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1 Writing Noosa's Beach: Themes of Ascent from History

2 Nick Osbaldiston¹

3 ¹ – College of Arts, Society and Education, James Cook University, Cairns Campus

4

5 Abstract

6 In this chapter, the writings of travelers to the Noosa beach are analysed using Smith's (1999)
7 theory of place. Here, Frye's (1957) literary critique which makes use of the methodological
8 tool known as themes of ascent and descent is employed in the reading of place. Using
9 historical writings that colourfully annotate adventures to Noosa especially in the 1890s, the
10 chapter demonstrates that the beach here was narrated as something to escape to from
11 modernity. However, as time has progressed, these writings have perhaps sparked the decline
12 in value of Noosa for some writers.

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14 Keywords

15 Cultural sociology; Noosa; Place; Beach; Sacred.

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34 Introduction

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36 One of the major features of Australian culture is how the coast underpins our identity with
37 place. As Booth (2001, 3) argues, the beach has become somewhat a ‘national
38 preoccupation’. Despite dwindling domestic tourism in recent times towards the coastline
39 (Franklin, Picken and Osbaldiston, 2013), the beach itself remains a powerful symbol of
40 Australian identity. This is evident especially in how Australian coastal places like Surfers
41 Paradise, Noosa, and Cairns in Queensland, Seal Bay and Cape Jarvis in South Australia, the
42 Coral Coast in Western Australia and the Surf Coast in Victoria are marketed to international
43 audiences through imagery of open beaches, leisurely pursuits and culinary delights.
44 However, the valorisation or ‘ascent’ of the beach to this status within our culture has a deep
45 history underpinning it (Booth 1991; Lenček and Bosker 1998; Osbaldiston 2018, cf. Olive,
46 2015). Our past since modernity and colonisation has written, painted and photographed the
47 coast that has constructed our present-day ideas about the beach (Dutton 1985). As Booth
48 (1991, 3) states, ‘these images, symbols, artefacts and words are neither passive nor neutral.
49 Individually and collectively they constitute lore, knowledge and systems of belief that shape
50 values and behaviours’.

51 It is argued here, and within this volume of work, that text has contributed significantly to
52 this collective imagination of the beach. Fictional accounts such as D.H. Lawrence’s
53 *Kangaroo* (1923[1970]) and Adam Gordan’s poem *The Swimmer* (1870[2007]) paint pictures
54 of the Australian coastline as sublime, imbuing feelings of both inspiration and dread. Within
55 the Australian psyche, there is a tendency to see the beach in similar fashion as both
56 somewhere to play but also somewhere dangerous where people lose lives. Contemporary
57 accounts such as Robert Drewe’s *The Bodysurfers* (1983) and more recent collection *The*
58 *True Colour of the Sea* (2018) have played on these narratives further. In the case of the latter
59 for instance, Drewe (2018) in his first short story *Dr Pacific*, provides a tale of a woman who
60 sees the beach as a place for healing and health, but butts this against another darker tale of
61 death and woe. We see in some respects the latter play out in the Australian psyche with our,
62 arguably dark tourist, pilgrimages to the shores of Gallipoli where experiences range from
63 horror through to collective reverie and patriotism (Osbaldiston and Petray, 2011).

64 Fiction however has been complimented by non-fictional accounts of Australia’s love affair
65 with the beach. This is what this chapter hopes to contribute by demonstrating how the beach

66 was understood in Noosa as a spot for relaxation, calm and importantly restoration. We can
67 see this theme in the collected works of Game and Metcalfe (2011, Metcalfe and Game,
68 2014, Game, Metcalfe and Marlin, 2013) who recount the experiences of Bondi Beach (New
69 South Wales) patrons. Within these accounts, there is a sense of connection through the
70 senses, both affective and emotional, between the individual and natural surrounds of the
71 beach. Participants in their work talk eloquently about the beach as a place for ‘energy’,
72 ‘comfort’, ‘meditation’ and ‘rhythm’ (Game and Metcalfe, 2011, 46-47). There is a belief in
73 the power of the beach to provoke rejuvenation and restoration. This becomes almost
74 ritualistic where ‘transformation is brought about by the very practices of coming down’ to
75 the beach (Metcalfe and Game, 2014, 301). Similar narratives are found in writings on people
76 who seachange (migrant for a better way of life to the beach/bush) to the coast where the
77 beach is seen as a fundamental feature in redefining life goals and ambitions (Dowling,
78 2004). The foundations for these ideals are not new, as this chapter argues. Rather they are
79 found throughout the history of European settlement, specifically with the romanticism
80 towards the beach that the English settlers transported here.

