



# The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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## Reviews

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### *Steam Pigs*

Melissa Lucashenko

published by University of Queensland Press,  
St Lucia, Australia: 1997

*Reviewed by Sam Watson, Lecturer,  
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Murri women are loud! Murri women are strong ... now they are angry and they are on the move. Today's Murri titterhood have smashed away the colonial chains and they are marching forward. Right across the land, on sports fields and running tracks; on stages and screens and in books – they are standing up and they are demanding to be heard. They want their rightful place in the sun and they want their own place at the fire.

One of these Murri women is Melissa Lucashenko, a daughter of the proud Bunjalung nation of northern New South Wales. A true warrior and a mother of two, she also holds a black belt in karate.

Like her beloved tribal lands, her debut novel *Steam Pigs* is set against a vast and brooding scape of searching humanity. True to her urban dreamings her book is secret, sacred and it pulses with dark energies.

*Steam Pigs* is the story of Sue Wilson, a young Aboriginal woman who is in transition. Before her there beckons the strange and foreign world of the self-focussed white middle class. Behind her, beneath her and within her own woman's spirit there echoes the competing voices of her own people and her true culture. Set in today's troubled world, Lucashenko's work is an exploration of individuals and their innermost senses of self and place. With a rare abandon, she bounces her players through a series of daunting hoops as they each confront their own flawed realities.

Through Sue Wilson's daily life and her complex relationships, Lucashenko grapples with the tragic dilemma of the urban Murri. Denied land, language and cultural integrity, Sue Wilson and her network of fellow travellers must remake themselves and survive within an environment over which they have no real control.

This is life at the edge. *Steam Pigs* takes us into the world of today's "untermensch", a place that is all around us, but a place that is invisible to all except those who have been initiated by history or circumstance.

Lucashenko is our guide and she leads the way with bold and simple language. She has a fine sense of structure and pace, and I feel that her courtship of jeopardy will strengthen as she matures into the genre. Her characters are well rounded and very human, I found that I know most of them. Here is a good young writer who has courage and who writes with a distinct voice.

There has been some passing comparisons to this book and Alan Duff's *Once Were Warriors*, but you should not allow that to distract. There may be limited similarities in the way that both works provide quite intimate windows; but neither book loses anything when placed in that sort of light and both are strong enough to stand on their own.

The University of Queensland Press and their editorial staff have been able to hone and polish without blunting or denying. *Steam Pigs* is a woman's book set in a very particular place and at a very particular time; but it confronts themes that are eternal and universal.

Melissa Lucashenko and her sister Sue Wilson have started their journey in times most uncertain ... bon voyage.