ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR AUSTRALIENSTUDIEN

AUSTRALIAN STUDIES JOURNAL

Mudrooroo (1938 – 2019)

GAST

41
2024

Mudrooroo
(1938 – 2019)

Mudrooroo
(1938 – 2019)

Australian Studies Journal
Zeitschrift für Australienstudien

41 / 2024

Edited by Gerhard Fischer

published on behalf of the **German Association for Australian Studies Gesellschaft für Australienstudien**

ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR AUSTRALIENSTUDIEN AUSTRALIAN STUDIES JOURNAL

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek:

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über http://dnb.dnb.de abrufbar.

ISBN: see back cover

Druck: epubli – ein Service der neopubli GmbH, Berlin

Correspondence and manuscripts: journal@australienstudien.org

Reviews: reviews@australienstudien.org

The Australian Studies Journal | Zeitschrift für Australienstudien is archived by 'The Stacks', Library of Anglo-American Culture & History, Göttingen State and University Library

Typesetting & Design: Dr Stefanie Affeldt

The '**Australian Studies Journal | Zeitschrift für Australienstudien**' is an academic publication issued by the editors on behalf of the German Association for Australian Studies with a regular issue in summer and special issues in spring and autumn.

It discusses a variety of disciplinary and interdisciplinary aspects relevant to Australia and its society, among them:

- anthropology
- economics
- education
- fine arts and culture
- geography
- history
- law
- linguistics
- literature
- musicology
- natural sciences
- philosophy
- politics
- sociology

These issues are presented in consideration of both current and historical interrelations of European and Australian societies. In this context, studies on Indigenous Australian matters receive special attention.

The 'Australian Studies Journal | Zeitschrift für Australienstudien' is indexed in the annual **MLA International Bibliography** and **AustLit** and is a fully **peer-reviewed** journal.

Publishers are kindly asked to provide review copies of pertinent publications.

We invite **abstracts** for special issues with the respective deadlines of *15 October / 15 April*.

We invite **original contributions and reviews** for our regular issues, please refer to our website – https://australienstudien.org/information-for-contributors – for further information. Deadline: *15 October*

Contents

Wer mit sich selbst identisch ist,
der kann sich gleich einsargen lassen,
der existiert nicht mehr.

If you identify with yourself,
you can just ask to be put into a coffin,
you don't exist anymore.

Heiner Müller (1991)

DOI: 10.35515/zfa/asj.41/2024.01

Australian Studies Journal
Zeitschrift für Australienstudien
41 — 2024

Gerhard Fischer

From Colin Johnson to Mudrooroo

Tracing the Extraordinary Life of a Cosmopolitan Indigenous Writer

Mudrooroo, who died in 2019 at the age of 80 in a Brisbane hospice after a protracted battle with cancer, was Australia's most highly regarded and at the same time most controversial Black writer. The controversy – that has all but overshadowed his prolific literary output – does not concern the quality of his artistic achievements: his merits as a renowned novelist, poet, playwright, and literary and cultural theorist are internationally recognized and beyond doubt. Opinions are divided, however, on the question of his claim to Aboriginal identity.

Mudrooroo was born Colin Thomas Johnson on 21 August 1938 in East Cuballing, a tiny settlement in outback Western Australia. He was the youngest of ten siblings in a sprawling, poor, mixed-race family. Colin never knew his father, Thomas Patrick Johnson, who died a few weeks before Colin was born, and he never got to know his four older siblings who had been placed into institutional care when the local welfare authorities declared the family 'destitute' following the father's death. As Colin was to learn later, his paternal grandfather is now believed to have been an Afro-American immigrant who had arrived in Melbourne in the late 19th century. He had married an Irish-Australian woman, and their son, Colin's father, subsequently moved to Western Australia where he worked as a farm labourer; he likewise married an Irish-Australian woman, Elizabeth Barron. Colin's mother had two daughters prior to her marriage and another two children after her husband's death. Another child had died in early infancy.

The companion of Colin's childhood was his sister Shirley. Their skin colour (a light olive-brown complexion) marked them out as being 'tarred by the brush', and their mother always feared that the two might also be taken away from her. This is what eventually happened. Living precariously in an abandoned shop and dependent on handouts from an obscure 'uncle', the mother was unable to properly supervise her children. Aged nine and eleven, respectively, Colin and Shirley were declared 'neglected' and sent to different institutions, Colin to the Clontarf Boys' Town near Perth run by the Christian Brothers. It is today chiefly known for its appalling history of physical and sexual child abuse.

At the age of sixteen, Colin was released from the orphanage onto the streets of Perth, abandoned to himself and totally unprepared for life outside of the draconian tutelage of the Church. He soon found himself in another institution, the equally notorious Fremantle Gaol, where he spent a year after being convicted for assault and robbery, and subsequently for a second offence ('twocking', taking without consent, e.g. stealing a car for a joyride).[1] In prison, as elsewhere, it was

1 See Gerhard Fischer: 'Twocking' Der Auftrag to Black Australia.

taken for granted that he was just another delinquent 'Abo' who typically populate the penal institutions in Australia. Importantly, the gaol became his university. He was an avid reader, discovering in the prison library a great treasure of alternative worlds and life stories that could be found in encyclopaedias as much as in novels or poetry.

While in prison, Johnson met Dame Mary Durack, a writer and member of a prominent family clan in Western Australia. She took an interest in him and for a brief period, after his release from prison in 1958, invited him into her home. That Mudrooroo was considered and treated as a 'native boy' by the Durack family is evident from Dame Mary's introduction to Colin Johnson's first novel, 'Wild Cat Falling' (1965). The physical appearance determined for Mary Durack the identity of the young man: "He showed little obvious trace of native blood, but he had, what most of the darker people have lost, the proud stance and sinuous carriage of the tall, tribal Aborigine".[2] It was the 'do-gooder' philanthropist Mary Durack who encouraged and helped Mudrooroo to write and publish 'Wild Cat Falling', which came to be universally regarded as the first novel "by someone of Aboriginal blood" to be published in Australia.[3] In a very real sense, it was Mary Durack who made Colin Johnson into what he was eventually to become, an Aboriginal writer.

A letter of recommendation by Mary Durack to the Victorian Aboriginal Advancement League helped Johnson to move from Perth to Melbourne. His Indigenous identity was readily accepted by his new friends, but it had no practical consequences. In the 1960s, it did not play a major part in his life. There were other models of identification. In Perth, the teenager had adopted the pose of a 'Bodgie', but this was declared 'square' in Melbourne, so he converted to 'hippie' to fit in with the sweeping lifestyle revolution of the early sixties and its culture of 'sex, drugs and rock'n'roll'. The budding author found the temptation of a bohemian subculture hard to resist. But the drug-fuelled scene into which he was initiated by his brother-in-law constituted a great risk: to be arrested, if only by association, would have likely meant another jail term. His past, two criminal convictions, was an ever-present threat.

There was also the imperative to go 'straight', driven by the memory of a period of solitary confinement in Fremantle Gaol where Johnson had sworn to himself to reform. On the road towards middle-class respectability, he held a day-job as a civil service clerk (at the Motor Registry Office and, later, the State Library of Victoria), while often writing at night. Quite unhippie-like, he even married. His wife Jenny Katinas had come with her parents as refugees from Lithuania; she was young and beautiful, and her infatuated husband romantically saw her as "my European girl […] with a real history of princes, betrayals and occupations", while he described himself as "an Aussie, dark and often dull as the Australian bush".[4]

The next phase in Mudrooroo's remarkable life story is an almost incredible saga of a nearly decade-long meandering journey throughout Asia. In 1966, Colin

2 Mary Durack: Foreword, p. viii.
3 Ibid, p. xvii.
4 Mudrooroo: Tripping with Jenny, p. 7.

and Jenny embarked on an overland trip to London. In Bangkok, the couple met a monk who morphed into a kind of father figure (for the father Johnson never had) and who initiated him in the rites of Buddhism. A second trip two years later to deepen the religious experience saw the end of their relationship. Jenny, secular and pragmatic, returned to Melbourne while Colin continued his search for a new identity as a Buddhist. He subsequently spent seven years in India and Tibet, living in monasteries and as a wandering monk under the guidance of various teachers and gurus, adopting as his life model that of the Buddha who had transcended home and family and even his native country: he may have made occasional visits, but he would forever move on in his life-long travels. The Buddhist concept of a transcendent personal identity that is always in flux became a cornerstone of Colin Johnson's sense of Self.

In the mid-1970s, Colin Johnson returned to Australia to begin yet another transformation: he became an Aborigine by way of learning and studying. He worked along activist Burnum Burnum at Monash University, collaborated on several publishing projects with Indigenous playwright Jack Davis with whom he founded The National Aboriginal and Islanders Writers, Oral Literature and Dramatists Association ("one of the first attempts to enjoin a truly pan-Aboriginal approach to Indigenous verbal art"),[5] and organized and attended Aboriginal literature festivals and conferences. His research for the 'Dr. Wooreddy' novel took him to Tasmania where he walked across the island, guided by elders who explained to him the historical sites where the first Tasmanians fought against the European invaders.

While learning what it meant to be an Aborigine and immersing himself in Aboriginal life, studying its history and traditions, he became a pioneer of Indigenous cultural studies. He read widely in history and anthropology and completed a bachelor's degree (Honours). He began research into Aboriginal mythology that quickly found its way into new literary works, and began teaching courses in Aboriginal studies. His academic career began with introducing subjects in Indigenous culture at Monash University; subsequently, he was invited to set up an Aboriginal Studies Unit at Queensland University and, at the height of his career, he was Head of Aboriginal Studies at Murdoch University in Perth. He became well-known for his historical novels about Aboriginal resistance against the European invaders, most prominently 'Long Live Sandawara' (on the 'frontier war' in Western Australia's Kimberley region), and 'Dr Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World' (based on the fate of the Tasmanian Aborigines).

