

# ***In Your Dreams: Cultural Appropriation, Popular Culture and Colonialism***

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Industrialisation, globalisation, technological advancement, urbanisation, mass communication systems and other sources of modernity have created a society with contradictions.<sup>1</sup> As much as these elements offer the individual interconnectedness with others, a plethora of opportunities, the ability to transcend gender, racial, cultural and geographical boundaries they also contribute to an impersonal society whose members complain of alienation and a spiritual hunger that capitalistic fetishism cannot seem to satiate. Little wonder then that interest in eastern religions, the occult, psychic networks and fundamentalist religions is on the rise. In this quest for reassurance and clarity, people have also sought to find the mythic and the spiritual in indigenous cultures.

Marlo Morgan's New Age fantasy *Mutant Message Down Under* (1994) set a net which captured the imagination of those who are on this search for the sacred in order to find fulfilment and understanding in a world that is increasingly complex, contradictory and confusing.

***Marlo Morgan's Mutated Message***

Morgan's best selling book chronicles her trek through the Australian outback with a group of Aborigines, a 'lost tribe' who retain their traditional ways of life. The tribe kidnapped her to take her on this journey but Morgan comes to understand that her abduction was no matter of chance. She was chosen because of her spiritual link with the leader of the tribe. The journey culminates with the arrival at a secret cave in which the Dreamtime secrets have been kept. Morgan is given the message that she is to disperse amongst the other Mutants (the supposed Aboriginal word for white person): the earth is dying and the indigenous peoples ('Real People') with it. Morgan had taken up the challenge and managed to spread 'the message' - which bears a resemblance to the message the many alien abductees have returned with (Sagan 1995: 100-02) - by world wide sales of her book.

What prevents Morgan's book from being treated as a fantastical tale of the supernatural - or just plain wishful thinking - is her deceptive attempt to present the book as fact. Despite Harper Collins' discrete title of fiction, Morgan self-published the book in two earlier editions as non-fiction and shamelessly promoted the book as an actual experience on the New Age market. Morgan's introduction claiming she cannot reveal the name or location of the tribe for 'legal reasons'<sup>2</sup>, her printed endorsement in the back of the authenticity of her work by Aboriginal 'elder' Burnam Burnam (Harry Penrith) and her continued claims that she has contact with her tribe through telepathy do little to present her claims to the reader as simply (over)imaginative fiction.

Morgan entrenches her Aboriginal characters in a mythical spirituality constructed around her New Age agenda. Her duplicitous actions and

deceptiveness notwithstanding, Morgan has, while helping herself, helped to create an image of Aboriginal people that may gather the sympathy and support of non-Aboriginal people, particularly vulnerable and naive Americans. This portrayal of Aboriginal people as a spiritually superior race could be characterised as a positive stereotype, a 'noble savage', and thus raises perplexing questions: how do we treat this positive stereotype? Is Morgan doing Aborigines a back-handed favour?

### ***White Prophets and Modern Day Saviours***

In *Mutant Message Down Under*, the white protagonist is a stark contrast to the Aboriginal characters. Marlo Morgan is cast in the role of 'saviour'. She finds this role to be unexpected but predestined, given to her through her cosmic/spiritual link to the tribe's leader. Morgan states: 'This was something I was born to do!' (1994: 20) and is told: 'The reason you have come to this place ... is destiny... The agreement was made before you were born' (1994: 34).<sup>3</sup>

Thus she is pre-ordained into her Christ-like mission. Marlo 'Moses' Morgan originally states that she saves Aboriginal 'half-castes' from the streets of an unnamed Australian city<sup>4</sup> but ends up leading her 'lost tribe' through the desert, performing miracles on the way (1994: 131).

The object/subject of deliverance of this modern day saviour is the Aborigine. But not the Aborigine one would meet in the streets of Redfern, in the communities on the outskirts of country towns, within the walls of the University or in the work place. Her Aborigines are a 'noble' breed. Traditional. Morgan even names them 'the Real People'. They are inevitably 'lost tribes'

since such unaffected traditional existence was destroyed by the violence of invasion and the duress of colonisation.