81 We should remember however, as Ellison (2014) demonstrates in her work, that Australian
82 beach spaces, even within text, are not necessarily equal places. Rather, these are tiered
83 hierarchically which is demonstrable in other locales such as Brighton in the United Kingdom
84 (Shields 1991). Of course, when it comes to place as a concept, we cannot avoid the
85 “institutionalisation of place myths” as “uneven or fractured along social cleavages” (Smith
86 1999, 16). As Smith (1999, 16) writes, “the same place (text) may embody differing
87 meanings for differing social groups (readers)”. Subsequently, disputes across these groups
88 can emerge which is evident in our contemporary history where conflicting ideas on what the
89 beach should be used for define certain places (Osbaldiston 2012, 2018). For instance, across
90 Australia there are numbers of campaigns against development, mining and even certain
91 activities like fishing which are seen as degrading to local place value (Osbaldiston 2012).

92 This unevenness in reading what the beach looks like and the types of activities it should
93 encourage is illustrated in the different types of coastal places we have. One of these, Noosa,
94 is the focal point of this chapter. This place has a unique history which is defined by a sense
95 of slowness, authenticity and the beauty of natural environment. It is often held in distinction
96 with Surfers Paradise which is seen as ugly and manufactured. This is evident especially in
97 Noosa’s anti-high rise ethos that is written into planning law today to protect the perceived
98 ‘natural’ authenticity of the place (Edwards 1998; O’Hare 1999). Noosa is seen as ‘quieter,

99 softer, more in tune with nature’ against the idea of a ‘ritzy, fast and furious atmosphere’ of
100 the Gold Coast (Bowen cited in O’Hare 1999, 89).

101 This alignment with nature, and the rejection of the modern city, is written into Noosa’s past.
102 In this chapter, I explore Noosa textually and argue using Northrop Frye (1957) and Philip
103 Smith (1999) that, as a place, this highlights how a ‘theme of ascent’ has occurred which
104 places Noosa on a quasi-sacral level against modernity more generally. Like those listed
105 above, we can see this especially in the ways visitors and locals in the area describe Noosa
106 through text. Here, words paint pictures of a place defined by natural beauty and a site for
107 ritualistic escape. I conclude by arguing that this cultural value can be diminished by the very
108 factors that attracts people to the area. Furthermore, as we move into a climate changed
109 future, the cultural values that underpin our coastal spaces are increasingly under threat.

110

111 **Reading place: a theoretical and methodological primer**

112 Understanding place and placelessness has been well discussed and theorised in the human
113 and social sciences (Lipovac 1997; Seamon and Sowers 2008). In general, the former relates
114 to the ability of the human consciousness to develop a deeper association with certain spaces
115 over others (Lipovac 1997). Conversely, placelessness refers to the breaking down of social
116 attachments to a place through the standardising influence of modernity (Relph 1976. For
117 instance, a coastal place may lose its emotional significance to people as development takes
118 over dislocating it from the previous ideals and values individuals understood it through.
119 Doing justice to the breadth and depth of work on place/placelessness within the space
120 afforded here would be impossible however. Therefore, I seek here to introduce two specific
121 areas of thought that will help conceptualise this chapter. Firstly, in unpacking place I turn to
122 the sociological work of Smith (1999) and his cultural approach to understanding
123 space/place.

124 Smith’s (1999) approach reflects both a Durkheimian hermeneutical frame where cultural life
125 is narrated by the sacred/profane binary, and structuration theory where action from
126 participants reinforces or challenges the status quo. Places are therefore sites of participation
127 and ritual, but which are underpinned by some structure. For Smith (1999), place myths in
128 particular form a large part of this:

129 The action/setting dialectic can be understood as mediated by overarching, place
130 identifying cultural structures [...] which inform the actions of ego in context [...] That is
131 to say interpersonal actions are attuned to symbolic meanings attached to a locale, and,
132 indeed, that ego's action within a place will be influenced by the myths and narratives
133 even in the absence of alter (Smith 1999, 15).

