

## Call for abstracts:

### 'Speculating upon Biography':

An International Symposium dedicated to exploring the boundaries of biography

25-26 October 2018, Noosa Queensland Australia

The etymology of biography comes from the Greek βίος (*bíos*, "life") plus γράφω (*gráphō*, "write"), which explains why most definitions describe this genre as a narrative of a life, that is written by someone else with the intention of offering an historically-accurate account of this person. Despite this emphasis upon veracity, biography has long been a vibrant site for experimentation. Over forty years ago, esteemed biographer Leon Edel acknowledged that 'there's a great deal of speculation in [all] biography' because biographers 'can never know everything ... most readers understand that there will be a degree of 'informed speculation' (qtd. in McCullough 1985, online).

More recently, some writers have chosen to experiment further with biography, employing conjecture and 'informed imagination' to fill in the gaps and silences in the archives, and when writing the lives of those who are under-represented in sources and obscured from the historical record. Such works have come to be known as 'speculative biography', not only because they challenge traditional notions of authorial veracity but also because, in contrast to biographically-based fiction or historical fiction, these experimental approaches are still clearly recognizable as non-fictional attempts to explore and express the 'truth'. And yet, despite the fact that such speculative work has significant implications for postcolonial histories globally as well as the way we construct notions of 'truth', little scholarly attention has been devoted to the methodological and theoretical underpinnings of this new variant of biography or to exploring key works thus produced.

This one-day multi-disciplinary event will remedy this by inviting investigation into speculative biography and exploring associated practices and processes including:

- Definitions, models and methods for writing speculative biography
- Theoretical underpinnings of speculative biography
- Possibilities and challenges of speculative biographical writing
- Speculative biography and historical fiction: similarities and differences
- Speculative biography and questions of truth, fiction and fictionalization
- Speculative biography, lost lives and forgotten life stories
- Past and recent speculative biographies
- Ethical issues in writing speculative biography
- Speculation, gaps in the historical record and fragmentary/unreliable sources
- Beyond the violence of the archive
- Writing and publishing speculative biography
- Speculative biography for younger readers
- Speculative biographical memoir
- Speculative graphic and comic biographies
- National histories of speculative biographical production
- Implications of speculative biography for postcolonial historical enquiry
- The reception of speculative biography
- Other relevant topics and issues

## Keynote Speakers

**Professor Donna Lee Brien** has been writing, and writing about, experimental and speculative biography since the 1990s. Recent books aligned with the topic include *Recovering History Through Fact and Fiction: Forgotten Lives* (with Dallas Baker and Nike Sulway, 2017) and *Assisting International Students Develop and Publish Accounts of Learning Transformation Due to their Australian Experiences* (with Alison Owens, 2015). *Offshoot: Contemporary Life Writing Methodologies and Practice* (with Quinn Eades) will be published by University of Western Australia Press in 2018. With over 250 published book chapters, journal articles, refereed conference papers and creative works, and editor of over 40 themed special issues of journals, Donna is the current co-editor of the *Australasian Journal of Popular Culture* and past Commissioning Editor, Special Issues, *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*.

**Dr Kiera Lindsey** is an award-winning historian who published a speculative biography entitled *The Convict's Daughter: The Scandal that Shocked a Colony* with Australia's largest independent publishing house, Allen & Unwin in 2016. *The Convict's Daughter* received positive trade and scholarly reviews and is now in its 4th print run. In 2017, Kiera was awarded an ARC DECRA for a project entitled 'Speculative Biography, Historical Craft and the Case of Adelaide Ironside'. This project, which she will complete at UTS, will reconstitute the scanty archive of Australian colonial artist Adelaide Ironside into a narrative-driven speculative biography, before critically investigating this process in a series of publications, masterclasses and public workshops aimed at encouraging others intent upon recovering lost lives for general readers. Kiera is an enthusiastic communicator who recently appeared in a four-part HISTORY Channel TV series. She is also a regular presenter on ABC's *Nightlife* program.

## Masterclass

To encourage discussion and explore the creative possibilities and challenges of speculative biography, this symposium includes a Masterclass workshop. Together, we will consider a host of case studies and potential methodologies useful to writers wrestling with stories and sources that resist a straightforward approach. This workshop will appeal to practitioners keen to experiment with biography and historical writing as well as theorists considering the critical and ethical implications of genre-transgression. We welcome those working in biography, history, creative writing and life writing as well as family-historians and theoretical scholars.

## Publications

An edited book and/or refereed journal issue will be produced from this event.

**Abstracts (250 words max)** and your **name, email** plus **brief bio note (50-100 words)** due 30 May 2018, email to [Kiera.Lindsey@uts.edu.au](mailto:Kiera.Lindsey@uts.edu.au)

\*\*Please put '2018 International Speculating on Biography Symposium abstract' in the subject line of your email

### Location

CQUniversity, Noosa campus  
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### Contact/ all queries

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**We look forward to welcoming you to beautiful Noosa!**