The stoic Aborigine is not the hero of the story.<sup>5</sup> He (and it is almost always a he) is the relic. The hero is the white redeemer, the saviour through which the fantasy of saving can be lived, delivering the Aborigine who, according to the subtext of these scripts, is unable to save himself, his powerlessness reinforcing the images of his childlikeness and impotence.

Connected to this theme of saving is the theme of acceptance and inclusion. Morgan finds ways of being accepted into the secret world of the lost tribe, a world where the uninitiated would never have been able to enter. She transcends the cultural barriers, gains access to hidden and forbidden knowledge, and even personal initiation into the group.<sup>6</sup> Morgan is told: 'If anyone in this tribe had voted against you, they would not walk this journey. You have been tested and accepted.' (1994: 15) It is her - her person, her body - who is the worthy receptacle: 'I was found acceptable and worthy of learning the knowledge of the true relationship of humans to the world we live in, the world beyond, the dimension from which we come, and the dimension where we shall return. I was going to be exposed to the understanding of my own beingness' (1994: 45). And: 'Their Aboriginal spirit was being received by me' (1994: 47).

She is chosen and follows the course, claiming no agency nor contrivance on her part: 'After all 'it' was not my message, I was merely the messenger' (1994: 117). In this way, she also denies the agency of the Aboriginal people who are impotently unable to transmit their own messages.

The black cannot survive in the white world - hence his need to be saved - but the white can cross the cultural divide.<sup>7</sup> The white inevitably conquers. The black inevitably dies: Morgan's message is that the indigenous culture is perishing.

***Secret Caves and Lost Tribes***

Morgan's tribe is 'lost' in the remote desert outback. What lies at the heart of this wish to find the lost tribe is the hope that the culture that Europeans have attempted to destroy will remain untouched and pure, ensuring their survival by the entombment of their cultural icons and practices. The true Aborigine is the tribal Aborigine. Raw. Real. Primitive. Preserved in a natural state.

The journey with the tribal Aborigine is a trip into to the past, where secrets and understanding, safety and comfort can be found in the womb-like caves.<sup>8</sup> Nestled in this cave is the deepest secrets of life. Within Morgan's cave is a jewelled chamber, a womb within a womb. It is here that she receives the highest honours afforded to her - her initiation, her name, her message, her skill to disappear. It is here that she is most closely transformed, reborn into the Aboriginal person she wishes to be.

Aboriginal culture has resisted European influences in subversive ways. These dynamic and flexible adaptations of culture that possess the strength of survival and the resilience to change are ignored; the newly emerging culture is seen by Morgan to be diminished, less authentic, and tainted. In place of the Aboriginal culture that exists today, Morgan seeks something 'pure'. Something revelatory. Since the epiphany she seeks is not readily available, she invents it, creating a culture that can be commercialised. She uses Aboriginal culture as a conduit through which to channel her pre-determined New Age ideals and practices.

### ***Cultural Appropriation and Authenticity***

Choosing the Aboriginal culture for the purpose of fanciful storytelling is an easy target. Few people, even Australians, understand the culture well, if at all. It is this mask of ignorance that Morgan is able to paint with her own brushes and colours.

Morgan's book has stirred the ire of the Aboriginal community for its distortion of the cultural practices of Aboriginal culture, which have been presented to her audience as fact. Her book has been charged with creating a misleading impression of Aboriginal people and their cultural practices, giving outsiders an incorrect perception of Aboriginal culture. Morgan has been disrespectful of cultural practices in a manner that is offensive and distressful to Aboriginal people. She is more interested in using sacred cultural practices as a tool for drama and white fetishism.

Morgan creates both fictitious cultural practices (the day to day practices of her tribe) and cultural values (the fundamental philosophies that guide Aboriginal culture).

#### ***(i) Cultural Practices***

Morgan constantly creates aspects of the cultural practices that could be marketed on the New Age market. Her contrivances include her possession of supernatural powers and displays of an interconnectedness with nature supposedly achieved by reaching a higher consciousness. Morgan's most

incredulous example of the skills she has learnt is telepathy, a skill that is, according to her, commonplace in traditional Aboriginal culture.