134 In short, the narratives that make up our locales (not simply spaces), are adopted into the
135 psyche unreflexively and then impact even on micro behaviour.

136 Smith (1999, 19) notes that this is most evident when moving through an area that might be
137 deemed as a 'sacred place':

138 Nearing the sacred place a penumbra of solemnity imposes itself on human behaviour,
139 inviting, for example, the hushed tones, the straightened back, silent footsteps, slow
140 breathing which in turn invoke physiological changes and direct memory towards the
141 sacred and away from the mundane.

142 Contemporary equivalents of this may well include both religious and secular sites like war
143 memorials, the burial places of charismatic leaders and dark tourism sites like Auschwitz. For
144 instance as noted earlier, the cultural weight of Gallipoli has a heavy influence on the
145 psychological and bodily responses of individuals visiting there from Australia (Osbaldiston
146 and Petray 2011).

147 However, these locales only achieve this significance through a structural element that
148 hardens it as distinct within culture. Smith (1999) turns to Frye (1957) here to help him
149 unpack this further. Here, place can be read like text and thus subjected to textual analysis.
150 For Frye (1957), much of our literature, especially those of mythology, involve a movement
151 between 'themes of ascent' and 'themes of descent'. In the case of the former, there is a
152 glorious renewal of the self and social solidarity involved in the narrative which often
153 promotes unification and freedom from individualism. Themes of descent on the other hand,
154 which often occur during the beginning phrases and sections of stories, involve restrictions,
155 loss of freedoms and a misplaced identity. It is worth citing him here briefly:

156 The general theme of descent [...] was that of growing confusion of identity and of
157 restrictions on action. There is a break in consciousness at the beginning, with analogies
158 to falling asleep, followed by a descent to a lower world which is sometimes a world of
159 cruelty and imprisonment [...] In the descent theme there is a growing isolation and
160 immobility [...] The narrative themes and images of ascent are much the same in reverse,

161 and the chief conceptions are those of *escape, remembrance, or discovery of one's real*
162 *identity, growing freedom and the breaking of enchantment*. Again there are two major
163 narrative divisions; the ascent from a lower world and the ascent to a higher world (Frye
164 1976, 129, *italics added*).

165 Within texts themselves, there are no doubt several examples that could be drawn from.
166 However, when applying this to place, it is important to dig into the earth of culture and
167 uncover what the narratives are that define locations. These emerge no doubt from multiple
168 sources and artifacts within our culture. However, in the early modern period, one of the
169 major contributors to how we understand coasts in the west, I argue, is text (cf. Shields 1991).
170 Important here of course are the Romantics such as Wordsworth who helped to reinvigorate
171 and transform the sea from a force invoking fear to one of reverie (Lenček and Bosker 1998;
172 Osbaldiston 2018). However, in the early defining period of Australia's modernity, I argue
173 that the contributions from public travel writers not only conveyed what Noosa looked like,
174 but also cemented a type of 'theme of ascent' of the area from mundane to sacred-like.

175

176 **Writing Noosa: escaping modernity**

177 Located in the Sunshine Coast region of Queensland in Australia, the locale known as Noosa
178 is today a popular lifestyle destination not only for international tourists, but also for lifestyle
179 migrants (Benson and O'Reilly 2009; Osbaldiston 2012). The place itself has a rather
180 accidental history however and was largely unnoticed in Australia's early colonial days.
181 James Cook, who sailed past the present-day location in 1770, landed further up the coastline,
182 and found the area full 'of green tree ants' and was 'harried by clouds of mosquitoes' (Cato
183 1979, 7). The coastal explorer Matthew Flinders in his journeys on *The Investigator* in the
184 early 1800s also failed to locate the entrance of the Noosa River, sailing past it with the
185 observation that "no river of importance" existed in the region (cited in Estensen 2003, 107).
186 Later however, the area was the site for numerous accidental encounters. The most infamous
187 is the rescue of Eliza Fraser (wife of Captain James Fraser of the shipwrecked *Stirling Castle*
188 which landed aground on the now Fraser Island) in 1836 (Brown 1993; Schaffer 1991).
189 Following this event, anecdotal and official reports of timber in the location were fed back to
190 the struggling Queensland colony and eventually timber-getters found their way to the region
191 in the 1860s felling large trees for shipment back to England (Brown 1993; Edwards 1998).