In the bicentenary year of 1988, Johnson travelled to several Aboriginal communities all over Australia to experience the life of tribal Aborigines in remote settlements. Out of this encounter, along with an awareness of Aboriginal politics gained in his work with government agencies like the Australia Council, and informed by a deep understanding of Aboriginal history, grew an idea of 'Aboriginality', a term that he coined and elaborated on as the core of what modern Indigenous literature and art should be all about, namely an attempt to recall the

5 Adam Shoemaker: Waiting to be Surprised (printout), p. 1.

mythological past with its spiritual connection to a dreamtime reality (whose stories today are mostly irretrievably lost), juxtaposed and fused with an account of the historical resistance of Indigenous Australians from the time of first contact through to the post-modern era of today's decolonized world. Johnson expanded this notion of a literature of magical-realist story telling in his 'Writing from the Fringe: A Study of Modern Aboriginal Literature in Australia' (1990), a 'landmark' work that firmly established his credentials as a literary and cultural theorist. Adam Shoemaker believes that, if Mudrooroo had died in 1995, his work as an Aboriginal "literary pioneer would live on today untarnished".[6]

Also in 1988, Colin Johnson confirmed his commitment to the Aboriginal cause by changing his name to Mudrooroo, following the advice of Aboriginal poet Kath Walker – his mentor in poetry – who had changed her name to Oodgeroo Noonuccal. It was an act of political protest against the official bicentenary commemorations. Both Mudrooroo and Oodgeroo mean 'paperbark' – as the writer's totem, or trade-mark – in their respective languages, in Johnson's case the Bibbulman language of what he thought were his mother's people, the Noongar of Western Australia. It was from his mother, as Mudrooroo claimed, that he got most of his culture and his complexes: "one of the latter was not being white".[7]

In the mid-1990s, Mudrooroo reached the peak of his career. He had won numerous prestigious awards; his books had been or were in the process of being translated into several languages: "His was the voice of Indigenous Australia".[8] In the European summer of 1996, Mudrooroo was in Germany where his "brave yet fearsome"[9] play 'The Aboriginal Protesters Confront the Declaration of the Australian Republic on 26 January 2001 with a Production of "The Commission" by Heiner Müller' – a hit at the Sydney Festival in January 1996 – was being performed to great critical and popular acclaim. He was in Weimar, traditional centre of classical German humanist culture, when the news broke that a newspaper in far-away Perth had published an article entitled 'Identity Crisis'. It suggested that Mudrooroo was no Aborigine at all.

The story by Victoria Laurie in the 'Weekend Australian Magazine' (20-21 July 1996) was based on the claim by Mudrooroo's sister, Rebecca Elisabeth ('Betty') Polglaze, née Johnson, that Mudrooroo's and all his siblings' olive skin colour was due to the genetic heritage derived from an Afro-American grandfather. Polglaze, nearly forty years older than Mudrooroo, felt apparently more comfortable about a Black American genealogy than a connection with Australian Aborigines. She was reported as having always been mystified why her famous brother had claimed an Indigenous identity, so she had researched their family history and found out that their mother's family, the Barrons, were white settlers from Ireland whose residence in Western Australia dated back to 1929. The conclusion was that there seemed to be no trace at all of 'Aboriginal blood' in Mudrooroo's family, and that he had wrongfully constructed an Indigenous identity. As the writer initially refused to comment on the story to 'set the record straight', as

6 Ibid, p. 2.
7 Quoted in Liz Thompson: Mudrooroo Narogin, Writer, p. 57.
8 Maureen Clark, Unmasking Mudrooroo, p. 48.
9 Angela Bennie: Call to Arms on the Eve of the Republic.

he was asked to do, it was widely assumed at the time that the family history as claimed by his sister was essentially correct. Betty Polglaze has since passed away. Recently, American scholar Paul Spickard, a leading researcher in the field of race and ethnicity, especially on the question of multiracialism and mixed racial and cultural experiences, has raised fundamental doubts about crucial aspects of the findings of Betty Polglaze.[10] She was neither a professional historian nor a researcher with training or experience in genealogical work.

One moot point is the skin colour of both Mudrooroo's mother and sister Betty. When Mudrooroo met his sister after nearly four decades, he was immediately struck by the similarities between mother and daughter: he remembered his mother as an old woman, small, brown, and with long black hair and dark eyes, and Betty looked exactly like her. In fact, both their appearance suggested to him a likeness to Noongar women. The dark skin of the mother is, however, inconsistent with the lily-white genealogy claimed by Betty Polglaze. As Spickard has pointed out, within the span of five generations after the first arrival of the European settlers, there could have been many instances of racial mixing in the family history, a common enough experience in the early history of rural White Australia. Tellingly, the research of Mudrooroo's sister had focussed solely on the "one ancestral line that led back […] to a Black American, not from Indigenous roots in any of the 31 other lines of her ancestry".[11]

Mudrooroo had repeatedly refused to be drawn on the issue of blood relations as a marker of Indigeneity: "I am […] not a government definition".[12] He eventually answered his critics in two essays in which he emphasized his record as a Black Australian writer in conjunction with his life story: a life lived and publicly acknowledged as an Aboriginal author. But his Aboriginality, he insisted, was only one part of his complex identity; his personal religious beliefs and life-long commitment to Buddhism in addition to his original and innovative work as a Black Australian author, in other words his *praxis* as an intellectual and activist, must be accounted for as well. Mudrooroo had found that identity was "a fragile thing that could be given and taken away",[13] yet he steadfastly refused to give up on an Indigenous identity that was determined for him by others on the 'evidence' of his dark skin colour.

In the wake of what the media termed a 'scandal', Mudrooroo was severely criticized; his books were removed from schools' reading lists, he was repudiated by his publisher and asked to return the literary prizes he had won. After having been regarded an undisputed "leader in the cultural politics of Aboriginal Australia" for many years, the "famous poet, novelist, playwright, essayist, and academic" suddenly found himself shunned and abandoned.[14] Quasi overnight, he had become a persona non grata in Australian literary circles. His works were all but erased from the public sphere.[15]

10 Paul Spickard: Mudrooroo, Aboriginal Writer of Many Identities.
11 Ibid.
12 Mudrooroo: Portrait of the Artist (printout), p. 2.
13 Mudrooroo: Tell them you're Indian, p. 263.
14 Maureen Clark: Unmasking Mudrooroo, p. 48.
15 Cf. Adam Shoemaker: Waiting to be Surprised, p. 2.

In 2001, overwhelmed by the continuing hostility he encountered, Mudrooroo withdrew into a self-imposed exile in India and Nepal. For a while it seemed he had lost his creativity, but after remarrying and founding a new family, he began writing again. He initially concentrated on his extensive diaries and on a six-volume autobiography of which four volumes were completed between 2004 and 2010.

In 2011, after a decade in exile, Mudrooroo returned to Australia to seek medical treatment for his terminal illness, accompanied by his Nepalese-born wife, Sangya Magar, and their 10-year-old son, Saman Nyoongah Magar. The family lived in a modest apartment in a Brisbane suburb, virtually anonymously and unrecognized. While his health continued to deteriorate, Mudrooroo kept on writing. In 2013, a book of poetry appeared, 'Old Fellow Poems'. In 2017, he published a new novel, 'Balga Boy Jackson', a kind of prequel to 'Wild Cat Falling' based on his childhood and teenage years. Against all odds, he managed to complete another book, 'Tripping with Jenny', based on another section of his autobiography. Sadly, he died on 20 January 2019, a few days before his last book appeared in print. His death was all but ignored by the Australian media.[16]

References

Bennie, Angela: Call to Arms on the Eve of the Republic. In: Sydney Morning Herald, 15 January 1996.

Clark, Maureen: Unmasking Mudrooroo. In: Kunapipi: Journal of Post-colonial Writing, 23, 2001, 2, pp. 48-63.

Durack, Mary: Foreword. In: Colin Johnson: Wild Cat Falling (1965). North Ryde, NSW: Collins/Angus & Robertson 1990, pp. v-xviii.

Etherington, Ben: The Living and the Undead. In: Sydney Review of Books, 29 April 2020, (online printout, pp. 1-38): https://sydneyreviewofbooks.com/essay/les-murray-mudrooroo.

Fischer, Gerhard: 'Twocking' Der Auftrag to Black Australia. Heiner Müller 'Aboriginalised' by Mudrooroo. In: Gerhard Fischer (ed.): Heiner Müller. CONTEXTS and HISTORY. Tübingen: Stauffenburg 1995, pp. 141-164.

Mudrooroo: Portrait of the Artist as a Sick Old Villain. 'Me I Am He the Villain': Reflections of a Bloke from Outside. In: JASAL, 11, 2011, 2.

Mudrooroo: "Tell them you're Indian". In: Jillian Cowlishaw, Barry Morris (eds.): Race Matters. Indigenous Australians and 'Our' Society. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press 1997, pp. 259-268.

Mudrooroo: Tripping with Jenny. Exile Bay: ETT Imprint, 2019.

Shoemaker, Adam: Waiting to be Surprised. In: JASAL 11, 2011, 2.

Spickard, Paul: Mudrooroo, Aboriginal Writer of Many Identities. In: Ethnic and Racial Studies, 43, 2020, 3 (online 11 July 2019), pp. 433-435.

Thompson, Liz: Mudrooroo Narogin, Writer. In: Aboriginal Voices. Contemporary Aboriginal Artists, Writers and Performers. Sydney: Simon & Schuster 1990.

16 Cf. Ben Etherington: The Living and the Undead, p. 8.

DOI: 10.35515/zfa/asj.41/2024.02

Australian Studies Journal
Zeitschrift für Australienstudien
41 — 2024

Stephen Muecke

Shuffle

We worked together on 'Paperbark'.
He might have suggested the name, since it was his,
and Oodgeroo's too.
A tradename for Aboriginal writers.

We met at Jack Davis' place in Fremantle:
Mudrooroo Narogin,
Adam Shoemaker and me.
Shuffling through the offerings,
Like leaves scattered on the floor.
Fingering leaves, that might break …

'A Collection of Black Australian Writings',
with a boost of Bicentennial money
that went into the Unaipon Award.

A book not as robust, we thought,
as oral traditions.
Repeated, elaborated, embellished,
and always in the warmth of
mother tongues,
cuddling for bedtime stories,
so you don't forget.

"Black Australian", as if
presaging the scandal
of genetic origins.
Was he Nyoongar, or Black?

Some Nyoongars didn't know.
One blackfella says,
"He never come to any of our barbecues!"
Must have kept to himself.
Too busy writing.

Like: “We’ll kill your reason
With unreason;
The murdered child,
His people waiting;
We’ll kill you stone dead,
And eat you with your cannibalism!”

(‘Sunlight Spreadeagles Perth In Blackness.
A bicentennial gift poem’.
By Colin Johnson.
Perth, Western Australia, 1985.)

The scandal broke and spread,
as the man who wrote the first novel,
Wild Cat Falling,
was pushed aside.
Words were his only real Country.

Blackfellas don’t care about pious origins.
Ruby Langford Ginibi got wind,
And wrote a letter to the editor:
“If your people don’t like you, Muddy,
You can come stay with me!” Trustori!

She loved all kinds of strays,
but he couldn’t stay:

“Let me be as unique as I want to be,
Let me dance this shuffling step,
Let me murmur this soft song”.

