POOR BUGGER WHITEFELLA GOT NO DREAMING.

The representation & appropriation of published Dreaming narratives with special reference to David Unaipon's writings

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ABSTRACT

This thesis critically reviews the many and varied representations of Aboriginal Dreaming narratives that have appeared in print since Australia's colonisation. It begins with early representations by missionaries, who judged the beliefs of their Indigenous charges as 'heathen', and those of early ethnographers who shared their contempt. It then considers representations by other non-Indigenous recorders, including government surveyors, anthropologists, bushmen, wives of pastoralists and those with an interest in the exotic. It looks at the works of Indigenous writers, some of whom were influenced by representations by non-Indigenous writers before them. However, in more recent years alternative printed representations have emerged that challenge the status quo and push the boundaries of what audiences have come to expect of this 'most sensitive genre'. These alternatives retain that strong sense of personal ownership and authority that is still evident in oral versions of Dreaming narratives, and a strong sense of Place and connection with the land that is missing in many past representations. They also give their narratives a place in the present, rather than relegating them to some long distant 'Dreamtime'. This thesis celebrates these new and alternative representations.

A special focus of this study is the writings of the Ngarrindjeri man, David Unaipon, who appears on the Australian fifty dollar note. He was the first Indigenous person to publish in this genre, and went on to become a prolific producer of syncretic narratives that defy categorisation. My literary and linguistic analysis reveals that every Dreaming text that reaches the publication stage is influenced by the circumstances in which it is produced. Whether by non-Indigenous writers or people working in close collaboration with Indigenous story-tellers, there are always political and social factors that influence the adopted style of representation. Dreaming narratives contain knowledge, and all knowledge systems are influenced by the circumstances in which they emerge. This thesis challenges those with an interest in representing Indigenous knowledge in print, particularly in the form of Dreaming narratives, to respect the rights of the Indigenous owners of that knowledge, and to strive to maintain the integrity of their texts.