192 In the meantime, the discovery of gold in Gympie in 1867 by James Nash presented
193 significant opportunities for industry turning the inland township into a significant industrial
194 center. During this Gold Rush period, entrepreneurs within the Noosa and the adjacent
195 Tewantin area began to notice a need to produce a place for escape both from Brisbane and
196 Gympie. It is very important to recognise that during the mid to late 1800s, a combination of
197 the Native Police and colonial land use law effectively removed the local Gubbi Gubbi
198 indigenous peoples, thus transferring Noosa to European colonial interests (Adams 2004;
199 Osbaldiston 2018). Unfortunately there is no room to explore this in depth here.

200 This paved the way for boarding lodges such as *Bay View (Halse Lodge today)* and *Laguna*
201 *House* which was constructed in the late 1800s on the same site where today the famed
202 Hastings Street exists. These facilities, combined with the increases in transportation available
203 to both Brisbane and Gympie residents, gave impetus to visitation to the area. It was during
204 this period that reports of the natural beauty of the beach and coast were inked into
205 newspapers both in Gympie and Brisbane through travel logs. In particular, early on a
206 comparative theme developed which situates Noosa's value above other available beaches.
207 For instance, a visitor to the area from Brisbane recounts his experience in the following
208 excerpt;

209 Noosa [...] is well sheltered from the south-east winds by the "South Head" [...] a
210 sand-spit which forms a natural breakwater, *being a continuation of the magnificent*
211 *sand beach* stretching away to the north as far as the eye can follow it, with *the blue*
212 *Pacific rolling in right glorious style*. Oh, tell me not of Sandgate, after this, and its
213 *monotonous expanse of muddy salt water* which people are compelled to accept as the
214 sea, forsooth! Nor of Cleveland, *with its mean, desolate fore-shore* and nothing else
215 worth mentioning (*The Telegraph* 1876, 5, *italics added*).

216 Embedded in this excerpt then we see the cultural coding of other beaches (found near
217 Brisbane) as 'mean', 'desolate', 'muddy' and 'monotonous', whereas Noosa is narrated as
218 'magnificent' and 'glorious'. The citing of this is not insignificant, as although the fledgling
219 Brisbane colony existed on the coastline, the admiration of the natural beauty of Noosa's
220 beach in comparison to these other places reflects a 'theme of ascent' on one side, and a
221 'theme of descent' on the other. In other words, a binary opposition is set up between Noosa
222 and the rest, pitting magnificent against mundane, glorious against monotonous, and beautiful
223 nature against a mean and desolate landscape.

224 This coding of nature as serene and pristine carries through the other writing by travelers
225 journeying through Noosa. A recurring theme is one of a world that is separate from
226 modernity, time and place forgotten. Nature here in particular is pristine and full of colour and
227 life. Consider the following excerpt;

228 Even the pens of the greatest word-painters in the language have failed to accurately
229 transfer to paper the beauties of nature, so I am fully conscious of how miserably
230 inadequate my pen is for its purpose (*Gympie Times and Mary River Gazette* 1898,
231 8).

232 The writer immediately positions the natural surrounds of Noosa as surreal and exquisitely
233 beautiful. They continue;

234 A narrow strip of glistening sand that is delightfully smooth and firm walking stretches
235 away on either hand. To the right it merges into a rocky point that runs out like the horn
236 of a crescent. To the left it runs away in a wide semi-circle of several miles in length.
237 From its extreme end a bold headland rises sheer out of the sea, and runs out and out until
238 it seems to blend with the unfathomable blue, and is lost in a veil of shimmering haze.
239 That is the outline: but to fill in the picture is well night impossible, because it is
240 continually changing in sympathy with the light and the state of the atmosphere (*Gympie
241 Times and Mary River Gazette* 1898, 8).