27 October 2022

DOI: 10.35515/zfa/asj.41/2024.03

Australian Studies Journal
Zeitschrift für Australienstudien
41 — 2024

Mudrooroo

Two Poems

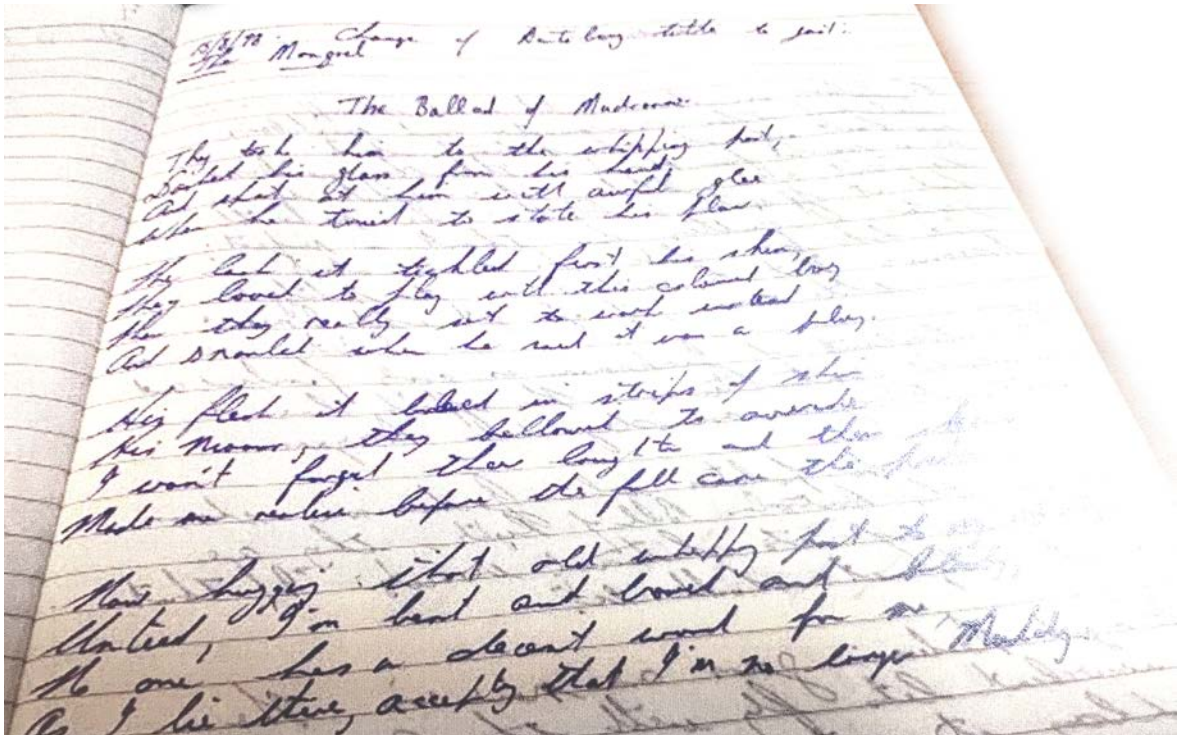
The Ballad of Mudrooroo

They took him to the whipping post,
Dashed his glass from his hand
And spat at him with awful glee
When he tried to state his plan.

The lash it tickled first his skin
They loved to play with this coloured boy
Then they really set to work instead
And snarled when he said it was a ploy.

His flesh it baked in strips of skin
This Moon, they hallowed to override
I won't forget their laughter and their scorn
Made me realise before the fall came the pride.

Now hugging that old unhappy post to my chest,
Untied, I'm bent and bowed and bloody,
No one has a decent word for me,
As I lie there, accepting that I'm no longer Muddy.[1]



1 15 August 1998, NLA, Acc O1.036, Box 3, item 21.

Anthropology

At Tübingen university,
The anthropology department is based
In the witch's house
The students, Hansels and Gretels,
Enter the forest – a fastness,
Become lost to find the forbidden
Sweetness of other cultures –
They find food to become food –
Not switching roles.
They become the white knight
Slaying the dragon,
Slaying the witch,
And all that seeks to enchant
By a bewitching difference
That once was dangerous,
Now rendered safe and sanitised
As stone walls painted over
Exactly, in medieval pretence.[2]

2 4 April 1999, NLA, Acc O1.036, Box 3, item 19.

DOI: 10.35515/zfa/asj.41/2024.04

Australian Studies Journal
Zeitschrift für Australienstudien
41 — 2024

Paul Spickard

Who Is to Judge?

Mudrooroo, W.E.B. Du Bois, and the Dance of Identities

Abstract: William Edward Burghardt Du Bois is widely regarded as the most important Black American intellectual. Editor of 'The Crisis', author of thirty books on Blackness in America, he was a founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and a dogged challenger of White supremacy over seven decades. His writings inspired generations of Black activists and intellectuals. Yet Du Bois grew up with a less than clear-cut racial identity and had relatives who were White. It was only in college that he took on the unambiguously Black identity that lasted throughout his career. Mudrooroo (also known as Colin Johnson) was the most prominent Aboriginal novelist, poet, playwright, and critic from the end of the Beat era into the 1990s. Yet in the mid-1990s, he was charged with racial fraud and drummed out of the Aboriginal movement; he subsequently chose to live in self-imposed exile in Nepal. Much later, in the 2010s, he returned to Australia and ultimately reclaimed his Aboriginal identity. This article is a meditation on racial plasticity, invention, and assertion in the lives of these two iconic figures in the racial struggles of their respective countries.

Du Bois: When I Chose to Be Black

W. E. B. Du Bois was the foremost Black American intellectual of the 20th century, by universal acclaim. Some would argue that he was the foremost American intellectual, period. He was a leader in the Niagara movement, one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, a longtime professor at Atlanta University, editor of 'The Crisis' for nearly a quarter century, author of countless articles and thirty books, and one of the most influential figures in the disciplines of history, sociology, and ethnic studies. He did battle with Booker T. Washington and Marcus Garvey for the hearts and minds of African Americans, and with Congress and the FBI for the right to advocate peace. He was one of the great leaders of the Pan-African movement and lived out his last years in Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana. It is not to contest the thoroughgoing Black identity of Du Bois, nor his eminence in African American history, that I offer the gentle suggestion that, by his own testimony, his racial origins were a bit more complicated than that.[1]

In 'Darkwater' and 'Dusk of Dawn', two of several places Du Bois recorded autobiographical details, he wrote fondly of his childhood in Great Barrington, a town of perhaps 5000 in cranberry country in far western Massachusetts. His mother, Mary Silvina Burghardt Du Bois, came from a long line of New Englanders. Her family had been free since her great-grandfather, Tom Burghardt, won

1 I have written on W. E. B. Du Bois many times, notably: The Power of Blackness: Mixed-Race Leaders and the Monoracial Ideal; In: Racial Thinking in the United States: Uncompleted Independence, and the Introduction to: Race in Mind: Critical Essays. In those essays, I stressed the multiracial aspect of Du Bois's consciousness, something he maintained throughout his life. In this essay, I am exploring the racial identity transformation that Du Bois experienced when he went to Fisk University.

emancipation in 1780 for his Revolutionary War service. Du Bois's father, Alfred Du Bois, was the grandson of a White planter in the Bahamas and that man's enslaved mulatto mistress. "Alfred, my father, […] was small and beautiful of face and feature, just tinted with the sun, his curly hair chiefly revealing his kinship to Africa".[2] Alfred was light enough that he served briefly as a White private in the Union army. One of Alfred's siblings lived as a White woman, married a White man, and that part of the family passed into the White race. W. E. B. Du Bois had White cousins.[3]

There were no more than a couple of dozen Black people in Great Barrington in those years, and in any case those were not the people with whom Willie and his mother mainly socialized. She had brown skin, the family was poor because Alfred went away and did not return, but young Willie mixed freely among the White townspeople. "In the ordinary social affairs of the village – the Sunday school with its picnics and festivals; the temporary skating rink in the town hall; the coasting in crowds on all the hills – in all these, I took part with no thought of discrimination on the part of my fellows […] I was thrown with the upper rather than the lower social classes and protected in many ways".[4] Mary Silvina and Willie attended the White First Congregational Church, not the small AME Zion Church, and he was culturally "quite thoroughly New England", with little day-to-day consciousness of race. "Living with my mother's people I absorbed their culture patterns and these were not African so much as Dutch and New England. The speech was an idiomatic New England tongue with no African dialect; the family customs were New England, and the sex mores".[5]

Great Barrington was a racially liberal place. Nearly all the townsfolk were Republicans (that meant something quite different then about racial politics than it does now), and many of them had fought in the Civil War to end slavery. Willie was the brightest child in the school, much beloved and encouraged by his White teachers. The mill owner's wife – the mother of one of his playmates – bought the textbooks for him that Mary Silvina could not afford. Frank Hosmer, the principal, insisted that Willie take the college preparatory curriculum (languages, history, philosophy, science) rather than train for a trade. His friends and classmates – people like Mary Crissey, Sabra Taylor, Ned Kelly, George Beebee, and Art Benham – all were White. Aiming perhaps for a journalism career, Willie did write two dozen squibs on local Black news for African American papers in New York, but otherwise he had little to do with Great Barrington's tiny Black community.[6]

When Du Bois (Fig. 1), still a proud son of New England, applied for college at Harvard he was turned down. His biographer, David Levering Lewis, says it was because the curriculum at Great Barrington High School was not as rigorous as Harvard demanded, though perhaps if Willie Du Bois's skin had been

2 W. E. B. Du Bois: Darkwater, p. 4.
3 See ibid., pp. 4 f.
4 W. E. B. Du Bois: Dusk of Dawn, pp. 14, 16.
5 ibid., pp. 18 f., 115. Only once did young Willie experience racialized discrimination, when a White girl who was new in town snubbed him; see W. E. B. Du Bois: The Souls of Black Folk, p. 2.
6 See David Levering Lewis: W. E. B. Du Bois, pp. 12-40.

just a bit lighter and his last name had been Leverett or Saltonstall, they might have found a seat for him.[7] Du Bois went instead to Fisk University, a Black college in Nashville that then was mainly engaged in turning out teachers for Black schools in the rural South. First Congregational and three other White churches each pledged twenty-five dollars a year to pay for Du Bois's college education.

