

Preface

Dhuuluu-Yula is a Wiradjuri phrase meaning ‘to talk straight’ and this book is straight talk about publishing Indigenous literature in Australia. The book also includes broader issues for writers, such as engaging with readers and reviewers.

Dhuuluu-Yala was originally written as a thesis focusing on the production of Indigenous writing. Both the thesis and this book have been inspired by my own experiences as an Indigenous author and the experiences I gained from working with Aboriginal publishers and participating in writing workshops with Indigenous people.

The research contained in the book is current up to the mid-1990s although some references to developments in the late 1990s/2000 have been included. Since this time there has been some significant change in the institutions that support the production and publication of Indigenous literature, for example, staffing structures have changed within Indigenous publishing houses. While this change in particular is significant, and may well influence the content and quality of books by or about Indigenous people, the issues identified at the time of writing the book remain current and to a large extent unresolved.

Writing for entertainment and education has increasingly become an important aspect of reviving and maintaining Indigenous history and culture, and a logical and necessary move in the development of Indigenous expression. In *Dhuuluu-Yala* I acknowledge that ongoing journey and take a close look at the journey a writer’s work takes—from inception to [hopefully] broad readership.

The history of defining Aboriginality in Australia and the experience of “being Aboriginal” have both impacted on the production of Aboriginal writing today. These twin themes are the major focus of the work.

The growth of the Indigenous publishing industry and an Indigenous literary and publishing culture have arisen as a result of the pioneering roles of Aboriginal writers gone by who paved the way for the growing pool of emerging Indigenous writers. The development of this new Indigenous arts practice has also been fuelled by the increasing desire and need for an authentic Indigenous voice in Australian literature. Although support mechanisms for Indigenous writers have improved and the scope of opportunities has broadened because more publishers are seeking Indigenous authors, opportunities are still to a large extent, limited by existing publishing practices. As a result, authors are continuing to choose self-publishing paths.

Part 1 of the book focuses on authorship and includes a brief history of the publishing of works by Indigenous authors in Australia (including the first Indigenous newspapers). This Part has two themes: what makes and forms the identity of the Indigenous author; and, what the focus of Indigenous

authorship is. There is significant discussion around the authors Colin Johnson (Mudrooroo) and Roberta Sykes in light of the roles they have played in the history of Indigenous writing in Australia and their profiles as Aboriginal writers. There has been widespread discussions in their respective communities. This community discourse is an essential feature of authorship and authority.

In Part 2, publishing and editing issues are discussed in the context of the process of bringing writing into the public domain. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural and intellectual property rights are also briefly discussed. Of interest in this part are the reflections of Aboriginal authors across literary genres. It would appear that there is a consistent experience particular to Indigenous authors that reflects the fact of their being Indigenous regardless of the literary genre they are working in. In many respects this phenomena has been a product of the fact that there are so few Indigenous editors employed in the publishing industry. In other respects, it is reflective of the qualities a work will have as a result of the identity of its author. The research outcomes in Parts 1 and 2 of the book indicate that within the publishing industry a line can be drawn that divides, *relevancy to the public*, from, *relevancy to Indigenous people and communities*. This theme is developed and leads into a discussion of 'readership' in Part 3.

In Part 3 the essential appeal and importance of Indigenous literature is covered as are problems, such as marketing Indigenous literature to a largely disinterested public or indeed, to alienated Aboriginal communities. The discussion here includes some analysis of the extraordinary success of Sally Morgan's *My Place*. Information of interest to emerging or established authors, for example, support mechanisms, writers' associations, awards, festivals and conferences is also included to show how and why a good knowledge of the machinations and infrastructure of the publishing industry is indispensable to the emerging or established author.

Part 4 and Part 5 trace respectively the publishing experiences of Canadian First Nations' and Aotearoa peoples. In these Parts, the history of writing and publishing Indigenous literature in Australia is compared with the experiences of First Nations' Canadian writers and Aotearoa writers. The comparison shows that there are some essential differences, such as the fact that Canada and Aotearoa have a national culture of revering their writers, that directly impact upon the status of 'the aboriginal author' and/or their publisher in Australian, Canadian and Aotearoa jurisdictions.

A catalogue of Indigenous literature is included at Appendix A, a select bibliography of Canadian First Nations' literature is at Appendix B, and a select bibliography of Maori literature is at Appendix C.

Dhuuluu-Yala, while considering the history of Indigenous publishing and literature, also canvasses contemporary thought on the role of the Indigenous author and related literary production. These thoughts and opinions are as ever-changing and evolving as the cultures of Indigenous Australia itself, but once

stated, whether in 1990 or 2002, remain a record of the way in which Indigenous literature has, and continues to impact on national and international audiences.

The issues covered in the book highlight the challenges faced by authors, editors and publishers of Indigenous manuscripts and show what is at stake for authors and publishers of Indigenous literature. The book is intended to be as accessible as possible to authors, publishers, readers and critics, and to engage relevant parties in discussions that will impact on, and assist the development of Aboriginal writing and publishing in the future.

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Sydney 2003