242 The narrative presented here is one that positions the natural beauty colourfully but also
243 underneath this is a sense of emptiness. The author does not explicitly state so, but hidden in
244 this message is one of untouched paradise. This idea, of beach uncluttered by the artefacts of
245 modernity, permeates cultural values of the coast to this day within the promotional material
246 marketing some of Australia's coastal townships (Osbaldiston 2012). It sets up the beach as a
247 place of refuge, away from modernity's stressful and cluttered lifestyles. For early moderns,
248 the beach was a haven from the dirty and risky industrial/colonial modern period; a place of
249 forgetting, albeit momentarily.

250 This is evident in another travel writer's experiences in the Noosa sunshine. They write;

251 After an absence of some years I made up my mind to again renew acquaintance with the
252 sanatorium, Noosa – the veritable queen of the Southern watering places – whose
253 recuperative qualities, however, are not as widely known as they should be. In the 'off'
254 season the inhabitants (of Noosa) *lead an almost ideal life – the world forgetting, by the
255 world forgot* – this *idealistic stage* being only broken in upon by sundry travelers at lengthy
256 intervals (*Gympie Times and Mary River Gazette* 1896a, 3, *italics added*).

257 From this perspective, Noosa appears as a place left behind in the modern push towards
258 industrialisation. This extravagant writing does not, however, recognise that the area itself
259 was widely depopulated of indigenous trees and peoples. As noted above, the colonisation of
260 the region removed these elements and created a pathway for a new type of Brighton on the
261 coast for Europeans to escape to. Over time, this has led to the eventual commercialisation of
262 the location built on this historical themes of ascent which for some writers caused the demise
263 of Noosa itself. However, we cannot overstate the importance of the beach for these historical
264 forebears – a ‘world’ forgotten and an ‘idealistic stage’.

265 The virtues of sea-bathing and coastal visiting were, of course, well revered during this time
266 period, especially in Europe and the United Kingdom (Lenček and Bosker 1998). Visits to the
267 coast, initially activities for the bourgeois, however, were rationalised events where one could
268 participate in a range of activities to acquire all the health and well-being benefits the seaside
269 offered. Lenček and Bosker (1998, 86) expand on this throughout their work, highlighting that
270 the resort was ‘an idealised and sanitised microcosm of the world of leisured aristocracy [...]’
271 Eden was parceled out among the hours of the day with the pragmatic precision of a railroad
272 timetable’. As the beach was opened up further to the masses, it became a focus for critique,
273 in which ‘scorn and revulsion’ specifically around the middle-classes and their activities, as
274 well as the morality of female bathing, was abundant (Corbin 1994, 279; Shields 1991;
275 Lenček and Bosker 1998). This is what we might claim as a ‘theme of descent’ specifically
276 for the upper elites. Nonetheless, the beach and seaside were both romanticised, positioned as
277 healthy and importantly as a site for refreshment from industrialisation for the rest of society
278 (Corbin 1994; Shields 1991).

279 While European coastal resorts required the elites to popularise the movement to the beach,
280 the story of Australian beaches is less elitist, and this is also the case in Noosa. Here, it was
281 the working class, especially those from the goldfields in Gympie, who defined the beach for
282 the rest of society. Edwards (cited in Adam 2004, 180) makes this clear by suggesting that, at
283 one point, locals were “agitating for a railway to Tewantin (near Noosa) so that the miners
284 might go to the sea”. In this case, the working and middle classes were mingled together. Both
285 were seeking refreshment. As Smith (1999) notes in his work (discussed above), the impact of
286 places with high cultural value is felt both cognitively and physiologically, producing micro-
287 changes that reinforce the sacred. This can be seen in the following from one of the writers
288 above:

289 If the pallid city man (sic) who tries a course of Noosa does not return with mind and
290 body *refreshed, and reinvigorated, and feeling physically, mentally, and morally better,*
291 then he can conclude that there is something wrong with the system, and he had better hie
292 himself to a hospital without delay (*Gympie Times and Mary River Gazette* 1898, 8,
293 *italics added*).

