

Realism on Country
University of Wollongong 19.2072B 22 – 23 May 2025

DAY 1

8:45am	Welcome from Aunty Barb Nicholson	Wadi Wadi (UOW)
9:00 – 9:45	Teachings with Country – Anthony McKnight	Yuin (UOW)
9:45 – 10:00	Morning break	
Keynote panel 10:00 – 11:15	What is real? What is realism? Evelyn Araluen Goorie, Koori (UniMelb) Melanie Seward Bigambul, Wakka Wakka (UQ) Luke Patterson Gamilaroi Jeanine Leane Wiradjuri (UniMelb) CHAIR: Micaela Sahhar	

Sessions: 20 min. talks + 10 min. questions each speaker + 15 min. general discussion

Session 1 11:15 – 1:00	Tony Hughes-d'Aeth (UWA) Nicole Moore (UNSW) Micaela Sahhar (RMIT) CHAIR: Mike Griffiths
1:00 – 2:00	Lunch / Book Launch <i>Find Me at the Jaffa Gate: An encyclopaedia of a Palestinian family</i> by Micaela Sahhar (New South Books 2025) To be launched by Jeanine Leane
Session 2 2:00 – 3:15	Shady Cosgrove (UOW) Julienne van Loon (UniMelb) CHAIR: Julieanne Lamond
3:15 – 3:45	Afternoon break
3:45 – 4:45	Readings from UOW Storying Country, Countrying Story Collective
Close day 1	NOTE: Ngana Barangarai and Aunty Barb Nicholson invite you to the launch of <i>Dreaming Inside, Vol. 13</i> , at Wollongong Art Gallery, 6pm.

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DAY 2

Session 3 9am – 10:45	Evelyn Araluen (UniMelb) Michael Griffiths (UOW) Julieanne Lamond (ANU) CHAIR: Tony Hughes d'Aeth
10:45 – 11:15	Morning break
Session 4 11:15 – 12:30	Roger Osborne (JCU) Jonathan Dunk (Deakin) CHAIR: Nicole Moore
12:30 – 1:30	Lunch
1:30 – 3:00pm	Future research directions – discussion & writing

Close day 2

Thank you!

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and this support is greatly appreciated.

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EVELYN ARALUEN

Dr Evelyn Araluen Corr is a Goorie and Koori poet, editor and educator, born and raised in the Dharug and broader Blak Western Sydney community, now living on Wurundjeri land. She is the co-editor of *Overland Literary Journal*, the Chairperson of the Institute of Postcolonial Studies Board of Directors, and co-convening editor of the *Journal of Postcolonial Studies*. In 2024 she was appointed Lecturer in Indigenous Arts and Culture at the Wilin Centre, Victorian College of the Arts. Her PhD, *Refusal and Desire: Aboriginal Inscription Against the Canon* (USYD, 2023) is focused on histories, cultures and political contexts of Aboriginal storytelling and literary practices. Her poetry debut *DROPBEAR* was published by the University of Queensland Press in 2021, and won the 2022 Stella Prize for Australian Women's Literature. Her next collection, *The Rot*, will be published by UQP in 2025.

SHADY COSGROVE

Realism, Country, Tree and Ant

This presentation explores ways of writing about and honouring Country in a realist paradigm that takes as given settler notions of the real. According to the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, realist literature 'appears to provide an accurate, objective, and confident description or authentic impression of reality' (491) which raises important questions: first, how does one provide 'an authentic impression' of things (what do we mean by authentic, and to whom?)? What is this assumption of 'objective reality'? Who gets to define it? And is confidence, that settler trademark, really that useful when we consider/engage with/represent Country? Drawing on discussions that took place in Naarm, December 2025, with fellow presenters, I explore creative writing techniques (craft) that offer opportunities for 'slippage' for writers when engaging with these questions.

Herman, David and Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan, eds. 2005. *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*. New York: Routledge.