Morgan slowly comes to understand that her tribe communicate by telepathy: 'It finally dawned on me why it was quiet everyday as we walked. These people used mental telepathy to communicate most of the time. I was witnessing it. There was absolutely no sound to be heard, but messages were being relayed between people twenty miles apart.' (1994: 61) This skill includes the ability of the desert-dwelling tribe to communicate with dolphins.

But telepathic skills aren't just a toll-free way to communicate. According to Morgan, they are intricate to the interconnectedness that the Aborigine enjoys with nature: 'So each morning the tribe sends out a thought or message to the animals and plants in front of us. They say, 'We are walking your way. We are coming to honor your purpose for existence. It is up to the plants and animals to make their own arrangements about who will be chosen.' (1994: 53) This is how Aborigines prepare their meals.

Morgan's interconnectedness with nature comes from the ability to communicate with it. It derives from a supernatural power. She ignores the fundamental philosophy in most indigenous cultures that land needs to be respected because it is the source of life. She dismisses the idea that interconnectedness comes from a deep understanding of the delicate balance of the ecology of the land that the Aboriginal group had been responsible for tens of thousands of years. She needs something more fantastic. Something superhuman. Something that she, and only she, can gain the knowledge of.

The ability of the Aborigines to convince their food to give itself over to be eaten is linked to the Aborigines ability to tap into their higher consciousness. These skills derive from the purity of the Aborigine: 'The reason ... that Real People can use telepathy is because above all they never tell a lie, not a small

fabrication, not a partial truth, nor any gross unreal statement. No lies at all, so they have nothing to hide.' (Morgan 1994: 63)

Morgan's text is littered with invented cultural practices. She redefines the totemic system, which rather than being a complex system of family bonds and interconnectedness, becomes a quaint association with an animal that can be determined by the shadow of someone's nose. Also amongst Morgan's inventions and distortions of Australian Aboriginal culture are the mixing of practices from other cultures. For example, there is a reference to a Dream Catcher, an implement that is found in the indigenous cultures of North America but nowhere in Australia.

Her lack of understanding of basic cultural practices is displayed by her use of terminology to describe Aborigines that is considered offensive by the people themselves. She constantly refers to 'half breeds' and 'half bloods'.<sup>9</sup> These are terms that are not part of the self-identification of indigenous Australians who define themselves as 'Aboriginal' if they (i) are accepted by the Aboriginal community, (ii) identify as an Aboriginal person, and (iii) have Aboriginal ancestry. The notion of blood divisions is rejected as being an arbitrary determiner of identity and understood to be a colonial European concept.

Such a lack of respect deeply vilifies Aboriginal people as misuse and disrespect of tribal objects and practices is a severe breach of Aboriginal law, an offence that attracts harsh punishments.

Portrayals of Aboriginal culture like Morgan's have become a focus point for Aboriginal people who are resentful of the false portrayals of their culture. There are concerns that false representations of Aboriginal culture give false impressions distorting identity and create stereotypes, both negative and positive.

**(ii) Cultural Values**

It is not just the practices but the values that are romanticised and reinvented by Morgan to suit her new age agenda. In her culture, Aboriginal caring and interconnectedness are intertwined with a strange sense of sacrificial self-determination.

Morgan states the interconnectedness first: 'If you hurt someone, you hurt self. If you help someone, you help self. Blood and bone is in all people. It's the heart and intent that is different.' (1994: 125)

Her individualism, which coexists with non-materialism and non-competitiveness, relates to the telepathic messages that the Aborigines supposedly send their food every day. For Morgan, even animals choose their fate: 'There should be no suffering by any creature except what they accept for themselves.' (1994: 174)