Fig. 1: W. E. B. Du Bois
(Courtesy New York Public Library)

Lewis opined: "Willie's knowledge of the larger world of black people – and especially of southern black people – was […] indirect and negligible […] The South was alien and mysterious – a place of dread for black people in the North".[8] Du Bois underwent a transformation at Fisk. There he encountered the offspring of elite Black families from all over the South. They came in many shades, but clearly the Beigeoisie were the cream. Lewis, a later generation Fisk student himself, described them:

> The sons and daughters of slaves and slave masters, few of them displayed servile traits because, to the extent advantages flowed from it, they were beneficiaries of the slave system. Few came directly from farming backgrounds, and the parents of those who did owned more than a few acres. Their fathers were preachers, barbers, undertakers, and caterers, and, as often, the privileged domestic and sole doctor or pharmacist in a small town […] Their contact with white people had usually been far more restricted than Willie's […] Whereas Willie's intellectual and social growth had depended upon and led him into ever-closer contact with Great Barrington's white community, the educational and social advancement of his Fisk classmates had largely depended on the extent to which they had been insulated from local whites […] the sons and daughters of affluent Afro-America came to Fisk […] they set the tone and defined the institutional character […] Mulattoes seemed to be everywhere.[9]

In his autobiographical writings Du Bois located the critical era in the development of his Black consciousness in his college years at Fisk.[10]

Essential to Du Bois's transformation was learning about the people of the Black South. During both of his summers at college (he graduated in three years), he worked as a teacher in a tiny schoolhouse in little Alexandria, Tennessee. There he encountered people just struggling to survive in the aftermath of slavery. As

7 See ibid, p. 54. It likely was not *just* a racial decision on Harvard's part. Richard T. Greener had already been the first Black student to graduate from Harvard fifteen years earlier, and there was another one now and again in succeeding decades; see Ingrid Dineen-Wimberly: The Allure of Blackness among Mixed-Race Americans, 1862-1916, pp. 123-136.
8 David Levering Lewis: W. E. B. Du Bois, p. 56.
9 ibid., p. 61.
10 See W. E. B. Du Bois: Dusk of Dawn, pp. 25-49, 115.

he tried to teach elementary students to read, write, and figure, his Victorian New England sensibilities were shocked by poverty and filth and ignorance. Yet he was inspired that he might help uplift the people of a race he was increasingly feeling was his own. Lewis wrote that "Willie rapidly acquired a faith in his race that was quasi-religious […] he was finding his existential anchor at Fisk, growing in self-esteem among people who didn't 'despise [his] color,' and learning how to be a 'Negro' in the fullest sense".[11]

Whenever and however Du Bois's Black consciousness emerged, his biographers speak of him as remaining in conflict about his own racial identity in later years even while he proclaimed his Blackness. Citing Rayford W. Logan and E. Franklin Frazier, two Du Bois disciples of later decades, Lewis wrote:

> Du Bois insisted […] that he had embraced his racial identity only at Fisk. "Henceforward I was a Negro", Du Bois would proclaim, and then soar into a grand vision of his place in the race.
>
> Logan always said that Du Bois's claim of belated racial self-discovery was a polemical contrivance to give greater punch to his writings about race relations. To claim that his identity as a Negro was in some sense the exercise of an option, an existential commitment, was to define Willie's celebration of and struggle for his people as an act of the greatest nobility and philanthropy. He was a Negro not because he had to be […] but because he had embraced the qualities of that splendid race and the moral superiority of its cause […] the veil of color had always been porous.
>
> Willie's feelings about race in these early years were more labile or tangled, not to say conflictive […] [He wrote] diary entries flashing over Franco-Caribbean roots like far-off lightning, enhancing a lordly sense of self. Willie's racial shape in his last year at Fisk was still congealing, and it would always be an alloy, never entirely pure. […]
>
> [Frazier said] Willie's ambivalence endowed him with a resilient superiority complex, and […] *his lifelong espousal of the Darker World was an optional commitment based above all upon principles and reason, rather than a dazzling advocacy he was born into* […] during his short sojourn in the South as an undergraduate […] he never was thoroughly assimilated into Negro life.[12]

Thus, during three momentous years at Fisk, did Du Bois make a transition, not from White to Black exactly, but from unraced (or not very intensely raced) New England boy to loudly and proudly Black man.

Du Bois's comments in later years on two men he admired intensely give a clue to the complicated nature of his ongoing feelings about racial identity. Du Bois respected no one more than his grandfather, Alexander Du Bois. Alexander and his younger brother John were born to James Du Bois, a wealthy White planter in the Bahamas, and his enslaved mulatto mistress. The boys were educated at a fine school in Connecticut, but that came to an end when the father died and other relatives made off with the sons' inheritance. Willie was a young teenager when he first met his grandfather and described him as "a short, thick-set man, 'colored' but quite white in appearance, with austere face, […] hard and set in his ways, proud and bitter".[13] In the grandson's account:

11 David Levering Lewis: W. E. B. Du Bois, pp. 66, 68 f.
12 ibid., pp. 72 f., 597 n42, n44 (emphasis added); Rayford W. Logan (ed.): W. E. B. Du Bois, p. ix; E. Franklin Frazier: The Du Bois Program in the Present Crisis, p. 11.
13 W. E. B. Du Bois: Dusk of Dawn, p. 19, see also pp. 106 f.

> Grandfather took his bitter dose like a thoroughbred. Wild as was his inner revolt against this treatment, he uttered no word against the thieves and made no plea. He tried his fortunes here and in Haiti, where, during his short, restless sojourn, my own father was born. Eventually, grandfather became chief steward on the passenger boat between New York and New Haven; later he was a small merchant in Springfield; and finally he retired and ended his days at New Bedford [where he had a large house and servants]. Always he held his head high, took no insults, made few friends. He was not a "Negro"; he was a man![14]

W. E. B. Du Bois used the same sentence to sum up the life of Charles W. Chesnutt, the great, light-skinned, African American writer of the turn of the century, in a 1933 obituary in 'The Crisis':

> Chesnutt was of that group of white folk who because of a more or less remote Negro ancestor identified himself voluntarily with the darker group, studied them, expressed them, defended them, and yet never forgot the absurdity of this artificial position and always refused to admit its logic or its ethical sanction. He was not a Negro; he was a man.[15]

In his 1897 essay, 'The Conservation of Races', Du Bois wrote:

> We believe that the Negro people, as a race, have a contribution to make to civilization and humanity, which no other race can make […] We believe it the duty of Americans of Negro descent, as a body, to maintain their race identity until this mission of the Negro people is accomplished, and the ideal of human brotherhood has become a practical possibility.[16]

Du Bois knew he had made a racial journey, from relatively non-raced to emphatically Black. Like his grandfather and like Chesnutt, he had racial options, and like them he chose to be Black. In a life spent fighting White supremacy and racial injustice, alongside a rock-solid commitment to exhorting the 'Negro race' to liberation, Du Bois always made room for sympathy and alliances with other races – Asians, Polynesians, Indigenous North Americans – and yes, even some White people.[17] And he always remembered that he had once been at home among them. As powerful and complete as his commitment to Blackness was, it was not quite that way early in his life, and there was also a volitional element in his choice of a Black identity.

Mudrooroo: Aboriginal No More?

Mudrooroo was an Australian who was first known as Colin Johnson and also went by other names. He occupied many identities: Indigenous Australian, Buddhist priest, Beatnik, famous writer, Aboriginal activist, former Aboriginal, and late in life, Aboriginal once again. It is a complicated tale of repeated identity shifting, sometimes by Mudrooroo's own choice, and sometimes by the force of others. Adam Shoemaker, an eminent scholar of Aboriginal literature, wrote of Mudrooroo in 2011:

14 W. E. B. Du Bois: Darkwater, pp. 4 f.
15 W. E. B. Du Bois: Chesnutt, p. 20.
16 W. E. B. Du Bois: The Conservation of Races. In: American Negro Academy Occasional Papers, No. 2 (1897); reprinted in David Levering Lewis (ed.): W. E. B. Du Bois, pp. 20-27.
17 Cf. W. E. B. Du Bois: The World and Africa / Color and Democracy.

> I believe that – had Mudrooroo died in 1994 or 1995 – his reputation as a literary pioneer would live on today untarnished. His works would be extensively taught, anthologised and discussed […] Mudrooroo played a central role in [a vital] transformation – a cogent increase in mainstream recognition of the merit of Indigenous writers and their work […] the strong, written Indigeneity he had passionately advocated [for so long, just then was coming] into stronger focus.[18]

In order to understand the fluctuating identity journey of Mudrooroo, it will be helpful to understand a few things about the history of racial hierarchy and racial mixing in Australia.[19] Racialized relationships have been complex throughout Australia's history. Prior to British intervention, there were many different Native peoples in Australia, with distinct names, territories, languages, and lifeways. Outsiders lumped them all together as 'Aboriginal'. Other peoples came too: Afghan camel drivers, Melanesian contract laborers, Chinese miners. In the 19th century there was a lot of racial mixing: largely White men and Aboriginal women, but also Aboriginal men and White women, White women and Chinese men, and other combinations galore.[20] This meant that huge numbers of people whose families were multigenerational in Australia had complicated racial ancestries. There was also a lot of racial violence. White supremacy was the rule of the day. It remains an active force in Australian society, barely disguised, to this day.

As the 19th century turned to the 20th, Whites began creating the White Australia policy: not one law but a series of actions that sought to bar non-White immigrants. An Aboriginal assimilation policy segregated unmixed Aborigines, punished them, prevented them from flourishing, and kidnapped mixed-race children, incarcerated them in orphanages, and tried to turn them into White people. They imagined that Aboriginal people would wither and disappear, and that Australia would become a White republic.[21]

Colin Johnson/Mudrooroo

The story of Colin Johnson, a man of several names and many identities, is a cautionary tale about shape shifting.[22] One may have a complicated family history that presents one with multiple ethnic options, and one may wish to inhabit a particular identity that connects with a part of that history, but one's identity is not necessarily purely a matter of one's own choice. One's options may be constrained, whether by the dominant discourse of the majority group in society,

18 Adam Shoemaker: Mudrooroo, p. 2.
19 For a first list of sources on race in Australia, see Appendix 1 in the Reference Section.
20 See Ann McGrath: Illicit Love.
21 See Fact Sheet – Abolition of the 'White Australia' Policy. See also Peter Read: Stolen Generations and Rape of the Soul; Margaret D. Jacobs: White Mother to a Dark Race; Doris Pilkington: Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence.
22 For a list of sources and scholarly evaluations regarding the debate on Mudrooroo's identity, see Appendix 2. In the following, I also draw on two earlier pieces I wrote about Mudrooroo: 'Mudrooroo. Aboriginal No More?'; 'Mudrooroo. Aboriginal Writer of Many Identities'. Mudrooroo's own direct writings on identity include: 'Passing for White Passing for Black'; 'Us Mob. History, Culture, Struggle'; 'Tell Them You're Indian'; 'Portrait of the Artist as a Sick Old Villain "Me Yes I am He the Villain"'; 'Me – I Am Me!' (typescript courtesy of Tom Thompson, Sydney, dated 2015); 'Balga Boy Jackson'.

or by the subdominant discourse of a minority group with whom one might be associated. And both dominant and subdominant groups can change their minds.[23] Colin Johnson took on several identities over a long career (Fig. 2). He was rather a famous poet, novelist, playwright, essayist, and academic, and a leader in the cultural politics of Aboriginal Australia for several decades. And then, quite suddenly, he was forced to stop being all of those things. He was accused of being a racial fraud – and then he was forced to give up his lifelong identity against his will.