294 Written into the narratives of early visitors to the Noosa beach, therefore, is an implied belief
295 in the benefits of quasi-ritualistic visitation as important for the body, mind and spirit. While
296 seclusion was a significant drawcard, others write about the beauties of the crowd
297 experiencing the beach collectively. The sacred beach is a place where all are welcome, all
298 experience beauty and all are joyful (cf. Ellison 2014). As another writer notes, the virtue of
299 increasing opportunities for others to participate in visiting Noosa on weekends is found in the
300 ability for the beach to ‘build them up for their toil as nothing else could do!’ (*Gympie Times*
301 and *Mary River Gazette* 1896b, 3). This author then cites Göethe in the following;

302 From poor mean homes – from consuming toil,

303 Laborious – from the work-yard and the shop

304 From the imprisonment of walls and roofs

305 And the oppression of confining streets

306 All are abroad – all happy in the sun.

307 Look, only look, with gaiety how active

308 Both young and old disperse themselves!

309 How the wide water, far as we can see

310 Is joyous with innumerable boats!

311 This is the people’s very heaven on earth

312 Where high and low in pleasure all unite (*Gympie Times and Mary River Mining Gazette*
313 1896b, 3).

314 In such a view, access to the beach is not to be restricted or privatised, but opened up for all to
315 enjoy. In doing so, the idea of social solidarity is also embedded in place. In this way, the
316 Noosa beach can be read as producing both individual but also collective effervescence.

317 This ‘theme of ascent’ therefore is, therefore, coded around the natural beauty of the Noosa
318 area, but also the associated moral and soulful virtues the place provokes. For Smith (1999),

319 these sorts of locales are often associated with the ‘themes of descent’ of other places.
320 Specifically in this setting, the city/townships where industrial modernity was accelerating
321 were seen as more mundane and, therefore, escape from modernisation could be afforded by
322 the beach. It stands to reason, then, that attempts to ensure the distinction between the two are
323 important for the maintenance of these narratives. This is especially difficult in the case of
324 Australian beaches, where modern progress such as transportation appeased demand for
325 domestic tourism, and thus opened up the coast to the masses. What follows is a common
326 theme of increased demand for services, development and eventually whole cities established
327 behind and even on sand dunes. Noosa is not much different for some writers. This once
328  tranquil and undisturbed beach is now the site of significant development and tourist
329 infrastructure.

330 Of all those who write on Noosa, perhaps none has been more critical than Nancy Cato
331 (1979). Cato writes passionately about the rapid decline of Noosa’s cultural value, criticising
332 especially property developers and local government. We can see within her writings a type of
333 ‘theme of descent’ as Noosa’s once natural beauty is overcome with the artefacts of
334 modernity. Unlike the optimism of previous writers, the increasing numbers of visitors and
335 the ensuing development have effectively destroyed what was special about Noosa. Cato
336 writes polemically about this in the following;

337 The increase in incomes and in private car and boat ownership, more leisure time, more
338 caravans [...] mean that hundreds of thousands of city people set off for the coast by road
339 each year. Picnickers unthinkingly trample down the sea-verge wildflowers and break the
340 crests of dunes, scattering their glass and plastic rubbish, their milk cartons and
341 newspapers. This once remote and beautiful area, populated by a few fisherman and
342 farmers, has *deteriorated visually and aesthetically*. However it is not only tourism that is
343 to blame. It is our *own apathy, our selfishness and greed, our indifference* to what is
344 happening to our environment, that have led to the rape of Noosa [...] It is too late now to
345 undo what has been done (Cato 1979, 132, *italics added*).

346 Indeed, as can be seen in the above quote, there is a sense of a ‘theme of descent’ from
347 Noosa’s high value, natural heritage and distinction from the city, into a confused place lost to
348 capitalism and modern apathy. In short, what Cato (1979) reflects here is the uglification of
349 Noosa (Boyd 1961), the transferral from a sacred to a mundane place, and a blurring of the
350 codes between city and beach. This is the bitter reality of our history where the very cultural
351 foundations that drew people into areas for ritualistic escape have been degraded through

352 overdevelopment and population growth (Osbaldiston 2012). While not all would agree with
353 Cato about the destruction of Noosa, a theme can be identified within her writing which
354 ‘descends’ Noosa down into the swamp of a modernity which is seen as individualistic,
355 greedy and destructive. As she concludes, “we can only look back and mourn the passing of
356 that picturesque beach” (132).