Aborigines have the same docile fatalism: 'If they were killed, it was with their agreement on an eternal level and only indicated how truly they understood forever.' (1994: 175) Violent death as an expression of a sacrificial higher love is a disturbing interpretation on the massacres of Aboriginal people along Australia's bloody frontier. Morgan implies consent, a mixture of passive agency and fateful pre-determination. The interpretation her theory gives to colonising acts such as the clubbing to death of Aboriginal children would be seen as horrific and insulting except by an ardent white supremacist. Her transference of this philosophy into the modern world is equally unpalatable: 'I began to wonder if perhaps our street people and the homeless in the United States are allowing themselves to remain victims ... we must lead, if only to become responsible for ourselves. (1994: 130) On Morgan, the sense of responsibility of the other members of the (extended) family group through sharing and caring,

attributes that really do exist in traditional and modern Aboriginal cultures are lost.

Aboriginal culture and practices become tools that can increase the drama of a plot and send messages the fit with New Age beliefs. The hands of white storytellers mould Aboriginal cultural practices into mechanisms for conflict, mystery and terror. They are more intent on hooking a white audience rather than protecting, preserving and respecting a black one. Often, as is the case with Morgan's tale, the author evokes a narrative in which the care, preservation and respect of the tribe is used to market the book. She claims she is providing insights into the very culture that is being assaulted and insulted.

Morgan does not claim to be an anthropologist. Her work sits in a sinister spot between fact and fiction. What could be labelled as cultural insensitivity becomes a charlatan's unconscionable portrayal of identity and culture, outside the parameters of fantasy or fact, when her work becomes a tool for self-promotion and the marketing of (fictitious) knowledge rather than a thrilling read.

The most manipulative aspect of Morgan's book is that she not only claims to have the voice to speak but that she undermines the legitimacy of the Aboriginal voice.

On each occasion she deals with the Aboriginal person who lives outside of her noble savage paradigm she shows insensitivity and prejudice, eroding their cultural authenticity. She portrays urbanised Aborigines as being lesser than the whole, aware that they are less authentic and 'real': '... but quite truthfully, they did not want to be reminded of their dark skin and the difference it represented. They hoped to marry someone of lighter colour and eventually for their children to blend in.<sup>10</sup> (1994: 42) She, with god-like power, grants authenticity. And she chooses to give it only to her tribe. No other Aboriginal person was as pure, as untouched, as uncolonised: '... every other tribe in

Australia had submitted to the rule of the white government. They were the last of the holdouts. (1994: 45)

Her tribe is not only purer of strength, escaping the lure of white colonialism, it is the only one with legitimate practices: 'There is not an Aboriginal tribe that has any material objects left connected to their history.' She so easily slices legitimacy, identity and cultural practice off real Aboriginal people (1994: 143).

Not just their practices, but their skills and gifts can be legitimised or delegitimised by her: 'The Aboriginal race has been long rumoured to vanish into thin air when confronted with danger. Many of the urban-dwelling natives say it was always a hoax. Their people were never able to do superhuman feats. But they are wrong. The art of illusion is being performed or mastered out in the desert (1994: 162).

Morgan says this: If they cannot perform this superhuman feat, they are not real. If they tell you there was no such superhuman feat, they are lying or they are ignorant. She is omni-present. Only she is all-knowing.

### ***Black Person Dreaming the Black Face***

At the end of *Mutant Message Down Under* there is a statement by Burnam Burnam (Harry Penrith) praising the author and her book. Penrith, a member of the Wurundjeri group and claiming to be an elder, not only raises questions about his own character by putting an endorsement on such a fabricated piece of work but the way in which he authenticates the book is cause for consideration. Penrith presents himself as the quintessential noble savage.

That Penrith could have been the proper voice for authenticity is dubious. It is open to question how an Aboriginal person from an eastern tribe can know anything of a traditional Aboriginal group in the desert. And yet he comes to know so much about a tribe that no-one else other than Morgan has managed to find. (Perhaps he has that telepathy?)

Penrith is explicit in his support for the book, wrapping himself up in the spiritual role that Morgan seeks to give him. Of her book he writes: 'It is a classic and does not violate any trust given to its author by us Real People. Rather it portrays our value systems and esoteric insights in such a way as to make me feel extremely proud of my heritage.' He cloaks himself in the rhetoric of Morgan's New Age mysticism.

