

# To write wrongs

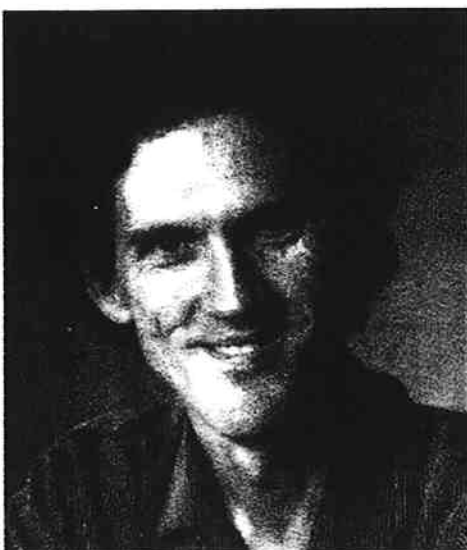
**Melissa Lucashenko** welcomes a new generation  
crafting stories from the ashes of a history half-told

## UNWRITTEN HISTORIES

Craig Cormick  
Aboriginal Studies Press  
\$19.95 pb, 188pp

We in the indigenous communities are deeply concerned with how others in Australia know us, and that knowing is mostly informed, of course, by white recorded history. The arts and pop culture also play their part, but it is largely what is learned in the schools and universities that endures. Or not. I still have vivid and bitter memories of first-year university, packs of young men roaring with laughter at a video shown to them of desert lawmen at a funeral. The fault was not in the film. So Canberra writer Craig Cormick has set himself a considerable task in dishing up colonial revisionism about those funny (ha-ha and peculiar) blackfellas, in an era when the love of even mainstream history is in decline.

For the first 150 years of white contact, our indigenous cry was, with notable exceptions, "Leave Us In Peace!" (sub-text: Just Go Away). And for the subsequent six decades, "Listen to Us!" (If You're Not Going). It is predictable, in hindsight, that sympathetic white people, having listened, would eventually begin to write what they wish had happened instead. Cormick is first cab off the rank, and has produced a very funny book. I have no qualms about his use of slightly angled humour to talk not about, but around, the killing times, but I do wonder if this book will be remembered for Cormick's cleverness rather than any impact on, say, Australian Studies courses. I hope his book will be



RAZOR-SHARP: Craig Cormick

taken up as a text, although *Unwritten Histories* should find an audience either way. It's worth buying for "Do You Remember When You Heard Kennedy Had Been Killed?" alone:

### *Cape York 1848*

Kennedy's blood is draining out of him. Seeping slowly into the damp soil. He is lying in the mud with three spear wounds: one in his back, one in his side, and one in his thigh. He can feel his life slipping away. He knows he will never see civilisation again. Will die in this accursed wilderness.

"Would you describe your situation as tragic?" one of the reporters asks.

And it seems that Cook, Captain J, might have been severely maligned. Cormick has him in conversation with Banks:

"I will describe this land as uninhabited. Terra Nullius."

"But what about the natives?" asks Banks.

"They live in the forests," replied Cook. "I'm referring to the beaches."

Of course, we were on the beaches too, but you get the point. This is black armband history with a vengeance and a razor-sharp twist. And as the saying goes, it's gotta be better than the white blindfold version. My only real concern is that the requisite level of historical information to appreciate Cormick's book isn't out there. Laughing at what "might have been" first needs some understanding of what was and too few of us have that. With any luck, this book might inspire some ahistorical Australians to take the plunge towards Henry Reynolds and co.