



BlackWords 5th Anniversary Celebration and Symposium

Friday, 19 October: Avid Reader Bookshop, Boundary Street, West End.

Time: 6.00 p.m. for a 6.30 p.m. start 8.00 p.m. finish

The event will celebrate five years of *BlackWords* and almost 25 years of the David Unaipon Award which has brought so many wonderful writers to light.

Some recent award winners will read, and the UQP Unaipon eBook Collection will be launched.

Saturday, 20 October – UQ Art Museum – BlackWords Symposium

Time: 8.30 a.m. for an 8.45 a.m. start. 7.00 p.m. finish MC – Kerry Kilner

8.45 Kerry Kilner – welcome and acknowledgements

8.50 Welcome to Country – Uncle Joe Kirk

8.55 Welcome to the Symposium – Dr Anita Heiss, Convenor

9.00 *Keynote address:* Melissa Lucashenko

9.45 *Session one: Writing Us*

Speakers: Dr Sandra R Phillips; Ellen Van Neerven-Currie; Dr Anita Heiss

Chair: Dr Peter Minter

10.45 Morning tea

11.15 *Session two: Writing the Record*

Speakers: Dr Jeanine Leane; Irene Howe; Natalie Harkin

Chair: Kerry Kilner

12.30 Lunch Book selling and signing

1.30 *Session three: Writing and Editing*

Speakers: Dr Peter Minter; J. Linda McBride-Yuke; Simone Tur; Faye Blanche

Chair: Dr Jeanine Leane

2.30 **Afternoon tea**

3.00 **Tour of the UQ Art Museum's *Desert Country* exhibition with Gillian Ridsdale**

3.30 *Session four: Writing Across Land and Genre*

Speakers: Bruce Pascoe; Dr Jared Thomas; Wesley Enoch

Chair: Dr Sandra R Philips

4.30 – 5.30 Australian Children's Laureate Boori Pryor in conversation with Dr Anita Heiss.

5.30 – 7.00 Wrap-up by Dr Peter Minter, followed by:

Closing drinks, readings, and emcee artist Kayemtee.

The Co-Op bookshop will run a bookselling counter all day.

Find out more and register to attend this free event at:

www.austlit.edu.au/BlackWords

To explore *BlackWords*, go to www.austlit.edu.au/BlackWords and enter user ID: bwrc Password: symp

We gratefully acknowledge the generous sponsorship of the following organisations:

EMSAH

www.emsah.uq.edu.au

The School of English, Media Studies and Art History, UQ



AustLit www.austlit.edu.au and BlackWords www.austlit.edu.au/BlackWords

**UQ
ART MUSEUM**

The UQ Art Museum <http://artmuseum.uq.edu.au/>

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Saturday, 20 October – 9.00 a.m.
Venue: UQ Art Museum

'Writing as Decolonising Practice – we are the ones we've been waiting for.' The Baugul Gulgan

Melissa Lucashenko

Australian author

Abstract: We blackfellas today are modern peoples in perpetual struggle with neo-colonial Australia. It is a central task of First Nations writers to address this situation with honesty, with courage, and with hope. We live in all parts of Australia; we speak many languages, including English. Most of us interact daily with the dominant Western culture which is, and will always be, our shadow. The largest Aboriginal community today is in Blacktown – an urban community in Western Sydney.

How will we remain Indigenous to our countries – even radically Indigenous – in this context? How will we protect our hearts and minds from the stench of racism? How will we best pursue the goal of mental decolonisation, alongside economic justice and recognition of political sovereignty? The Dakota intellectual T. Mayheart Dardar, responding to the work of Dr Martin Luther King, has written that 'Indigenous thought is merely the clear, cognitive expression of a human being.' To be Indigenous, in other words, is to be fully human, and to be connected to others who are the same. Yet at nearly every turn, Aboriginal people in Australia are told today that we are less than human. Our humanity is defined away by white onlookers as inferior. Our rights are trampled upon by paternalistic government; worse, we are still, sometimes, taught to despise ourselves, and to despise an interpretation of Aboriginal culture which is so warped as to be a slander on our people.

Well, I refuse this slander utterly. My Yugambeh Bundjalung ancestors lived sumptuous, profound, moral and sustainable lives in this place for millennia, and I intend that my descendants do the same. The task, then, is clearly to imagine this future, and to write about other First Nations people on the same *baugal gulgan*, the same Good Road. This task requires vigilance, and discipline, and a willingness to put the story first. These are small prices for writers to pay for extracting our humanity out of the hands of the *binung goonj*. Small price to pay to avoid becoming like those with small, shrivelled hearts and tainted minds, who seek not just to rule over us, but to destroy us utterly as First Peoples.