Giving himself Morgan's name of 'Real People' and playing into the noble savage stereotype, he grants Morgan the right to make him feel authentic, giving her the god-like status she seeks. She hands his authenticity to him rather than him getting it from within himself or from his community. But he also grants her the right to be the Messiah and messenger, giving her the roles of savior and saviour. He states further: 'In telling the world of your experiences, you have righted an historical wrong. In the sixteenth century the Dutch explorer William Dampier wrote of us as being the "most primitive, wretched people on the face of the earth". Mutant *Message* uplifts us into a higher plane of consciousness and makes us the regal and magestic (sic) people that we are.'

No-one could question Penrith's Aboriginality nor his interest in indigenous rights. But the way he allows his Aboriginality to be defined by Morgan is of concern. He submits to her labels and fictions, he takes the titles of 'regal' and 'magestic' and embraces the false spirituality that Morgan creates in the book. He is happy to be the noble savage, to be perceived as superhuman rather than human.

And it is this embrace of the noble savage stereotype that is evident in some of the critiques of popular culture that use images of Aboriginal people. The focus of many attacks are the use of material about cultural practices that is incorrect. In the onslaught of complaints about the images of Aboriginal people, few attack the romanticism of the 'noble savage' pervasive in texts and cinema, letting it slip as though the characterisation may be politically useful, or worse, even true. Critics ignore the noble savage myth, leaving it standing. Yet it is the noble savage myth that is the aspect of these appropriations and romanticism that can be the most dangerous, with political implications far greater than the ignorance-rooted misunderstanding of cultural practices.

### ***Nobel Savage Revisited***

Three elements can be extracted from the notion of 'noble savage' as it appears in Morgan's book (and Penrith's endorsement).

#### ***(i) The Primitive***

The primitive is found in the traditional. In this sense traditional means untouched, untainted and pure. It rests in the spirit of what is tribal. Primitivism is entwined with the notion of naturalism and this is why, in a colonised society, the primitive is found in the secret lost tribe, preserved in a time capsule.

The primitive simplicity is revealed in the lack of materialism exhibited by the noble savage. Unimpressed by the commodities and conveniences European society has to offer, the noble savage rejects all possessions in favour of a higher consciousness. Morgan is quick to mention the little use that material

possession had in her tribe: 'Much later I would understand that the releasing of attachment to objects and certain beliefs was already indelibly written as a very necessary step in my human progress towards being' (1994: 8).

The link between nature and the Aboriginal person is made with Morgan's message that the earth is dying and with it, the Real People, paralleling the inevitable demise of Aboriginal people with environmental destruction (1994: 183). 'The Real People tribe have earned the right not to continue their race on this already overpopulated plant. Since the beginning of the time they have remained truthful, honest, peaceful people who have never doubted their connection with the universe' (1994: 183).

Aboriginal people are linked to the land as part of the ecosystem. The noble savage lives in this domain of the untamed landscape. According to the myth, if the habitat is destroyed, the stoic savage beast is destroyed with it. If the natural environment dies then, naturally, the Aborigine dies. The Aborigine, according to Morgan's narrative, will not adapt to new surroundings but perish as the traditional environs perish.

This romanticised view ignores the reality that many indigenous peoples have transformed their cultural practices in an attempt to resist and survive dispossession. Aboriginal people have not become extinct, as though an endangered species of fauna or flora. The harsh realities of life for Aboriginal people are dissolved with this rosy picture. The untouched Aboriginal person is an Aboriginal person who does not bear the scars of the colonisation process: dispossession, genocide, rape, assault, poverty, disease. The person who deals with the 'noble savage' is not confronted with the ugly face of colonisation.

***(ii) The Passive***

Nobleness comes from a gallant, heroic acceptance of fate. Perceived as inevitable, it is faced with informed consent. Morgan creates a culture in which it is understood that death is an accepted fate, one that has been agreed upon willingly. Thus the Aborigine accepts his or her fate. To her, colonisation is as inevitable as death, hence there is no resistance to it. Morgan's Aborigines not only accept their demise but do so without complaint. There is no political agenda and no anger expressed by her noble troops.