Johnson's early life was difficult, and not unlike the lives of many other poor children in mixed race families. He was born in 1938, the youngest and perhaps the darkest in color of many children, in East Cuballing, a tiny hamlet in south-western Australia.[24] His father died while Colin was in the womb, whereupon four older siblings were taken into care by the state. The home seems to have been a tumultuous one, with not much money or parental supervision. As he

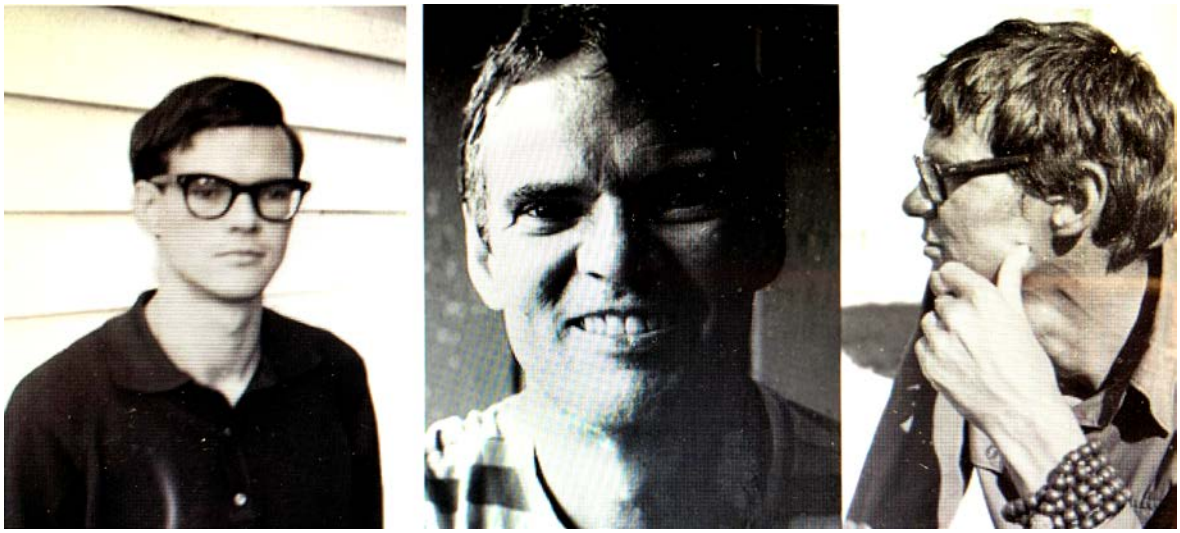


Fig. 2: Colin Johnson/Mudrooroo
[Courtesy The Publishers, ETT Imprint, Sydney]

described it later: "For the first nine years of my life we lived in the small town of Beverley where no one would talk to us, because we were poor and black […] When we went to school, we were segregated with the other Aboriginal children. [My mother] was treated as an Aborigine and we were treated as Aborigines, too".[25] When Colin was nearly nine he and an older sister Shirley – the "terrors of the town", in his words – were charged with theft and removed from their mother's care.[26] Colin was placed at Clontarf Boys' Town, a Christian Brothers home

23 On the concepts of dominant vs. subdominant discourses, see Paul Spickard: What Must I Be, pp. 43-60.
24 There is at least some doubt as to whether the woman listed as his mother on his birth certificate was in fact his mother. At points later in life, Johnson suggested his much older half-sister, Joyreen, who signed the birth certificate, may actually have been his biological mother; cf. Terry O'Connor: A Question of Race. Accounts differ as to whether there were eight children, nine, or twelve.
25 Mudrooroo: Portrait of the Artist; Terry O'Connor: A Question of Race.
26 Mudrooroo: Portrait of the Artist.

near Perth, where he remained for seven years.[27] He left at sixteen, then lived on his own for two years, pursuing the profession of burglar, before returning to an institutional setting: a couple of stretches in Fremantle Prison.

While he was there, he met Dame Mary Durack, a wealthy novelist, poet, and do-gooder. She noticed he liked to read, to talk about ideas, and to write; she became his mentor. He read Allen Ginsburg and Jack Kerouac and imagined himself a Dharma Bum. He traveled on the cheap across Southeast Asia to India, on to London to see the Beat scene there, and back to Australia, where he took a job in Melbourne. With encouragement from Durack, Johnson wrote a Kerouac-esque novel, 'Wild Cat Falling', about Aboriginal life in Western Australia, published in 1965.[28] Two years later, with the proceeds from selling the paperback rights to Penguin and in the company of his newly wedded wife Jenny Katinas (a migrant from Lithuania), he headed for India again. They became disciples of a Tibetan Buddhist teacher, Kalu Rinpoche. Jenny soon returned to Melbourne but Johnson stayed on for six years, eventually becoming a Buddhist monk himself.[29] He found his way back to Melbourne in 1974, but soon he was off again, this time following an American woman, Elena Castaneda, to San Francisco. There he sampled the remains of the Beat scene, met Lawrence Ferlinghetti, lived with the Moonies and the Salvation Army, then hitchhiked up the West Coast. He was thrown out of British Columbia for reasons that remain obscure. In California he finished his second novel, 'Long Live Sandawara' (about a late-19th-century hero of Aboriginal resistance); then he returned to Melbourne.[30]

Patsy Millett, a friend from those years, described Johnson's wanderings this way:

> Over a relatively short period, he declared himself in turn a bohemian beatnik, an existentialist, a vegetarian and a Buddhist […] The one facet of his ever-changing identity that was taken as read – beyond query – was his Aboriginal ancestry. [T]here is no doubt that from his earliest awareness, this nomad from the south-west of Western Australia identified himself with the indigenous people of that area […] Johnson came out of a time when no one would make a claim to Aboriginality if it were not true, since there was scarcely any advantage in doing so […] Moreover, along with many other part-Aboriginals, he had shared an initiation of abandonment, alienation and discrimination – and thus, as a youth, it was to these people that he turned for companionship.[31]

On his return to Australia, Johnson took up his Aboriginal heritage in earnest. He met the Aboriginal activist Harry Penrith (later Burnum Burnum) and together they worked at the Monash University Aboriginal Research Centre. Johnson also began to study for an undergraduate degree at Melbourne University. Along with historical and political writings, out came a third novel, 'Dr.

27 The Clontarf Boys' Town came under much-belated scrutiny and condemnation for physical and sexual abuse of the boys in its care during the era that Colin Johnson was confined there: Joseph Cantanzaro, Emily Moulton: Royal Commission Told of Torture, Rape and Beatings by Christian Brothers in WA; Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse: Report of Case No. 11.

28 See Colin Johnson: Wild Cat Falling.

29 See Mudrooroo: Tripping with Jenny.

30 See Colin Johnson: Long Live Sandawara.

31 Patsy Millett: Identity Parade, p. 75.

Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World'.[32] That same year (1983) he married again, to an academic named Julie Whiting. He and Jack Davis also founded the National Aboriginal and Islander Writers, Oral Literature and Dramatists Association.

Not just Colin Johnson, but a lot of other Aboriginal and mixed race people were mounting a movement for recognition and redress in Australian society in those years. In 1988, many thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander people marched through the streets of Sydney celebrating their survival despite the dominating presence of White Australians for two centuries. At the height of this movement, Johnson decided to change his name to Mudrooroo (a Nyoongah word for the paper bark tree). When he sought to make the change legally, he learned he needed a second name to complete the switch, so he added Nyoongah (meaning person but also a generic name for several Indigenous peoples of extreme southwest Australia) as a surname. As he said, "I've always been a Nyoongah and I'll be a Nyoongah till the day I die".[33] Several more books appeared – novels, volumes of poetry, and increasingly literary criticism. Sometimes he wrote as Mudrooroo Nyoongah, sometimes Mudrooroo Narogin, and increasingly just as Mudrooroo.

His crowning critical achievement was 'Writing from the Fringe: A Study of Modern Aboriginal Literature in Australia' (expanded from his B.A. honors thesis, which he completed at Murdoch University in Perth). In that book, Mudrooroo attempted to delineate a shape for what Aboriginal literature ought to be.[34] In teaching, writing, and criticism, Mudrooroo had risen to the status of an icon. Even a critic of Mudrooroo such as Maureen Clark had to admit that "[a]cknowledged for over two decades as the arbitrator in matters of authentic Aboriginal writing, his was the voice of Indigenous Australia".[35] He was head of Aboriginal studies at Murdoch. 'Wild Cat Falling' was taught in schools across the country. But he who rises high sometimes falls far. Mudrooroo was given over to making authoritative, sometimes injudicious statements. Although he wrote of Aboriginality as primarily a matter of culture and experience, he sometimes also claimed that, in order to be authentically Aboriginal, you also had to have a blood connection. Aboriginality, he wrote in 'Us Mob', rests on descent, but also "includes a learnt portion, and to stress degrees of 'blood' is in effect playing the Master's game, which is always one of dealing with possession, legality, paternity and caste".[36] In that book, he was trying to connect ideas about Aboriginal identity and peoplehood in Australia with discussions of such matters in other places by people like Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, and Trinh Minh-ha.[37]

It may have been a matter of professional jealousy that tipped things against Mudrooroo. Sally Morgan had written a huge best-seller, 'My Place', that

32 See Colin Johnson: Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World.
33 Terry O'Connor: A Question of Race.
34 See Mudrooroo Narogin: Writing from the Fringe.
35 Maureen Clark: Unmasking Mudrooroo, p. 48.
36 Mudrooroo: Us Mob, p. 13.
37 See Victoria Laurie: Identity Crisis, p. 32; Mudrooroo: Us Mob, pp. 1-17, 13, 3. Cf. Frantz Fanon: The Wretched of the Earth; Albert Memmi: The Colonizer and the Colonized; Trinh T. Minh-ha: Woman, Native, Other.