SESSION ONE – WRITING US
Saturday, 20 October, 9.45 a.m.
Venue: UQ Art Museum
Chair: Dr Peter Minter

Dr Sandra R. Phillips

Independent scholar

How do varied formats of Aboriginal writing and storytelling fit into the idea of Australian literature?

Abstract: Who among us would not have heard pre-emptive reports of the ‘Death of the Author’? Famously coined by French poststructuralist Roland Barthes in 1968, 44 years later the phrase can either rouse robust theoretical debate or humorous dismissal by simple reference to examples of breathing, living, writing, walking and talking authors. Notwithstanding the obvious occasion for humour in a Symposium peopled with authors, in this presentation I would like to cut a middle path between those two responses. For Barthes, writing is a process through which ‘all identity is lost’; so it is not a bodily death the phrase refers to but a representational death. If writing is understood as a process where ‘all identity is lost’, what new lens is required to see writing as a process through which identity exists? That question motivates this presentation, and in order to find my way towards a vision of that new lens I will refer to the rise of ‘the author’ in its original Western sense and the rise of the ‘Aboriginal author’ in our post-colonising Australian context. In finding my way to that new lens I will also consider the ways the ‘Death of the Author’, which may appear an old-fashioned assumption particularly in light of the almost ceaseless celebration of the author on the writing festival circuit, still informs some contemporary literary norms.

Ellen Van Neerven-Currie

Black&write! Indigenous writing and editing project

Intern Editor

‘Genre in Aboriginal literature’

Abstract: Is there an ‘Aboriginal genre’ of writing and why are we so preoccupied with categorising Indigenous-authored fiction? There are many misconceptions of what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people write, as well as many expectations weighted on the writers. This is emphasised in Anita Heiss’ memoir *Am I Black Enough for You?* (2012) where the author writes ‘many suggested that *Sacred Cows* wasn’t really Aboriginal literature because it wasn’t about land rights, Aboriginal health, politics and so on’.

In actuality... without doubt, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors write over a range of different genres and audiences: from literary to commercial, from crime to paranormal, from contemporary to traditional and from adult to children’s fiction. These authors write about both urban and remote experiences through fiction, short stories, poetry, verse novels and picture books.

Many Indigenous writing competitions require ‘Indigenous content and sensibilities’ to be apparent in the entered work. Ellen will discuss her experiences working as an Indigenous Intern editor for a competition that does not prescribe Indigenous content and her insights of the climate of Indigenous writing today.

Dr Anita Heiss
Australian Author

'Writing us into the Story'

Abstract: Anita Heiss's paper will consider her role as an author in writing Aboriginal people into contemporary Australian fiction. With a focus on her women's and children's novels, Anita will discuss attempting to fill the void that remains in the Australian literary landscape generally, and the responses she has had to her works.



SESSION TWO – WRITING THE RECORD

Saturday, 20 October, 11.15 a.m.

Venue: UQ Art Museum

Chair: Kerry Kilner

Dr Jeanine Leane

Australian Centre for Indigenous History, Australian National University

'Threads and Secrets: Black Women re-writing history through fiction'

Abstract: This paper will explore the important and invaluable role of Aboriginal women in pre- and post-contact Australia as both custodians of culture and experience, and in the re-writing and re-presenting of the nation's history. I will draw on my first volume of poetry, *Dark Secrets After Dreaming: AD 1887-1961* (2010), which is a collection of narrative poetry in historical sequence that tells the story of Aboriginal women's experiences from the period of first contact to the era of self-determination. Inspired by anecdotal and family stories from Wiradjuri women, it moves from campfire to captivity to confinement and through continuing colonialism. I will also discuss my first work of prose, the short story cycle *Purple Threads* (2011). Set in the shifting socio-historical landscape of the 1960s and 70s in rural Australia, the narrative re-visits different historical eras, such as first contact between settlers and Aborigines in the Wiradjuri lands and the assimilation period to provide an alternative perspective on the nation's history. With particular focus on three generations of Aboriginal women, who tell their unique stories in the different historical contexts in which they lived, national myths such as equality, freedom and the 'workers' paradise' are re-written and re-presented to readers from an Aboriginal perspective. My doctoral thesis *The Whiteman's Aborigine*, which examines twentieth century non-Aboriginal representations of Aboriginal Australians, will also be discussed, as the catalyst for my poetry and prose which seeks to centralize the voices and experiences of black women in what has been to date a white male-dominated literary landscape.