It is the ugly and confrontational aspect of the Aboriginal presence that is stripped away in this portrayal of the passive indigenous person. It takes the Aboriginal person and places them in a package that is user-friendly to the white person who seeks to interact. It allows those who seek their knowledge and spiritual enlightenment to do so with a creature who will not accuse them or ask them questions that might lead to feelings of guilt or complicity. Anger and frustration are not within the spectrum of the feelings of the noble savage.

The Aboriginal group itself is shown to live in harmony, devoid of the conflicts and emotions of every day life. In their purity, the Aboriginal person is devoid of prejudice and judgement<sup>11</sup>. In this construct, angry Aborigines are not authentic. Confrontational Aborigines are not worthy of the noble savage label and the associated reverential awe. The anger and resentment that make the Aborigines unconfontable and unpalatable is dismissed<sup>12</sup>. The passivity of the noble savage sits in direct contradiction to an indigenous person who is self-determining.

***(iii) The Child***

Aboriginal people, even as elders or adults, are wrapped in an unspoilt innocence by the 'noble savage' construct. This innocence reflects their naturalness and purity, untouched by the knowledge and power of the European world. This innocence cannot be transcended. And so, the noble savage character will not develop past childhood.

Without responsibility, without authority and without purpose, the childishness is expressed in the carefree and cheerful passing of the days. The Aboriginal life is one with 'laughter all day long' (1994: 119) and one where 'our joyful day was ending with more laughter and jokes.' (1994: 121)

Childishness is most clearly exhibited by the lack of agency that Aboriginal people have. Never able to deliver their own message, never concerned with politics, they are only able to be the beneficiaries of the actions of the white philanthropist.

***Too Good to Be True: Aborigines, the New Age and Alliances***

The noble savage image is often defended as being harmless. It is also asserted that the creation of such an image of a disadvantaged people will gather sympathy and hence generate greater rights protections and equality.

This strategy involves a political compromise. It claims that the ends justify the means. If it suits the political agenda to assert the positive stereotype, there is no harm done. What does it matter if rights are conveyed to the Aborigines because of a perceived mystical characteristic? Trying to claim that Aborigines

are entitled to rights protection because they are equal and therefore entitled to the same rights as others has not seemed, to date, to have been too successful.

The short term compromise may seem advantageous. But I would assert that the long term outcome for rights protections based on the assertion of the noble savage / positive stereotype are extremely detrimental to the Aboriginal community. If rights are granted because of a sympathy based on a particular stereotype, those indigenous people who do not fit within that paradigm will be excluded, considered inappropriate beneficiaries of the protections.

Those who do not fit into this image, who do not embody the images of passivity, childishness and naturalism, who do not live lives based on an affinity with nature and devoid of any material possessions, who do not use quaint logic to deduce naive and simplistic understandings of the world around them, are seen as outside the set of the worthy beneficiaries. Thus, those who do not fit within the stereotype are excluded. Urban Aboriginal people, house-owning Aboriginal people, angry Aboriginal people, Aboriginal people who do not speak their traditional languages, slip outside of the group that is the beneficiary of this benevolence.

To benefit from the sympathy evoked from a portrayal like Morgan's, Aboriginal people would have to fit themselves within the noble savage image - like Harry Penrith does in his statement of support of Morgan's book- becoming a manipulated piece of colonial construction in a process not dissimilar to assimilation. This process would attempt to make the Aborigine into an image of what he or she ought to be, rather than allowing them to live as they really are.

Of alarm is the fact that in this construction of the noble savage is that Aboriginal people are not treated as equal. They are romanticised and put on a pedestal. There is no acceptance within this treatment of the Aborigine that

s/he is equal. S/he is always other, falling outside of the fundamental dictum of rights protection that 'all people are equal'.