Associate Professor Shady Cosgrove writes on Dharawal and Yuin land, and teaches creative writing at the University of Wollongong, Australia. Her most recent book *Flight* (Gazebo Books 2024) explores the linked tensions of flight and longing, and her short works and articles have appeared in *Best Australian Stories*, *Anthology of Australian Prose Poetry*, *Dreaming Awake*, *New Writing*, *TEXT*, *The Scholarship of Creative Writing Practice*, *Animal Studies Journal*, *The Writing Mind*, *Cordite*, *Overland*, *Antipodes*, *Southerly*, *Island*, *takahe* and the *Eunoia Review*. She's received an ANU HRC Fellowship, a Bundanon Artists Residency and the Varuna House Eleanor Dark Flagship Fellowship. For more information, www.shadycosgrove.com.

JONATHAN DUNK

Jonathan Dunk is a Lecturer in Writing and Literature at Deakin University, and co-editor of *Overland Literary Journal*. He is a widely published critic and poet, and the recipient of the AD Hope prize and the Dal Stevens award. His scholarship has appeared in *Textual Practice*, the *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*, *Australian Literary Studies*, and the *Sydney Review of Books* among others. His poetry, essays, and short fiction are widely published.

MICHAEL GRIFFITHS

Birrarung Realism

How does storytelling take account of resistance put up by Country – in particular how does it record a river's resistance to colonial incursion into its lay and form? Tony Birch is a writer very much associated with Naarm and with the Birrarung (Yarra River). In a number of stories and, at length, in the novel *Ghost River*, Birch explores the Birrarung as a space of freedom and adventure for boys and young men living in the working class suburbs of mid to late twentieth century Melbourne. Birch can also be accurately described as working frequently within the frame of realism, developing a sensibility for and sensitivity to place-based accounts of human interaction and social meaning. This essay explores Birch's brand of realism through its representation of rivers in particular.

Michael R. Griffiths is Senior Lecturer in English Literatures at the University of Wollongong. He writes on Wadi Wadi Country and Gadigal Country. His book *The Death of the Author and Anticolonial Thought* (Palgrave Pivot) was published in 2025. He is also the author of *The Distribution of Settlement: Appropriation and Refusal in Australian Literature and Culture* (UWAP 2018) and his essays have appeared in *Discourse, Postcolonial Studies, Australian Humanities Review* and many other venues. Griffiths edited the book *Biopolitics and Memory in Postcolonial Literature and Culture* (Ashgate 2016). He also coedited a special issue with Bruno Cornellier of *Settler Colonial Studies* titled: "Globalising Unsettling" and, with Tanja Dreher, a special issue of *Continuum* which offered an account of freedom of speech debates in the late liberal world and was reprinted as a book in 2021.

TONY HUGHES-D'AETH

Modalities of the Real in Indigenous Writing

Social realism dominated the Indigenous renaissance of the 1970s and 80s, providing the basis for plays (Davis, Gilbert, Bostock, Merrit), novels (Johnson*, Weller) and memoirs (Nannup, Bropho, Langford-Ginibi). In this respect, realism was the genre of the working class, and these works were expressive of Indigenous experience at the edges of bourgeois white Australia. In 1990s and 2000s Indigenous writing, broadly following global trends, magical realism eclipsed social realism (Wright, Scott). Magical realism offered the opportunity for a dual-ontology, one grounded in settler-colonial reality and the other in the ancient systems, forces and relations of Indigenous cosmology. In that sense, it seemed to give Country a voice that was not quite as available to writing in the social realist mode.

In this paper, I consider contemporary works by Tony Birch, Melissa Lucashenko, Graham Akhurst, Alexis Wright, Anita Heiss, Julie Janson, Claire G. Coleman, Ambelin Kwaymullina, Nardi Simpson, Ellen van Neerven, Tara June Winch and Kim Scott in the context of these two realisms – social realism and magical realism. Against these realisms, what is becoming more pronounced is the real of Country.

Tony Hughes-d'Aeth is the Chair of Australian Literature at the University of Western Australia and a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. His books include *Like Nothing on this Earth: A Literary History of the Wheatbelt* (UWAP, 2017), *Paper Nation: The Story of the Picturesque Atlas of Australasia* (MUP, 2001) and *Netflix: Conceptual Television in the Streaming Era* (UWAP, 2024). Tony is the Director of the Westerly Centre, which publishes *Westerly Magazine*, a literary journal founded in 1956, and is the Chair of the Publishing Board of UWA Publishing.