Irene Howe

School of English, Media Studies and Art History, The University of Queensland

'Preserving our Indigenous Literature: the BlackWords Resource'

Abstract: Happy 5th birthday to *BlackWords*! From its infancy in 2007 when a mere 700 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers were recorded in AustLit, *BlackWords* has now matured to represent a rich record of more than 4,800 writers and storytellers today.

This unique database is a multi-faceted resource. Not only does it represent the wide-ranging records and information on the writers, storytellers, publishers, cultural organisation and groups, it is also an educational tool, a resource for study, teaching and general interest. However, another important aspect of *BlackWords* is that it is a digital tool that can aid in the preservation of the literature and stories of the Australian Indigenous peoples. Irene will discuss how *BlackWords* works and present some interesting facts about the history of Indigenous publishing and storytelling.

Natalie Harkin

Lecturer in Aboriginal Studies (University of South Australia)

'Memory in the Blood': The Poetics of (Re)Mapping Archives

Abstract: Our family archives are like maps that haunt and guide us toward paths past-travelled and directions unknown. We travel through these archives that offer up new stories and collections of data, and a brutal surveillance is exposed at the hands of the State. We gain material insight into intimate conversations, letters, behaviours and movements, juxtaposed with categorizations of people, places, landscapes and objects. These records are our memories and lives; material, visceral, flesh and blood. The State wounds and our records bleed. I travel through my own Nanna's records and recognise we have never lived outside the State, and this very act of recognition continues the wounding; my blood memory. State acts of surveillance, recording and archiving had the power to place our family stories in the public domain, or obliterate stories within a broader history of erasure; filed away, silent and hidden until bidden. But our bodies too are archives where memories, stories and lived experiences are stored, etched and anchored in our bloodlines deep. They ground our creativity in what become personal and political acts of remembering, identity making and speaking back to the State. Detective-like methods allow us to creatively re-map events and landscapes, piece together lives fragmented and heal our wounds. This paper will explore stories of re-mapping the archives through art and poetic-prose, using ideas of haunting through 'memory in the blood'.



SESSION THREE – WRITING AND EDITING

Saturday, 20 October, 1.30 p.m.

Venue: UQ Art Museum

Chair: Dr Jeanine Leane

‘One Big Anthology: toward an organic, transcultural and transhistorical way of thinking about anthologising and indexing Aboriginal literature’

Dr Peter Minter

Lecturer (The University of Sydney)

Abstract: As the first comprehensive anthology of its kind, the *Macquarie PEN Anthology of Aboriginal Literature* (2008) presented a renewed vision of Aboriginal literature by expanding the range of representative genres and voices and connecting them to a story of cultural resistance, resilience and renaissance. But this achievement would have been impossible if not for the important work of those Aboriginal anthologists who preceded us. Anthologies such as Kevin Gilbert’s *Inside Black Australia: An anthology of Aboriginal poetry* (1988), *Paperbark: A collection of black Australian writings* (1990) edited by Jack Davis, Mudrooroo, Stephen Muecke and Adam Shoemaker, together with keystone critical anthologies such as the 1985 *Aboriginal Writing Today: Papers from the first national conference of Aboriginal writers* edited by Jack Davis and Bob Hodge, played crucial roles in the emergence of contemporary Aboriginal literature and its critical reception. This paper pays homage to the anthologists and editors of the past, and in doing so suggests some new ways of thinking about the role of ‘the anthology’ in Aboriginal literary studies. Reflecting Indigenous cultural, economic and philosophical values, we can propose that, rather than existing in isolation, our genealogy of anthologies can instead be read in concert as a single organic work that maintains conversations between voices, times and places. This conversation is nourished by wellsprings and pools of information such as that embodied in *BlackWords*. Held together, an imagined ‘meta-anthology’ can inspire new ways of thinking about Aboriginal literature and its value to contemporary transcultural and transhistorical literary studies.

J. LINDA MCBRIDE-YUKE

Intern Editor

‘My journey as an editor with the black&write! Indigenous Writing and Editing Project’

Abstract: My black&write! Journey into this new world of reading, writing and editing began in February 2011. I will share my experience as a trainee Indigenous editor working with an Indigenous writer. The first challenge was being an integral part of the black&write! team with responsibilities in coordinating the inaugural kuril dhagun Indigenous Writing Fellowship 2011 – a national writing competition for Indigenous writers.