A far better, stronger approach is that Aboriginal people, as all people, are entitled to equal rights protection. Any other approach, whether it denies because of perceived inferiority or bestows because of spiritual fetishism, should be clearly rejected. Morgan's book doesn't demystify Aboriginal spirituality nor stereotypes about Aboriginal people. She actually seeks to perpetuate those myths as it suits her spiritual agenda.

It is erroneous to think that political mileage can be made of the sympathy elicited from the noble savage. Morgan was not concerned with the rights of Aboriginal people when she wrote her novel and not all of the people that were attracted to the spiritual promises of her story were interested in bettering the position of the Aborigines. The noble savage stereotype portrays the Aborigines as happy or at least resigned to their lot. It portrays them as inevitably dying out as environmental degradation increases. The real noble savage is above the need of human and legal rights framework. Morgan does not mention the issues of dispossession and land claims within her book. The noble savage is depoliticised and as a result the issue of rights is relegated to the sidelines.

As seen in Morgan's book, it is the aspects of spiritual expression and natural healing that the New Age crowd is interested in. We see from Morgan's book that what concerns her are constructed cultural practices that she can exploit on the New Age market. She develops special methods of massaging, telepathy and healing. Her lack of commitment to the political agenda of the Aborigines is evident. She has not used the fame of her book to forward the rights of Aboriginal people. She is not interested in protecting the rights of Aboriginal people today. She is more interested in preserving a mythical Aborigine of the past.

Aboriginal groups have not been shy in attacking Morgan and her New Age followers, confronting her on the occasions that she has tried to speak, condemning her actions and her words. Aborigine Paul Scampi has travelled to North America to expose Morgan's book as 'a fabricated New Age fantasy'. Morgan's response has been gibberish: 'We are all together on this planet, but you are full of anger and hate. It is time to stop the hurt. It is time to join the rest of the world.' (Skelton 1997: 17)

One could be seen as ungrateful for such a negative view of those who seek to find spiritual knowledge from the Aboriginal person but it is a view that is enlightened by the knowledge that such a search for answers of questions about higher consciousness are motivated more from self-interest and self-exploration than concern about the political, social and economic status (or lack thereof) of indigenous Australians.

When the person who has sympathy for the noble savage stereotype is faced with the reality - the angry urbanised Aboriginal man or woman, they express disappointment and disinterest, finding what they are faced with unpalatable and unworthy of the sympathy that the noble savage image had evoked from them. Any short term gains made by support gathered from the sympathies of the New Agers will be countered when the stereotype that has attracted their attention is shown to be a fiction.

The fascination that the New Age has with Aborigines is based on the needs of white people rather than on an interest in the Aborigines as they really exist. Because of this there is danger in creating an alliance between the two groups.

What is revealed by Morgan is that they never sought acceptance by the Aboriginal people for their work. How the indigenous people felt about their creations was irrelevant. The only thing that was important was acceptance and acknowledgement of the white community. The Aboriginal is only a vehicle, the vessel through which to gain recognition.

<sup>1</sup> The author wishes to thank Prof. Alan Stone (Harvard Law School), Ian Hicks, Colin Perrin, Raema Behrendt and Kris Faller.

<sup>2</sup> In her introduction, Morgan writes:

‘This was written after the fact and inspired by actual experience...It is sold as a novel to protect the small tribe of Aborigines from legal involvement. I have deleted details to honor friends who do not wish to be identified and to secure the secret location of our sacred site’ (1994: xiii).

And later:

‘My answer is this: I do not speak for the Australian Aborigines. I speak only for one small Outback Nation referred to as the Wild People or the Ancient Ones. I visited them again, returning to the United States just prior to January 1994. I again received their blessing and approval as to how I was handling this assignment’ (1994: xiv).

<sup>3</sup> The mysterious fortune teller, explaining the relation between Morgan and her Aboriginal soul mate continues: ‘In fact, you chose to be born at the same instant, one on the top of the world and the other here, Down Under. The pact was made at the highest level of your external self. You agreed not to speak to each other until fifty years had passed. It is now time. When you meet, there will be instant recognition on a soul level. That is all I can tell you.’

