

**A NOT SO INNOCENT VISION: RE-VISITING THE
LITERARY WORKS OF ELLEN LISTON, JANE SARAH
DOUDY AND MYRTLE ROSE WHITE (1838 – 1961)**

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Abstract

Foundational narratives constitute intricate and ideologically driven political works that offer new information about the colonial moment. They present divergent and alternate readings of history by providing insight into the construction of ‘national fantasies’ and the nationalist practice of exclusion and inclusion. White middle class women wrote a substantial body of foundational histories. They were influential mythmakers, historians in a sense, who actively manufactured compelling foundational stories of colonial possession and conquest, settler belonging and nation building. An interrogation of their writing casts fresh light on understanding how cultural discourses of national representation and identity often relied on a system of omission, misremembering and the dehumanisation of the Aboriginal peoples.

This thesis examines various literary works by three little known writers, Ellen Liston, Jane Sarah Douady and Myrtle Rose White between the years 1838-1961 and investigates how they used prescriptive ideas on race, nation, landscape, domesticity and progress to advance notions of successful settlement in South Australia. Their narratives were much more than ‘sentimental diversions’. They were political works that operated within white structures of power, privilege and control. They were designed to validate colonial expansion and white occupation by normalising the position of the

white settler subject while simultaneously marginalising the ‘disorderly’ Aboriginal presence.

This thesis provides an analysis of these women’s novels, short stories, articles and unpublished manuscripts to reveal the unique agentive role that white women writers possessed. These authors didn’t just write to participate on the public scene and to advance women’s role as nation builders, they wrote as ‘politicians in print’, intent on constructing very clear ideas about social behaviour, cultural norms, national patriotism and racial hierarchies. Indeed, the concern over who rightfully belonged and who did not pervaded much of their writing, as did the derogatory scripting of others. In short, these women were assertive ‘nationalist managers’ who had a lot to say about the creation of their ‘homely nation’.

By applying theoretical understandings, such as the colonial rhetoric of exclusion and control, the historicisation of whiteness and the decolonisation of ‘national fantasies’, to these women’s narratives, this body of work builds on, and advances, new understandings of white women writers and the ethnocentric cultural assumptions which coloured their writing. It not only rediscovers previously published works but also introduces new unpublished archival material as evidence for re-conceptualising the power involved in producing and consuming women’s writing from the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

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