions were far from the minds of Symbolists when they came together to publish their own work. That most famous of modernist journals, *The Egoist*, ran for only six years. *Blast* lasted all of two issues. For these writers, editors and publishers, the literary journal was a means of bringing together the kind of writing they wanted to see in print. These journals did not fail to last; they burned brightly.

The little magazine was, and remains, a statement of collegiality, of solidarity, of mutual interest and respect. It is a chance to show off, to skirmish, to pontificate and to be bold. It defies existing standards of taste and decorum by circumventing the standards imposed by the literary institution entirely. Its very nature implies that it is "bad" literature. The last thing in the world we should want a small publication to become is an institution. It is perfectly acceptable for a journal to detonate after a few interesting volumes; in fact, it is the historical norm, and some of the very best journals have seen themselves out in their prime. I would always prefer to see a journal that is running out of steam collapse than limp on into obscurity. Even better,

it might be replaced by another small journal run by a new group of disgruntled artists, writers or students with something more interesting to say. Don't get me wrong, I am as thankful for the existence of *Southerly*, *Overland* and *Meanjin* as I am for the existence of the *Académie française*. These are crucially important cultural institutions, but we should not feel beholden to their model. And we certainly shouldn't forget the irony of a journal called *Meanjin* being based in Melbourne. The benefit of publishing in the regions is that we don't have to wring our hands about the difficulty of maintaining the quality, quantity and diversity of submissions, or the metrics of academic publishing. We can publish what we want to see published, and when we run out of that, we can get out of the way and let someone else have a go. We can stop thinking like publishing barons and start thinking like the outcasts and fringe-dwellers that southern Australians are so infatuated with portraying themselves to be. Let us just hope that we can burn brightly, if only for a little while.

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