Ooota, Morgan’s Aboriginal interpreter reinforces this later when he says to her, ‘You will know this person because you were both born at the same moment, and there is soul-level recognition. The pact was made at the very highest level of your eternal beingness.’ (1994: 140)

<sup>4</sup> Morgan does not have the modesty of a humble prophet. ‘Working with urban dwelling, half-caste Aboriginal adults who had openly displayed suicidal attitudes, and accomplishing for them a sense of purpose and financial success was bound to be noticed sooner or later.’ (1994: 3)

- <sup>5</sup> Few non-Aboriginal writers have used the Aborigines as the prophet, the observer, the vessel of knowledge with the power of deliverance. One of the few successful uses of the Aborigine as outsider, voyeur, witness is Patrick White's Alf Dubbo in *Riders in the Chariot*.
- <sup>6</sup> 'We stayed at the sacred site for only a few days, but before we left I was given a ceremony in the sacred room that made me their spokesperson, and they performed a special rite to assure my future protection.' During the ceremony, Morgan is celebrated, anointed and decorated (1994: 163). Morgan is also given the name 'Two Hearts' by her Aboriginal comrades.
- <sup>7</sup> Morgan even claims that she is perceived as becoming Aboriginal.  
 'After he came to witness the strange spectacle of the blond-haired Mutant with dark brown roots, he allowed all the others to see the wonder ... Ooota explained that it was because they felt I was becoming more Aboriginal.' (1994: 67)
- <sup>8</sup> Morgan describes the caves (1994: 145): 'it was where they kept the stockpile of things collected over the years from the scouts that returned from the cities. There were magazine pictures of televisions, computers, automobiles, tanks, rocket launchers. slot machines. famous buildings, different races, and even gourmet food in glowing color'. The cave also contained a calendar and archives to record births, deaths, marriages and major world events (1994: 155).
- <sup>9</sup> Morgan's obsession with naming is also evident in the names she invents for her Aboriginal companions which are supposed to reflect the skill or talent that the person has: Tribal Elder, Big Music, Great Stone Hunter, Kindred to Large Animals, and Bearer of Happiness. She also gives the name 'Real People' to indigenous Australians.
- <sup>10</sup> Even her work with the urban dwelling 'half-castes' and 'half-bloods' is derided as being less noble: *Even though* these adults were not full-blooded natives and did

not belong to this tribe, my work was a display of someone who truly seemed to care' (1994: 45).

- <sup>11</sup> Recall the scene in *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (a film directed by Stephen Elliot. Released in 1994) in which the Sydney drag queens stumble upon a group of Aboriginal people in the outback. The Aborigines welcome the strangers, devoid of suspicion and prejudice. Rather than rejecting them, the tribe embraces the strange culture of the outsiders. The film is supposed to be a fantasy / comedy (though it is hard to find the comedy in the racist and sexist stereotyping the character of the Asian woman is subjected to ) and so the meeting is supposed to be comic relief. Yet it is typical that the meeting of the gay community and the Aboriginal community should be subject matter that is relegated to the 'comedic' genre. Issues such as the racism within the gay community towards Aboriginal men (and women) and the homophobia in the Aboriginal community are too real, too complex, too colonial, too political and too messy to be the subject matter of serious discussion. If the political reality starts to bite, the audience will switch off.
- <sup>12</sup> Anger and activism are not only understandable emotional responses in the context of the Aboriginal experience since 1788 but are both an important part of the healing process. In a paper presented at the *Rural Mental Health Conference: Working Together*, Broken Hill, 6-7th March 1997 titled 'Journey to the Crocodile's Nest: Moving through the Pain of Loss and Grief', Judy Atkinson, Bronwyn Federicks and Priscilla Iles note the importance of the expression of anger for indigenous people as a way of validating their feelings, healing their hurts and being able to move on to empower themselves:

'Anger is a strong feeling that is nearly always present in Aboriginal people who have experienced bereavement. There is nothing wrong with anger. It is much better to feel angry at a loss rather than passive and apathetic. Under anger is always a loss, and the pain, fear and grief that accompanies loss. Under grief is the sacred self that has been covered by the pain.'

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