Mudrooroo criticized severely. Morgan had only discovered her Aboriginal ancestry as a teenager, and her memoir charted her experience of discovery and subsequent identity change. The book was immensely popular (and also heavily criticized by several Aboriginal writers) because it seemed to allow White people an easy way to believe they had understood Aboriginal experience.[38] Mudrooroo was especially scathing among these critics. Mudrooroo wrote: "New writers such as Sally Morgan […] do not see themselves as part of an active ongoing movement, but as individuals either searching for their roots or seeking equal opportunity in a multicultural Australia".[39] Mudrooroo was trapped in Black Power while Sally Morgan had moved on to multiculturalism and self actualization, which proved to be more durable impulses.[40] 'My Place', said Mudrooroo, is "not really an Aboriginal book – it's coming from outside and exploring our Aboriginality. [It is] a sanitised version of Aboriginality". Morgan, he said, was successful because "[t]he time has arrived when you can be young, gifted and not very black, and end up selling 400 000 copies […] Just because something is written by a person who identifies as an Aborigine doesn't make it an Aboriginal work".[41] At this point Mudrooroo's career had reached its apogee. In 1996, 'Us Mob' won the Kate Challis RAKA Award for Indigenous creative art, the twelfth and final book or career prize Mudrooroo would win.

And then the roof fell in. An Indigenous writers' conference voted to censure Mudrooroo for his comments about Sally Morgan (he later apologized and retracted them). Betty Polglaze (née Johnson), Mudrooroo's oldest sister, then in her seventies, had been doing amateur genealogy for some years and she chose this time to go public with what she had found. She was living as a White woman and was married to a White man; had she been known to be Aboriginal, at the time that she married she would have been required to seek official permission to marry her husband, and she did not have that permission. It is not clear whether Betty had ever known her youngest brother, as she was a teenager and out of the house before he was born, but it is certain that she had not seen or known of him in more than half a century. When finally they met, Mudrooroo recalled:

> The first thing she said to me was: "Why do you want to be an Aborigine, they're dirty". I was actually startled and stared at this old brown woman who looked like a Noongar woman […] I didn't know what to make of [my sister] and felt insulted and hurt […] They weren't my kind of folks and there was nothing in their looks to even suggest that they were descended from Afro-Americans and not Noongars. Betty reminded me of those sad dark women who when girls had spent hours scrubbing their faces in order to rub off the black.[42]

Betty Polglaze's research showed that her mother was descended five generations back from one of the first Irish families in Western Australia, and that her father's father was a Black American, the descendant of enslaved people, who had immigrated from North Carolina. Apparently, for Betty Polglaze, being descended from a Black American was less of a threat to her Whiteness than being descended

38 See Sally Morgan: My Place.
39 Mudrooroo Narogin, Writing from the Fringe, p. 14.
40 See Mudrooroo Narogin: Writing from the Fringe, p. 14; cf. pp. 149, 162.
41 Victoria Laurie: Blacks Question, p. 12; Maureen Clark: Unmasking Mudrooroo, pp. 52 ff.
42 Mudrooroo: Me – I Am Me! See also Mudrooroo: Portrait of the Artist.

from an Aboriginal Australian. What her research did not show was the many other branches of her family tree; five generations back there should have been thirty-two in all, and Betty reported only on these two. Given the amount of informal mixing that occurred in the early generations of the encounter between Aboriginal Australians, Europeans, and others, it would not be surprising at all if Betty and Colin's mother or father had Aboriginal ancestry.[43] Betty chose to focus on the pioneer Irish White family, to explain her own olive complexion, dark eyes, and dark hair as products of her grandfather's American Blackness, and to ignore the other branches of her ancestry. (My friends in African American studies circles find it comical that, apparently in Betty Polglaze's mind, descent from an African American slave made her White in the Australian context.) But her younger brother Colin, now the famous author Mudrooroo, cast a threat upon the Whiteness to which she seems clearly to have aspired.[44]

Betty Polglaze made contact with Robert Eggington, a man of part-Aboriginal ancestry and an official with the Dumbartung Aboriginal Corporation in Western Australia. Eggington pronounced himself shocked by what he regarded as an imposture and went to the press.[45] A well-known journalist, Victoria Laurie, investigated and wrote at least two pieces for Rupert Murdoch's 'The Australian' questioning Mudrooroo's Aboriginal authenticity, and frenzied, gossipy discussion was on.[46] Several newspapers and magazines ran features.[47] Within a couple of years there was a huge, purportedly scholarly literature about what many eager critics framed as the Mudrooroo hoax, barely able to conceal their gloating tone.[48] Only a few people spoke up on Mudrooroo's behalf, among them the acclaimed Aboriginal writer Ruby Langford Ginibi:

> Who are these people who are bent on pulling him down? He has not got to prove himself to anyone […] I say this, that he couldn't write the way he does if he is not Aboriginal […] If these people are gonna hold Mudrooroo up to scrutiny, they better question every one of us claiming Aboriginality to be fair and they better also stop non-Aboriginals having a field day with all our Koori resources at that Institute of Aboriginal Studies in Canberra.[49]

Such protestations were drowned out in a cacophony of gossipy condemnation.

This is the subversive way that White supremacy works. Often, no White person has to do anything. The prize of Whiteness or near-Whiteness acts powerfully itself, dividing people of color and getting them to tear each other down. Adam Shoemaker summed up the outcome: "The 1996 denunciation of Mudrooroo was

43 Mudrooroo's mother had another daughter, Margaret, by another father, in 1940, two years after Mudrooroo was born. She stayed in close contact with the mother throughout that woman's long life. Mudrooroo later wrote that "Margaret […] had always thought that Mum was Aborigine", Mudrooroo: Me – I Am Me!, n.p.

44 We only know about the adult racial identities of three of Mudrooroo's many (at least seven, perhaps as many as eleven) siblings. Two who joined Betty Polglaze in asserting White identities and criticizing Mudrooroo's Aboriginality were also much older siblings, Joyreen Stamsfield and Frank Johnson. Whether any of the others identified as Aboriginal is not known.

45 See Amanda Meade: Novelist Defends His Black Identity.

46 See Victoria Laurie: Blacks Question; id.: Identity Crisis.

47 See References, Appendix 1.

48 See References, Appendix 2.

49 Ruby Langford Ginibi: Right to be a Koori Writer.

so powerful, so complete and so all-encompassing that his creative persona literally disappeared from view. His works were all-but-effaced and his memory all-but-erased".[50] Immediately 'Wild Cat Falling' was removed from the compulsory reading lists for A-levels across the country.

Mudrooroo's response was bewilderment, followed by pain. He apparently had not been expecting any of this and he was left reeling. He had been hoisted by his own petard: accused of Aboriginal inauthenticity, even as he had accused Sally Morgan of the same. When another much-older half-sister, Joyreen, demanded he take a DNA test to determine (a) if he had Aboriginal ancestry and (b) if she was really his birth mother as he suspected, he agreed to the test but the results were not published. He did not bother to contest the accuracy of Betty Polglaze's genealogy. A Nyoongah organization challenged him to come before them and prove his Aboriginality. In shock, and apparently unable to imagine how to prove that, he did not respond. As he reflected a year later:

> When, in 1996, it was declared that Mudrooroo was of Negro ancestry, thus negating thirty years of being an Aborigine, it necessitated some identity searching: what did this mean to me? I had discovered that identity is a fragile thing and can be taken away, just as it can be given. As I had not confronted such a crisis before, did it mean that through some genetic oversight I had lost my culture and had become unauthentic? Though with a little diligent research I might re-establish my racial credentials; but then for what? […] Whatever my identity is, it rests on my history of over fifty years and that is that […] I have done my part in the Aboriginal struggle and, now […] I do not intend to pursue an Aboriginal identity merely for the sake of claiming a piece of land.[51]

In the end, Mudrooroo kept his Aboriginal name, but he decided to go back to concentrating on his Buddhist identity. As he wrote later:

> It is my religion and my work that gives me a sense of identity and worth […] I realized the depth of the antagonism and hostility there was against me. This affected me deeply. I doubted that I had any talent to write and stopped. It was then that His Holiness the Dalai Lama appeared to me in a dream, laughed, and told me to come to India. I woke up and, old as I was, took to the road again. Away from Australia life turned sweet as the 21st century dawned. I ended up in Nepal under the smile of a Buddhist monastery housing the relics of the famous Lama Zopa who had spread Buddhism in the West. I married Sangya Magar, an Indigenous Nepali, on 22 May 2002, and I have a son, Saman, a bright kid who wishes to be a space engineer and terraform Mars.[52]

There, Mudrooroo professed to be happy – still Aboriginal, but no longer an activist, and more given to his Buddhism than to his Aboriginality.

When one talks about Mudrooroo, because of this history, the question of authenticity inevitably comes up. A lot of people are obsessed by it.[53] Authenticity policing of this sort is common in ethnic studies. Especially among Native American scholars, there is always somebody who is ready to say that so-and-so is not really an Indian. Native American novelist Michael Dorris was frequently dogged by rumors that he was simply a White man pretending to be an Indian, and the regents of the University of Colorado found a couple of people who were

50 Adam Shoemaker: Waiting to be Surprised.
51 Mudrooroo: Tell Them You're Indian, pp. 263 f.
52 Mudrooroo: Me – I Am Me!
53 See References, Appendix 2.

willing to question professor and activist Ward Churchill's Indigenous credentials in an attempt to discredit his political critique and remove him from a faculty position.[54]

For a very long time, Mudrooroo/Colin Johnson was an Aboriginal person, in his own mind and in the minds of everybody else. And then almost everybody else changed their minds. Manifestly, this guy was an authoritative Aboriginal voice for more than three decades. He was widely accepted as such by both Aboriginal Australians and others. Given where and how he came up, he had every reason to think himself an Aboriginal person of mixed ancestry. Lots and lots of people who were part Aboriginal had stories like his. There is no hard evidence that Mudrooroo was *pretending* to be Aboriginal.

There is reason to doubt both the motivation and the accuracy of the genealogical work done by Betty Polglaze, his sort-of sister. It seems clear that she had lived her life as a White person and wanted to remain White. Mudrooroo's very public Aboriginality was inconvenient toward that end. Polglaze's genealogical work, as it has been reported, is incomplete. She made much of one Irish immigrant family five generations back and of a Black American ancestor three generations back. But there are thirty other ancestral lines in which there plausibly could have been an Aboriginal ancestor, and Polglaze paid no attention to them.