JULIEANNE LAMOND

Common Ground: Country and the practice of description

A great deal of writing published in Australia represents the process and experience of moving through Country including fiction, especially that authored by First Nations writers, and nonfiction working in the modes of nature writing or memoir. In this paper I consider a realist narrative strategy that potentially forms some common ground between these works: the practice of description, specifically of 'the systems and processes of Country' (Saunders). Drawing on Lawrence Buell's discussion of realism and mimesis in relation to environmental writing, and taking Alexis Wright's *Praiseworthy* and Robyn Davidson's *Tracks* as my examples, I look at how each undertakes the work of description. Taking my cue from Jeanine Leane's essay 'Historyless People', I also look at how the notion of the 'real' is mobilised in the reception of these works. In doing so, I pose some open-ended questions about the role of description in shaping practices of writing, reading and experiencing the specificities of place in Australia.

Julianne Lamond is a literary critic and Head of the School of Literature, Languages and Linguistics at ANU, where she is an Associate Professor of English. She is co-editor of the journal *Australian Literary Studies*.

JEANINE LEANE

Jeanine Leane is a Wiradjuri writer, poet and academic from southwest New South Wales. Her poetry, short stories, critique, and essays have been published in *Hecate: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Women's Liberation*, *Australian Poetry Journal*, *Antipodes*, *Overland* and the *Sydney Review of Books*. Jeanine has published widely in Aboriginal literature, writing otherness, literary critique, and creative non-fiction. Jeanine was the recipient of the University of Canberra Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Poetry Prize, and she has won the Oodgeroo Noonuccal Prize for Poetry twice (2017 & 2019). She was the 2019 recipient of the Red Room Poetry Fellowship for her project called 'Voicing the Unsettled Space: Rewriting the Colonial Mythscape.'

Jeanine teaches Creative Writing and Aboriginal Literature at the University of Melbourne. She is the recipient of an Australian Research Council Fellowship for a project called 'Aboriginal Writing: Shaping the literary and cultural history of Australia, since 1988' (2014-2018); and a second ARC grant that looks at Indigenous Storytelling and the Archive (2020-2024). In 2020 Jeanine edited *Guwayu – for all times*, a collection of First Nations Poetry commissioned by Red Room Poetry and published by Magabala Books. In 2021 she was the recipient of the School of Literature Art and Media (SLAM) Poetry Prize University of Sydney. In 2023 Jeanine was the winner of the David Harold Tribe Prize for poetry. She also co-edited an anthology of First Nations lyric nonfiction with Mununjali writer Ellen van Neerven, released by UQP in 2024. Jeanine's collection of poetry, *Gawimarra: Gathering* (UQP 2024), won the 2025 Victorian Premier's Literary Award for Poetry.

NICOLE MOORE

Mid-century Truths: Radical realism and the Australasian Book Society

Renewed interest in realism's modalities names 'capitalist realism' (Fisher), 'worlding realism' (Goodlad), 'peripheral realism' (Cleary), and First Nations realism (Wright, Leane), among other forms, and seeks to question the abrogation of this literary mode in the wake of twentieth-century capitalism's foreclosures on history. At the same time, realism remains the most naturalized cultural mode in Australia (Buckridge, Coates), perhaps globally, across many platforms that reproduce everyday authenticity as a fungible token of shared sociality.

Mid-century realism in Australia was a high stakes endeavour, in contrast. Sent into cultural battle across the economic, social and political divides of the Cold War, realism was a flag-bearer for the worth of suppressed, marginalised, ignored and censored Australian experiences, made newly readable. The lives of Australia's working class were central to this endeavour, in the face of superpower-sanctioned state repression. As the archive of titles now shows, the forms of grassroots infrastructure built to express these experiences were committed to representing that class's diversity and solidarity, if unequally and inexactly – from First Nations land and labour rights to migrant exploitation, women's equal pay and forthright queer desire.

