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ABORIGINAL WRITERS AND POPULAR FICTION

The Literature of Anita Heiss

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Aboriginal Writers and Popular Fiction

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ABSTRACT: Wiradjuri woman, Anita Heiss, is arguably one of the first Aboriginal Australian authors of popular fiction. A focus on the political characterizes her chick lit; and her identity as an author is both supplemented and complemented by her roles as an academic, activist and public intellectual. Heiss has discussed genre as a means of targeting audiences that may be less engaged with Indigenous affairs, and positions her novels as educative but not didactic. Her readership is constituted by committed readers of romance and chick lit as well as politically engaged readers who are attracted to Heiss's dual authorial persona; and, both groups bring radically distinct expectations to bear on these texts. Through analysis of online reviews and surveys conducted with users of the book-reviewing website Goodreads, I complicate the understanding of genre as a cogent interpretative frame, and deploy this discussion to explore the social significance of Heiss's literature.

KEYWORDS: publishing studies, genre, chick lit, Aboriginality

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