Then there was the matter of the DNA test. We do not know for sure if it actually took place, nor what its findings may have been. Let us disregard whether or not Joyreen was found to be related to him in the manner of mother and son. And let us assume that the test came back with a determination that Mudrooroo's DNA showed no evidence of Aboriginal ancestry. That tells us nothing about Mudrooroo. In 1998, when he is reported to have agreed to take the test, a lot of people believed that DNA was a kind of magical template that could tell all manner of hidden things about a person. These days we are a bit more skeptical. DNA is good for many things, and it could indeed demonstrate that Joyreen and Colin were close relatives (but that was clear anyway). DNA testing can tell a person a lot about the percentage likelihood of contracting certain diseases. But it has been demonstrated conclusively that DNA ancestry testing for racial or ethnic ancestry is junk science. There are no markers (nor groups of markers) for Aboriginality, or Germanity, or Finlandity. Whatever group you choose, and whatever marker you choose, there are people inside the group who lack the marker, and people outside the group who possess the marker, so the markers cannot tell you if a particular person is a member of a racial or ethnic group. The markers of many people, taken together, can tell something about the frequency of specific markers within particular racial populations, but DNA cannot tell you anything at all about an individual person's racial identity.[55]

In the end, the authenticity question is less important than the shifting of this man's identity. That is quite a remarkable story. Colin Johnson/Mudrooroo was a part-Aboriginal person (and episodically some other things like a Beatnik and a Buddhist monk) for more than half a century. He grew famous and influential

54 See References, Appendix 3.
55 See References, Appendix 4.

in that identity. And then, in the blink of an eye, he was thrown out of that fraternity, because pretty much everybody decided, against most of the evidence, that he was a fraud.

And then …

There is a coda to this story. In 2011, Mudrooroo, his wife, and their teenaged son quietly moved to Brisbane. He took up writing again but stayed out of public view. He remained attached to his Buddhist identity as well as his Aboriginality, and he had achieved a certain peace. As he wrote in an autobiographical sketch dated 2015:

> For this old fellow it really doesn't matter […] His life is all but over and eventually all that will remain will be his books such as Wild Cat Falling. People have read and enjoyed my work and that is enough for me.[56]

ETT Imprint published a new autobiographical novel, 'Balga Boy Jackson', in 2017, and followed up with the first volume of a memoir, 'Tripping with Jenny', two years later. After a generation away, Mudrooroo came back into print and proclaimed that he was, in fact, Aboriginal after all. In 'Wild Cat Falling', Mudrooroo's first book, the author was young and brash and full of himself, pissed off at the world and trying to be artful and cool (with great success, one must say). Now, in 'Balga Boy Jackson' almost half a century later, Mudrooroo goes over much of the same territory – his boyhood to young adult years – but he is calmer, more linear and detailed, not wanting so much to make a splash as to be understood. 'Wild Cat Falling' made a huge impact, but 'Balga Boy Jackson' is deeper and truer. While the tone of 'Wild Cat Falling' was pulsing and spiritually empty, 'Balga Boy Jackson' is contemplative, elegiac. It has less heat and light, but more strength.[57] A new French-language edition of 'Wild Cat Falling' came out in Paris in 2017.[58]

In 2017, a man in his late seventies looking back at the identity controversy of twenty years before, Mudrooroo reflected, "It appears that many persons are out to grab some sort of identity even though they have never lived it" (this seems to be a reference to Sally Morgan), "or if living it disavowing it" (probably a reference to his sisters Betty and Joyreen).

> And so it goes on until you grow tired of disputation and become a refugee going off to explore your religion where difference is not so important and liberation is […] Except I still know that I am a Noongar, no matter what my sister says. Let any person believe and prove what they want to be; but Mudrooroo declares himself to be an Aborigine, his existential being a Noongar.[59]

Mudrooroo died in Brisbane on 20 January 2019.

56 Mudrooroo: Me – I Am Me!, n.p.
57 Mudrooroo: Balga Boy Jackson. Mudrooroo's relationship to narrow facticity was always a complicated one. He wrote, "I use Henry Miller's idea of *fictional autobiography*, believing that the truth lies in discourse, rather than in the content"; Mudrooroo: Me – I am Me!
58 See Mudrooroo: Chat Sauvage en Chute Libre.
59 Mudrooroo: Email to Paul Spickard, 30 December 2017.

Of Du Bois, Mudrooroo, and the Dance of Identities

What are we to make of the identity journeys of Mudrooroo and Du Bois, these two abundantly talented thinkers and writers? They both were prolific writers with distinct focus on their respective racial-political groups, Aboriginal Australians and African Americans. They were thought leaders and movement activists, Du Bois of the long-term fight for US Black freedom and dignity, Mudrooroo of a similar fight for Indigenous Australians.

The two also diverged. Du Bois grew up in a house without wealth, but his early life was not much circumscribed by race. He had access to a White social world and a solid education, first in New England schools, then at Fisk and Harvard, where he took the Ph.D., and then in Germany. Mudrooroo, by contrast, grew up even poorer, was taken from his family as a child and incarcerated in a notorious orphanage. He left school at sixteen and soon landed in prison. It was only after those hurdles were past that he began to find an upward path. Du Bois had to go to Fisk to discover Black culture. It was only when teaching in a tiny rural hamlet that he came face to face with the poverty and disempowerment experienced by the majority of poor Black people in the South. Mudrooroo did not have to go anywhere to find out about Aboriginal culture and limited life chances: he had lived them from birth. Du Bois inherited rigid New England Victorian morals and manners. Mudrooroo had a more adjustable moral and spiritual compass; he was a Buddhist and a lifetime seeker.

Each of these writers made extraordinary contributions to the life of the mind in their respective racial groups. Each had racial options. Du Bois had an ambiguous physiognomy, White cousins, and White social skills, but after Fisk, he chose to be Black. Mudrooroo was Aboriginal from birth and embraced it, but periodically he chose to emphasize other identities as well: Buddhist monk, Dharma bum. In the end, both chose the darker option. Mudrooroo's life took a different shape than Du Bois's, but it was not of a different kind. One must conclude that those who drove Mudrooroo out made a mistake – to their detriment, to his, and to the cause of Aboriginal people. Mudrooroo was as Aboriginal as Du Bois was African American.

Note

I am grateful to the Central European University Institute for Advanced Study, to the Australian National University and the University of Western Australia, for support during the research and writing of this article; and to Anna Spickard for research help and good company.

References

Cantanzaro, Joseph: Secret Report Exposes 'Horrifying' Child Abuse. In: The West Australian, 30 May 2012.

Du Bois, W. E. B.: Chessnutt. In: The Crisis, 40, January 1933, p. 20.
——: Darkwater. Voices from Within the Veil. London: Verso 2016 (Original: New York: Harcourt Brace 1920).
——: Dusk of Dawn. An Essay toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction 1984 (Original: 1940).
——: The Conservation of Races. American Negro Academy Occasional Papers, No. 2 (1897); reprinted in: David Levering Lewis (ed.): W. E. B. Du Bois. A Reader. New York: Holt 1995, pp. 20-27.
——: The Souls of Black Folk. New York: Dover 1994 (Orig. 1903).
——: The World and Africolor and Democracy. Introductions by Mahmood Mamdani and Gerald Horne. New York: Oxford 2007 (Orig. 1945, 1946).
Dineen-Wimberly, Ingrid: The Allure of Blackness among Mixed-Race Americans, 1862-1916. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 2019.
'Fact Sheet – Abolition of the 'White Australia' Policy', www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/danz/dv/0220_13_1/0220_13_1en.pdf, retrieved 14 January 2018.
Fanon, Frantz: The Wretched of the Earth. New York: Grove 1965.
Frazier, E. Franklin: The Du Bois Program in the Present Crisis. In: Race, Devoted to Social, Political and Economic Equality. New York: Negro Universities Press 1971 (Orig. 1935-36).
Johnson, Colin: Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World. Melbourne: Hyland House 1983.
——: Long Live Sandawara. Melbourne: Quartet Books, 1979.
——: Wild Cat Falling. Sydney: Angus & Robertson 1965.
Lewis, David Levering: W. E. B. Du Bois. Biography of a Race, 1868-1919. New York: Holt 1993.
McGrath, Ann: Illicit Love. Interracial Sex and Marriage in the United States and Australia. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 2015.
Meade, Amanda: Novelist Defends His Black Identity. In: Weekend Australian, 5 April 1997, p. 2.
Memmi, Albert: The Colonizer and the Colonized. New York: Orion 1965.
Minh-ha, Trinh T.: Woman, Native, Other. Writing, Postcoloniality and Feminism. Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1989.
Morgan, Sally: My Place. New York. Seaver 1988 (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press 1987).
Moulton, Emily: Royal Commission Told of Torture, Rape and Beatings by Christian Brothers in WA. In: The Sunday Times, 28 April 2014.
Mudrooroo: Balga Boy Jackson. Exile Bay, Sydney: ETT Imprint 2017.
——: Chat Sauvage en Chute Libre. Paris: Baelio 2017.
——: Me – I Am Me!. Typescript, courtesy of Tom Thompson. Sydney 2015.
——: Portrait of the Artist as a Sick Old Villain 'Me Yes I Am He the Villain'. Reflection from a Bloke Outside. In: JASAL, 11, 2011, 2.
——: Us Mob. History, Culture, Struggle. Introduction to Indigenous Australia. Sydney: Angus & Robertson 1995.
——: Tell Them You're Indian. In: Cowlishaw, Gillian, Barry Morris (eds.): Race Matters. Indigenous Australians and Our Society. Canberra, Aboriginal Studies Press 1997, pp. 259-268.
——: Tripping with Jenny. Exile Bay, Sydney: ETT Imprint 2019.

——[Narogin]: Writing from the Fringe. A Study of Modern Aboriginal Literature in Australia. Melbourne: Hyland House 1990.
——[Nyoongah]: Passing for White Passing for Black. An Ideological Con-pro-testation. In: Continuum: The Australian Journal of Media and Culture, 8, 1994, 2.
Narogin, Mudrooroo: Writing from the Fringe. A Study of Modern Aboriginal Literature in Australia. South Yarra, Victoria: Hyland House 1990.
Logan, Rayford W. (ed.): W. E. B. Du Bois. A Profile. New York: Hill and Wang 1971.
Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse: Report of Case No. 11. Congregation of Christian Brothers of Western Australia, Sydney, December 2014.
Spickard, Paul: Introduction. In: Paul Spickard (ed.): Race in Mind. Critical Essays. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press 2015, pp. 1-12.
——: Mudrooroo. Aboriginal No More? In: Tamai, Lily Welty, Ingrid Dineen-Wimberly, Paul Spickard (eds.): Shape Shifters. Journeys Across Terrains of Race and Identity. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 2020, pp. 350-62.
——: Mudrooroo. Aboriginal Writer of Many Identities. In: Ethnic and Racial Studies, 43, 2019, 3, pp. 433-35.
——: The Power of Blackness. Mixed-Race Leaders and the Monoracial Ideal. In: id. G. Reginald Daniel (eds.): Racial Thinking in the United States: Uncompleted Independence. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press 2004, pp. 103-123.
——: What Must I Be? Asian Americans and the Question of Multiethnic Identity. In: Amerasia Journal, 23, Spring 1997, 1, pp. 43-60.