Perhaps the jewel of the left's cultural infrastructure, the Australasian Book Society was a book-club style publisher from the early 1950s to the 1970s, which both involved its working-class subscribers in its editorial practices and was responsible at its height for more than a third of Australian titles. Yet most of the ABS's books have fallen out of history, their realist aesthetics and political aims disqualifying them from dominant accounts. Notably, the ABS enabled what Canadian scholar J.J. Healy described as "a remarkable cluster of novels" engaged with Aboriginal dispossession, activism and forms of life in still segregated Western Australia in the 1950s. As part of an ARC project with Christina Spittel, this paper investigates the ABS's investment, as a settler-run project, in Aboriginal demands of the nation, seeking shared insight on what we might make now of the books it produced to convey these.

Nicole Moore is Professor in English and Media Studies at UNSW Canberra, where the major will be taught out by 2026. Through 2022-2023 she was the Visiting Prof. of Australian Studies at the University of Tokyo. Among her recent publications are a chapter on mid-century realism for the *Cambridge History of the Australian Novel* (ed. Carter 2023) and a chapter on the Australasian Book Society for the *Bloomsbury Handbook to Cold War Literary Cultures* (ed. Barnhisel 2022). She is editor of the Anthem Studies in Australian Literature and Culture series and her biography of writer Dorothy Hewett will be released by Melbourne UP in 2026.

DR AUNTY BARBARA NICHOLSON

Aunty Barbara Nicholson is a senior Wadi Wadi woman, respected Elder, poet, activist, published academic and university lecturer. She is the Chief Editor of *Dreaming Inside: Voices from Juee Correctional Centre* anthologies and project director of the Ngana Barangarai Project and Black Wallaby Indigenous Writers Group. Aunty Barb Nicholson is a recipient of numerous awards in Aboriginal Education. She holds a degree in English Literature (Newcastle University) and an Honorary Doctorate of Laws (UOW).

ROGER OSBORNE

'I own this here (adj.) country, as fur as the eye can reach': Reading Realism, Romance and Country in Joseph Furphy's *Such is Life*

In Australian literary history, Joseph Furphy's *Such is Life* (1903) retains a prominent position in arguments about the "great Australian novel" and serves many scholars as a touchstone for discussions about nineteenth century realism and romance. The comedy associated with the narrator Tom Collins' delusions that he has an "intuition which reads men like sign-boards" is elevated in latter parts of the novel when he confronts Toby, a young Aboriginal stockman. Disguised in a borrowed coat, bell-topper, and shaded glasses, Tom Collins represents a flawed figure whose ability to "see" his surroundings is tested. When Tom mistakenly assumes Toby is of "slave stock", Toby protests and replies "Why, properly speaking, I own this here (adj.) country, as fur as the eye can reach". Toby is a minor character in *Such is Life*, but this sentence encourages further analysis of the depiction of land and landscape in the novel, and the ways in which literary critics have laboured over the distinction without

any consideration of the unceded Wiradjuri land on which the novel is set. As a first step towards such analysis, this paper considers the ways in which literary critics have analysed land and landscape in *Such is Life* and reflects on ways in which this analysis can be both disrupted and enhanced by listening to contemporary Wiradjuri voices.

Roger Osborne is the Roderick Associate Professor of English Literature at James Cook University. Roger's book on the works of Joseph Furphy, *The Life of Such is Life: A Cultural History of an Australian Classic*, was joint winner of the 2023 Walter McRae Russell Award for literary scholarship. With Professor David Carter, he is currently completing the second volume of *Australian Books and Authors in the American Marketplace*, and with Professor Katherine Bode, he is completing a study on serialised fiction in twentieth century Australian newspapers.

LUKE PATTERSON

Luke Patterson is a Gamilaroi poet, musician and educator living on Gadigal lands. His poetry appears in *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Plumwood Mountain*, *Rabbit*, *Red Room* and *The Suburban Review*. He has featured in the anthologies *Active Aesthetics*, *Firefront: first nation's poetry and power today*, and *Nangamay Mana Djurali: First Nations LGBTQI+ Poetry*. Luke's research and creative pursuits are grounded in extensive work with First Nations and other community-based organisations across Australia.