357 In addition to development as a theme of descent, there is also discussion of the
358 environmental degradation of the area. Cato (1979) for instance highlights the impact of storm
359 events on the local beach. In the 1967-68 summer season in particular, there was a set of
360 cyclonic events which hit the Noosa area ‘whipping up huge waves’ (71). As a consequence
361 of this, the beach was eroded significantly exposing some ‘dark, coffee coloured sandstone’
362 which was unsightly in comparison to the once iconic beach (71). Unfortunately, local
363 residents also saw this as a threat to the tourist infrastructure found just behind the dunes. In a
364 panic, the local council and residents dumped rocks along the foreshore to protect their
365 properties. The unintended consequence of doing so was that the beach was no longer able to
366 successfully regenerate as sand sediment transport was hindered by the rock wall (Coughlan
367 1989). Following this, the beach suffered dramatically for some time impacting greatly on
368 ‘the economic viability of the area through a reduction of tourists’ (Coughlin 1989).

369 Cato (1979) draws upon this in her work further to demonstrate how human hand has
370 degraded Noosa. Using another local writer’s thoughts that ‘Noosa beach was not destroyed
371 fire, flood, storm, tempest of other act of God’, she reminds us that Noosa’s beach was
372 destroyed (in her eyes) by modern intervention and human hands. Since her writing however,
373 Noosa Shire has put significant resources in to maintain the beach including a multimillion
374 dollar submarine sand recycler which sustains the beach’s theme of ascent. Despite this,
375 however, we cannot ignore the looming spectre of climate change and associated impacts.
376 This includes the potential loss of space through sea-level rise. In a place like Noosa, which is
377 so close to the sea, the beach one day may well be reclaimed by the sea again via the
378 unintentional actions of humans. Climate change indeed may well produce a different beach
379 space, a new theme of descent.

380 **Conclusion**

381 This chapter attempts to argue is that through the writings of the early modern visitors to
382 Noosa, a ‘theme of ascent’ rose where the beach in particular was seen as vital for the
383 refreshment of people living in, and with, the harsh realities of modernity. Colonialism

384 brought with it all the important industries of its time including mining and Noosa became
385 seen as a place of refuge, a place to rejuvenate the soul and spend some time amongst pristine
386 nature. Writers at this time who wrote travel logs for newspapers were keen to publicise the
387 virtues of Noosa and provided some of the codes that began to make up our contemporary
388 sense of this place. Noosa, narrated by its natural beauty and the impact this was understood
389 to have on the soul, was set apart from other places including the relatively distasteful beaches
390 of nearby Brisbane. Soon, both the middle classes and lower classes were clambering into the
391 township on weekends to escape into what can be read as another world.

392 Like any place in modernity, the seemingly ever-expansive nature of technology meant that
393 Noosa was no longer a secluded island. What I have argued here is that underpinning the
394 desire of people to make their way to Noosa was, and is, the way it was constructed through
395 ‘themes of ascent’ from a variety of sources including travel writers. Yet, as narratives from
396 Cato (1979) highlight, this is perhaps changing with overdevelopment and other artefacts of
397 modernity producing ‘themes of descent’ for the location.

398 Writers of the beach need not shy away from these themes. Often within the social sciences,
399 there is a tendency to rebuke such thinking as normative and aligned with humanist
400 approaches that do not appreciate that the beach is socially constructed. While we can admit,
401 and this is clear in the story of Noosa, that the beach is the production of cultural coding
402 through various mediums such as writing, this does not mean that those codes are meaningless
403 for individuals. We make sense of our places through them, and they hold deep symbolic
404 value collectively and individually (Smith 1999).

405 We should also be mindful (as noted earlier) of one large theme of descent that looms over
406 coastal places, climate change. Increasing knowledge in this space about the future
407 vulnerability of our beaches through sea-level rise and the potential loss of the physical place,
408 means that we should be forward thinking as well to promote a deeper consideration about
409 what we want our beaches for, and what we want them to be. Our past cultural coding of the
410 beach has led to present day realities – significant chunks of our coasts are populated with not
411 only people, but also expensive infrastructures. Opening up the public to imaginative
412 templates and writings of future coastal impacts of climate change, fictional or non-fictional,
413 could help us make decisions now that will mitigate future disaster loss.

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