

**Three Contemporary Australian/Australia-exposed Thinkers:**

**Mudrooroo, Sally Morgan, and Epeli Hau'ofa**

**by**

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## Candidate's Certification

I certify that the substance of this dissertation has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification. I certify that any help received in preparing this dissertation and all sources used have been acknowledged in dissertation.

Signature

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the candidate's signature.

Reginald Carl Forest

## **Dedication**

To my family and friends, of whom all is expected from me.

## **Acknowledgements**

There is no such thing as the self-made project. This work is no different. My first thank you is to the University of New England, Armidale, New South Wales, for the opportunity to become a member of the larger realm of intellectuals beyond my nurture and hemisphere. Next, my chair of supervisors and mentor, Dr. John Ryan, whose critical positivity was often needed. Of my confirmation committee, Dr. Helen Ware and Dr. Hugh de Ferranti, for your patience and understanding, as I plied ideas not entirely worked out. Dr. Tony Lynch has also been invaluable as a further stimulating force.

An institutional thank you goes to the Dixon Library, University of New England, NSW, for the numerous articles and research methods that were needed, photocopied and sent. To that same end, Austin Peay State University's Felix G. Woodward Library has also given me invaluable support and bibliographic assistance.

## **Abstract**

Colin Johnson (aka Mudrooroo) has argued for a phenomena known as Maban (or shaman/magical) reality. Epeli Hau'ofa also espoused a third way, for the reflective 'outsider writer'; being able to embrace flexible ideas as to the meaning of one's inherited identity while also moving to creating a new future. Sally Morgan crafted a new sense of identity from shards of her family's old narratives. Each writer convincingly expounds on centrist themes (identity, tradition, and culture) beyond their immediate concerns, but is still not deemed mainstream. Using selected work from Sally Morgan, Epeli Hau'ofa and Mudrooroo, I endeavour to show how narrow categories based on gender, ethnicity, and race hamper deeper understandings of these three writers. At the very least, a close—and—comparative—examination of their work will prove their subject matter is not the 'other' and should be thought of as canonical and/or mainstream literature.

## Introduction

The three thinkers discussed in this project, Mudrooroo, Sally Morgan and Epeli Hau'ofa are not as yet canonised. Odd, for they critique for a Western audience, primarily (many would say), since being educated by it. Further, they have earned name recognition and secured levels of financial security many do not. How can they be deemed anything other than Western and worthy of inclusion? Mudrooroo takes his models/samples extensively from Western novels and sensibilities to better reach a 'Western' audience. The same pertains to Morgan, who in her text, *My Place*, does not quote from Dracula lore or from Samuel Beckett, like Mudrooroo, but connects to Sir Walter Scott and to his novel *Ivanhoe*. Also, her project intersects three genres: coming of age, spiritual biography and the detective novel. Hau'ofa, also draws from Western discourse via his training and the experiences of his family, but he/his work strikes out in a different manner. He uses critical humour to personalise his work, a different yet not unfamiliar concept for a Western-centred readership. Though each of these writers has a unique perspective on the effect of living within Western spaces, each has also been judged to be outside full canonical placing. Ironic, for they have also been attacked from their own flanks from being too accommodating to a larger Western culture, especially Morgan. Regardless, each labours under a 'double-ness' reminiscent of what W. E. B. Du Bois wrote about in the early 1900s.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In 1903, influential thinker, W. E. B. Du Bois published *The Souls of Black Folk*. There he explains the inherent tensions between White America and their former slaves. The problem was in recognising (as equals) those who were once thought of as sub-human. Even Du Bois had been asked, 'How does it feel to be a problem?' (1903; New York: Dover, 1994) 1. Such inquiries are patronizing (at best) and display the unease those who did not and perhaps still do not want to share their 'privilege.' The effect on the powerless was/is also damaging. They endure a separateness from the society and/or culture they were reared. Du Bois remarked on this and said the interaction, 'yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity' (Du Bois 2). The chapter he discusses this psychological phenomena, 'Of Our Spiritual Strivings' was a revised essay ('Strivings of the Negro People') from *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1897. The argument here is not that these three are obscure and/or not celebrated within their fields, but that they are not allowed full recognition.

The ‘West’ is not locked in such struggles now, as then, but the vestiges are still amongst us, just not as pronounced. Hence there are still categories which those not officially sanctioned as European are tethered. It is in this manner the writers discussed here suffer that forced duality (metaphorically and metaphysically), which has kept them from full canonical status. Within their spheres of influence (especially geographically), they are seen properly. Yet in the wider realm of academia and letters, they are still first and primarily listed as ‘Indigenous’ or ‘Marginalised’ (meaning seen as exotic or different than ‘Western’ peoples) writers who write on those subjects and various others. Therefore, they are great ‘Indigenous’ writers, but not great writers. This is a standard European writers are not concerned—though ‘Western’ writers do pen the same types of subjects.

