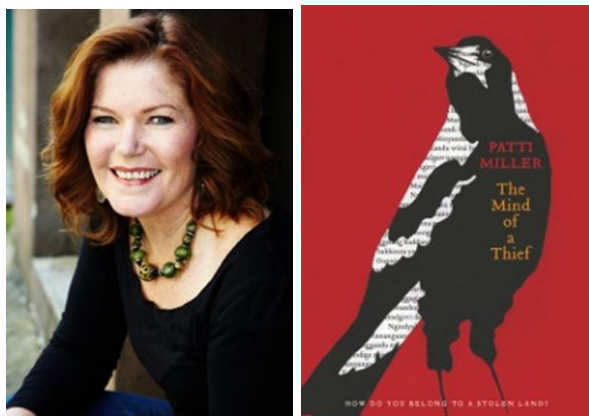


The Mind of a Thief



A graduate of both the BA and MA writing programs at UTS, Patti Miller has just released her sixth book, *The Mind of a Thief* from UQP. It uncovers ‘a chronicle of idealism, destruction and hope’ as it reveals the previously untold story of the first post-Mabo native claim in Australia. In an intensely personal way it explores issues of identity, belonging and country, weaving together memoir and narrative non-fiction into a compelling story.

Four publishers competed for the chance to publish *The Mind of a Thief*, recognising it as an important exploration of issues central to an Australian sense of self. When John Hunter at UQP secured the manuscript he said ‘it traverses public issues and private life in the way the best memoirs do’. At the Sydney Writers’ Festival this year, Patti Miller discussed this private life-public issue on a panel with Robin Hemley, Professor of English at the University of Iowa’s writing school. They both agreed it is a territory with many dangers for the unwary for as soon as public issues are made personal, everyone can feel implicated.

Although Patti Miller has been exploring this territory for a long time, both in her writing and in her ‘life writing’ courses, *The Mind of a Thief* is the first of her books to bring together the personal and the political in a way that addresses an issue at the heart of Australian life – how do we belong to a stolen land? It’s a question that has no easy answers but one that was teased out by interviewing Wiradjuri Elders who made the native title claim in her hometown, as well as researching early nineteenth century diaries in the Mitchell Library, all in the framework of Miller’s own memories of a childhood deep in a beloved landscape.

Two of Miller’s earlier nonfiction books, *The Last One Who Remembers* (A&U) and *Whatever the Gods Do* (Random House) as well as a novel, *Child*, (A&U) addressed more personal issues of family and friendship, but always in a context of how the telling of stories makes us who we are. Story-telling in fact is at the heart of Miller’s writing practice, which she presents in her two text books on writing, *Writing Your Life* and *The Memoir Book*, both from Allen & Unwin.

Miller is well known for her ‘life writing’ courses around Australia, which she also offers in Paris and in Bali through the Sydney Writers’ Centre. Although UTS gave her a rigorous theoretical framework for thinking about writing, she finds she teaches more from her own practice as a writer. Her approach brings results - at least twenty of her former students have found commercial publication.

For Miller, teaching writing courses and her own writing practice are part of the same continuum. She argues that it’s the stories we tell about ourselves and about our community that creates our sense of who we are. Without that storytelling we ‘lose the plot’. Telling the story of the native title claim and of her hometown in *The Mind of a Thief* creates not only Miller’s sense of identity, but a universal identity; we are all woven out of the stories we tell.