One of the winning Fellowship entries was a young adult fiction entitled *Grace Beside Me* (GBM) by unpublished writer Sue McPherson. As a trainee editor under the guidance of the Director of the Project, Sue Abbey, I commenced my editorial debut on GBM. My goal was to contribute to the process of developing a raw manuscript to publication standard. I used two editing styles: the tried and trusted hard copy approach with pencil and eraser in hand, and the electronic process of on-screen editing. I became aware of a range of editing skills such as consistency of characters; grammar and punctuation; proof reading; number of drafts and so on. As Rosie Fitzgibbon, who conducted an editing session for black&write, said, ‘Our job is to be the first reader of the manuscript and be the ears and eyes of editing.’

However, in addition to the technical side of editing, perhaps most important, is developing a relationship of mutual trust and respect between editor and author. Both Sue McPherson and I started the journey as beginners and the learning curve has been immeasurable. During this time I had an epiphany – when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people write their stories, who better to edit them than an Indigenous editor?

Simone Ulalka Tur, Faye Blanch, Gus Worby

(Yunggoendi First Nations Centre for Higher Education and Research at Flinders University, Flinders University)

'Writing forward, writing back, writing Black'

Abstract: Writing stories is important for historical, cultural, political and personal reasons. Each act of creation adds to a store of precious resources which contribute to wellbeing, healing and the capacity to imagine change. Some writers come from lines of story-keepers, song-makers and elders on country. With the authority of continuity they write us 'forward'. Other writers lack that direct, guiding narrative authority and – beginning with only fragments – write their way 'back' to wholeness. At some point these writing pathways meet to reshape ideas of time, space and country. This paper offers intersecting approaches to writing Black: from song-cycle to biography in *Cicada Dreaming*, from rap in 'Nunga space' to a poetic re-creation of home in a search for Pinnacle Pocket. It considers the place of writing forward, writing back and writing Black in shaping Indigenous educators and Indigenous education.



SESSION FOUR – WRITING ACROSS LAND AND GENRE

Saturday, 20 October, 3.30 p.m.

Venue: UQ Art Museum

Chair: Dr Sandra Philips

Bruce Pascoe

Author

'Dark Emu'

Abstract: Bruce Pascoe will discuss his forthcoming book, *Dark Emu* (Magabala, 2013) in which Aboriginal agricultures, as described by many of the 'explorers', are exposed. Almost none of the explorers used the big 'A' word but they saw grains being planted, irrigated, harvested, threshed, milled and stored. They saw incredibly complex fish traps and fishing 'machines' and of course they saw the clothes and houses. Many saw houses capable of accommodating 40-50 people. Sturt and Mitchell talk about villages of over a thousand people and the beauty and comfort of these dwellings. How come most Australians have no knowledge of these facts? Surely it's not a national educational policy!

Dr Jared Thomas

Lecturer in Aboriginal Studies: Communication

'Negotiating Indigenous protocol when developing fiction featuring Nukunu content'

Abstract: Jared will discuss how Nukunu protocols and those contained within guidelines such as *Writing: protocols for producing Australian Indigenous writing* were negotiated when developing the novel *Calypso Summer*, featuring Nukunu content. The paper will highlight the function of protocols of respect, communication, consultation, and secrecy and confidentiality.

Wesley Enoch

Playwright and Director

'Writing for theatre'

Abstract: Land is the cornerstone of many theatre works. I AM EORA was a show that told the story of Sydney through the heroic figures of Pemulwuy, Barangaroo and Bennelong as part of the 2012 Sydney Festival. Negotiating contested histories, languages, clan relationships and biographies was central to the making of this show and the modern day exploration of first contact Sydney. Wesley will talk about the consultation process, some of the fundamental cultural structures put in place for writing the show, and the issue of dealing with multiple stakeholders.



FINAL SESSION

Saturday, 20 October

Venue: UQ Art Museum

Boori Pryor

Author, Storyteller

Boori Pryor in Conversation with Dr Anita Heiss.

Abstract: Australian Children's Laureate, Boori Pryor, will discuss his career as a writer of stories for children and the collaboration with Jan Omerod on *Shake a Leg* (2010), considering the way that such works address both reconciliation and literacy.



5.30 p.m. – 7.00 pm: Closing drinks, poetry readings, emcee artist Kayemtee