The centre is still reluctant to hearing ‘other’ voices, unless in extreme circumstances, or at exotic ceremonies. ‘They only show up indirectly in the form of place names and buried cultural references to walkabouts or corroborees.’<sup>2</sup> In such locations, the ‘other’ is in his/her ‘place.’ Granted, Brian Attbery was writing about Australian Aboriginal representation, yet this is the plight of several minority groups. Luckily, the mindset of not deserving respectful attention has become much less common. However, there is still an over-representation of it on public access, satellite/cable channels, or commercials concerned with the need to feed the starving children of under-developed countries. Film as well, behaves like this, with the ‘Other’ still playing a secondary or stereotypical role (more than likely).

This is the locale of the three visionaries I wish to discuss: Mudrooroo, Sally Morgan and Epeli Hau’ofa find themselves. Each writer is controversial, influential and ‘marginalised’—by (primarily) being placed in very colonialised categories. They inhabit multiple and simultaneous locations, having achieved a level of consequence many would envy, regardless of their station.

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<sup>2</sup> Brian Attbery, ‘Aboriginality in Science Fiction,’ *Science Fiction Studies* 32.3 (2005): 385-404.



Yet despite the possibility of more enlightened critiques, the antiquated and problematic categories of class, race, and gender are, disappointingly, found to be most consistently featured.

Section One will feature Mudrooroo and an examination of his ability to blend Aboriginal sensibilities and the dictates of the Western novel; this is achieved while incorporating or co-opting themes and characters from canonical works into his own. This will include an examination of his first short piece and the *Wild Cat* series, then a look for the re-occurring aspects of his writings (and questioning if they fit within a Western context), alongside his ‘skin-walking.’<sup>3</sup> It is true his identity has been made even more sensational, with the sleuthing undertaken to find a more stable ‘family’ tree, but his written work will be the prime focus.

Section Two will cover Sally Morgan. She has been slighted by Mudrooroo, ironic as that sounds, for Morgan did not have a black American father or an Irish mother (a curious way to become Aboriginal). Morgan has not created (or re-created) her space and agency in a private way, as is thought proper in a Western context, but publicly, with the help of her family. Yet the process has still influenced those far from the initial readership, and forced a re-examination of popularised, fictional paradigms. Contemplating her narrative forces one to wonder if exile and a Diaspora,—symbols generally reserved for those removed from their homelands,—is truly a dilemma of distance. Her work also shows the flaws in essentialist ideologies—regardless of how well-meaning.

Section Three will deal with the late Epeli Hau’ofa—the most fascinating of the three, for his parents were missionaries, in a part of the world where that type of zeal, as Barzillai Quaipe,

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<sup>3</sup> Judy Scales-Trent, ‘Notes of a White Black Woman,’ *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*, eds. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia, PA: Temple UP, 1997) 475-481. The argument examines the plasticity of categories within cultures. She writes ‘in Navajo cosmology there exist certain powerful creatures who, although they appear to be mere humans, can change shape whenever they wish by taking on animal form.’ She expounds on the term to explain how people change (voluntarily or otherwise) shape, culture/identity and personae throughout their lives.

in the early 1800s, had commented, did not augur too well for the native population. Hau'ofa spans class, tribe, nation and language. His being able to move as freely as he has also forces a re-thinking of entrenched notions of (Western) identity, particularly when one how pervasive colonial/Christian ideology has permeated the Pacific—that while negotiating oral tongues to communicate (primarily) to an English audience—a struggle which other thinkers, such as Kwame Anthony Akroma-Ampim Kusi Appiah and Chinua Achebe, have also commented on.

The project will use comparative literary (and, to a lesser degree, historical, television and film) analysis, and canonical criteria heralded by literary critic Harold Bloom, to show that these three luminaries have crafted their work in a manner not unwelcome to the universe of letters. Also, that the quality is as relevant, significant and complementary (since the three writers do borrow from published Western work) as those—and to those—already in the canon. The argument will stress this, leaving little doubt that the problem lies with the 'privilege' given to the Euro-based writer (due to the hierarchal structure in place), which will be discussed in the last chapter. Also, the conclusion will discuss the historical foundations of Western thought and on the far reaching pervasiveness of Eurocentric points of view, even within such fields as science fiction.

It is true their names are out in the public sphere, but one must wonder to what extent—they are not prominent in international texts, like the *Norton Anthology of World Literature*. Yet the current project is not to have them seen by a wider audience for fresh vindication. Instead, to show that contemplating them with the care seen in debating the works of a Marcel Proust or T.S. Eliot is a duty academia must lead. From my American nurture and perspective I have enjoyed following their art and thought, and I am the wiser and the more enriched for contact with their personas and the privilege of exploring their thought as revealed in their creative writing.