MICAELA SAHHAR

And Empire will be stunned: victims, violence and a question of the real

This paper is attentive to two modes of engagement with place. The first is as a diasporic Palestinian writer and the process of writing a book about a specifically Jerusalemite story of displacement and dispossession in *Find Me at the Jaffa Gate* (2025). In this book, which constructs intimate histories, collective histories and a national unmaking, the book encounters in fragmentary ways three key terrorist events, perpetrated by the military wing of the Zionist movement, in Jerusalem in the 1940s. One of these events, the bombing of the Semiramis Hotel in January 1948, is a specific catalyst for my own family's departure, one they did not anticipate would have the finality which it came to have.

The second engagement of the paper is in respect of what it means to write such a narrative here in Australia in the time I am writing it in. Specifically, what it means for the victims of mass terrorist events to articulate their feelings about those events, now history, in this place. Despite the geographical remoteness of Australia from the ongoing genocide in Gaza, there is a disturbing vein of policy and legislation that seeks to occlude and suppress the Palestinian voice – even when speaking to past violence/s – regardless. How does this compare with voices understood to require preservation? How is that in some instances a victim's expression of sentiment is transformed into the most dangerous element of a sequence concerning the actual perpetration of violence on the one hand, and the fantasy of the victim on the other? This takes up ideas from recent literary debacles and the impact of problematic definitions of antisemitism now widely adopted in Australian universities.

Micaela Sahhar (Australian-Palestinian) is a Lecturer in the School of Media and Communication at RMIT University and an Honorary Research Fellow at Murdoch University. She has published on themes of narrative appropriation, questions of representation and the problem of archives in settler-colonial contexts, recently in *Middle East Critique* (2024) and *Mashriq & Mahjar* (2023). Her essays, poetry and commentary have appeared in *Cordite*, *Meanjin*, *Overland*, *Rabbit* and *Sydney Review of Books*, among others. Her first book is *Find Me at the Jaffa Gate: an encyclopaedia of a Palestinian family* (NewSouth 2025).

MELANIE SAWARD

Dr Melanie Saward is a proud Bigambul and Wakka Wakka woman. She is a writer, editor, and academic based in Tulumur (Ipswich), Queensland. She's the author of two novels, *Burn* and *Love Unleashed*, and has co-written a new book for young adults with Brooke Blurton called *A Good Kind of Trouble*. She is the coordinator of BlackWords at the University of Queensland and lectures in writing and Australian studies.

JULIENNE VAN LOON

The river of mists and shadows in *Who is the City For?*

This presentation responds to question of how non-Indigenous writers might convey their experience of Country. And relatedly, what are we learning from Country? In this paper I focus on the Yarra River or Birrarung, which is the river running through the place in which I now live and work in inner Melbourne or Naarm: on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri people. This river, and the city of Melbourne, is a key setting for a novel manuscript I am currently working on, provisionally titled, *Who is the City For?* The novel imagines a near-future Melbourne in which a radical local politics ignited by a worsening housing crisis brings into question the very notion of private property ownership, particularly in relation to land and housing. It is a work that seeks to engage with the idea of dwelling justice in this place. In the Woi-wurrung language of the Wurundjeri people, Birrarung means "river of mists" or "river of mists and shadows". In addition to reading some short extracts from my novel-in-progress and reflecting on how the novel conveys my experience of dwelling with and alongside the Birrarung in *Who is the City For?*, I also observe the way in which writers Tony Birch and Auntie Joy Murphy have represented Birrarung in their writing and storytelling. I am interested in writing realist fiction that engages respectively with the agency present in the "river of mists" as a living, nourishing, life force, and that does not whitewash or erase the presence of First Nations activist voices in contemporary inner city "property" politics.

Julienne van Loon's writing has been described as "surprising and resonant" (Jo Case), "raw, direct and passionate" (James Bradley) and "absolutely original" (Christopher Merrill, director of the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa). She is the author of four books, most recently the critically acclaimed nonfiction work, *The Thinking Woman*. Julienne's first novel, *Road Story*, won *The Australian/Vogel's* award and was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Writers Prize (Best First Book) and the WA Premier's Award for Fiction. It was set on Wiradjuri Country, in Western NSW, where she grew up. Julienne is an Associate Professor with the Creative Writing program at the University of Melbourne. For the last ten years, she has lived and worked in Naarm (inner Melbourne), close to the living presence of the Birrarung or Yarra river.