Appendix 1

Carlson, Bronwyn: The Politics of Identity. Who Counts as Aboriginal Today? Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press 2016.
Cowlishaw, Gillian: Black, White, or Brindle. Race in Rural Australia. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 1988.
——: Blackfellas, Whitefellas, and the Hidden Injuries of Race. London: Blackwell 2004.
Grant, Stan: Talking to My Country. Sydney: HarperCollins Australia, 2016.
Jacobs, Margaret D.: White Mother to a Dark Race. Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 2009.
Paradies, Yin C.: Beyond Black and White. Essentialism, Hybridity and Indigeneity. In: Journal of Sociology, 42, 2006, 2, pp. 355-367.
Pilkington, Doris: Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence. New York: Hyperion 2002.
Read, Peter: A Rape of the Soul So Profound. The Return of the Stolen Generations. St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin 1999.
——: The Stolen Generations. The Removal of Aboriginal Children in New South Wales, 1883 to 1969. Surry Hills, NSW: New South Wales Department of Aboriginal Affairs 2006 (Reprint of 1981).

Vasta, Elli, Stephen Castles (eds.): The Teeth Are Smiling. The Persistence of Racism in Multicultural Australia. St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin 1996.

Appendix 2

Primary Sources

Ginibi, Ruby Langford: The Right to be a Koori Writer [letter]. In: The Australian, 7 August 1996, p. 12.
Laurie, Victoria: Blacks Question 'Aboriginal Writer'. In: The Weekend Australian, 20-21 July 1996, pp. 3, 12.
——: Identity Crisis. In: The Weekend Australian, 20-21 July 1996, pp. 28-32.
Martin, Roger, Shaun Anthony: Author's Identity Crucial. Academic. In: The West Australian, 24 July 1996, p. 3.
——, Shaun Anthony: Family Adds Fuel to Literary Fire. In: The West Australian, 27 July 1996, p. 15.
Millett, Patsy: Identity Parade, The Bulletin, 116, 27 August 1996, 6035, pp. 74-75.
Morton, Tom: Mudrooroo's 'Career' [letter]. In: The Australian, 7 August 1996, p. 12.
O'Connor, Terry: A Question of Race. In: The Courier-Mail, 28 March 1998, p. 24.
Williams, Andrew: Mudrooroo to Undergo DNA Test. In: The Courier-Mail, 30 March 1998, p. 4.

Scholarly Evaluations

Barnes, John: Questions of Identity in Contemporary Australia. In: Adi Wimmer, (ed.): Australian Nationalism Reconsidered. Tübingen: Stauffenberg 1999.
Clark, Maureen: Mudrooroo. A Likely Story. Identity and Belonging in Postcolonial Australia. Brussels: Peter Lang, 2007.
——: Mudrooroo. Crafty Impostor or Rebel with a Cause? In: Australian Literary Studies, 21, October 2004, 4, pp. 101-110.
——: Unmasking Mudrooroo. In: Kunapipi. Journal of Post-Colonial Writing, 23.2. 2001, pp. 48-63.
D'Cruz, Carolyn: 'What Matter Who's Speaking?' Authenticity and Identity in Discourses of Aboriginality in Australia. In: Jouvert, 5, 2001, 3.
Dixon, Graeme: The Mudrooroo Dilemma. In: Westerly, 41, Spring 1996, 3, pp. 5-6.
Fischer, Gerhard: Mis-taken Identity. Mudrooroo and Gordon Matthews. In: John Docker, Gerhard Fischer: Race, Colour and Identity in Australia and New Zealand. Sydney: UNSW Press 2000, pp. 95-112.
Frost, Lucy: Fear of Passing. In: Australian Humanities Review, March 1997.
Hosking, Sue: The Wanda Koolmatrie Hoax. Who Cares? Does It Matter? Of Course It Does! Adelaidean [University of Adelaide student newspaper]. 21 April 1997, pp. 2, 6.
Hughes, Mary Ann: An Issue of Authenticity. Editing Texts by Aboriginal Writers. Southerly, 58, 1998, 2, pp. 48-58.
——: The Complexity of Aboriginal Identity. Mudrooroo and Sally Morgan. In: Westerly, 43, Autumn 1998, 1, pp. 21-27.

Lafiri, Debasish: Beyond the Pleasures of Otherness. Mudrooroo Narogin's Politics of Aboriginality. In: Jaydeeo Saangi (ed.): Australian Literature: Identity, Representation and Belonging. New Delhi: Sarup 2007, pp. 66-79.
Little, Tom, Lorna Little: The Mudrooroo Dilemma. In: Westerly, 41, Spring 1996, 3, pp. 7-8.
Perera, Suvendrini, Joseph Pugliese: Wogface, Anglo-Drag, Contested Aboriginalities. Making and Unmaking Identities in Australia. In: Social Identities, 4, 998, 1, pp. 39-72.
Rask Knudsen, Eva: Aboriginal Affair(s). Reflections on Mudrooroo's Life and Work. LiNQ, 39, 2012, pp. 105-116.
Shoemaker, Adam: Mudrooroo. A Critical Study. Sydney: Angus & Robertson 1993.
——: Mudrooroo. 'Waiting to be Surprised'. In: JASAL 11, 2011, 2, s.p.

Appendix 3

Churchill, Ward: A Little Matter of Genocide:. Holocaust and Denial in the Americas, 1492 to the Present. San Francisco: City Lights Books 2001.
——: Acts of Rebellion. New York: Routledge 2003.
——: Indians Are Us:. Selected Essays on Indigenism, 1985-1995. Boston: South End Press 1996.
——: Kill the Indian, Save the Man:. The Genocidal Impact of American Indian Residential Schools San Francisco: City Lights Books 2004.
——: On the Justice of Roosting Chickens:. Reflections on the Consequences of US Imperial Arrogance and Criminality. Oakland, CA: A.K. Press 2003.
——: Wielding Words Like Weapons:. Selected Essays in Indigenism, 1995-2005. Oakland, CA: PM Press 2016.
Dorris, Michael: A Yellow Raft in Blue Water. New York: Holt, 1987.
——: Cloud Chamber. New York: Simon and Schuster 1997.
——: The Broken Cord. New York: Harper and Row 1989.
Miller, Mark Edwin: Claiming Tribal Identity. The Five Tribes and the Politics of Federal Acknowledgment. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press 2013.
Weil, Ann: Michael Dorris. Austin, TX: Raintree Steck-Vaughn 1997.

Appendix 4

Bolnick, Deborah A., Duana Fullwiley, Troy Duster, Richard S. Cooper, Joan H. Fujimura, Jonathan Kahn, Jay S. Kaufman, Jonathan Marks, Ann Morning, Alondra Nelson, Pilar Ossorio, Jenny Reardon, Susan M. Reverby, Kimberly TallBear: The Science and Business of Genetic Testing. In: Science, 318, 19 October 2007, pp. 399-400.
Krimsky, Sheldon, Kathleen Sloa (eds.): Race and the Genetic Revolution. Science, Myth, and Culture. New York: Columbia University Press 2011.
Koenig, Barbara A., Sandra Soo-Jin Lee, Sarah S. Richardson (eds.): Revisiting Race in a Genomic Age. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press 2008.
Lewontin, Richard C.: Biology as Ideology. The Doctrine of DNA. New York: Harper Collins 1991.

——: It Ain't Necessarily So. The Dream of the Human Genome and Other Illusions, 2nd ed. New York: New York Review Books, 2001.

Mccann-Mortimer, Patricia, Martha Augoustinos, Amanda Lecouteur: 'Race' and the Human Genome Project. Constructions of Scientific Legitimacy. In: Discourse and Society, 15, 2004, pp. 409-32.

Roberts, Dorothy: Fatal Invention. How Science, Politics, and Big Business Re-Create Race in the Twenty-First Century. New York: New Press 2011.

Spickard, Paul: The Return of Scientific Racism? DNA Ancestry Testing, Race, and the New Eugenics Movement. In: Race in Mind. Critical Essays. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press 2015, pp. 142-73.

TallBear, Kimberly: DNA, Blood, and Racializing the Tribe. In: Wicazo Sa Review, Spring 2003, pp. 81-107.

Wade, Peter (ed.): Race, Ethnicity, and Nation. Perspectives from Kinship and Genetics. New York: Berghahn Books 2007.

Wailoo, Keith, Alondra Nelson, Catherine Lee (eds.): Genetics and the Unsettled Past. The Collision of NDA, Race, and History. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press 2012.

DOI: 10.35515/zfa/asj.41/2024.05

Australian Studies Journal
Zeitschrift für Australienstudien
41 — 2024

Gerhard Fischer

The Obliteration of a Writer

Abstract: The chapter traces the events leading to the exclusion of Mudrooroo from the circle of Indigenous Australian authors, resulting in the erasure of the previously celebrated writer and critic from scholarly discourse, and eventually in the cancellation of his life work from the country's institutions of cultural memory. The intervention of a local Aboriginal organisation to reject Mudrooroo's claim to Indigenous ancestry was widely regarded as a final verdict of the 'community', paving the way for Aboriginal writer Anita Heiss to suppress his name in influential anthologies and websites, edited by Heiss during her brief career as an academic. Similarly, Irish-Australian Maureen Clark published a Ph.D. thesis and a series of articles aimed at delegitimizing Mudrooroo's literary work that found a receptive scholarly audience. Clark explains Mudrooroo's meeting with his mentor Mary Durack as a key to his career: he supposedly "negotiated" his Aboriginal identity in dialogue with Durack, with both "involved in a conscious act of complicity". Heiss' and Clark's writings are equally characterized by an essentialist understanding of Aboriginality based solely on bloodline, as well as duplicitous scholarship and a wilful disregard of Mudrooroo's complex personality and the unconventional trajectory of his life story.

The Aboriginal Corporation

Dumbartung Aboriginal Corporation is located within the grounds of the former Clontarf Boys' Home, the notorious Marist Brothers' orphanage in the Perth suburb of Waterford, that was Mudrooroo's 'home' for eight years after he had been taken away from his mother at the age of nine.[1] Dumbartung's "primary aim", according to its mission statement, is to serve as a cultural centre "to promote Aboriginal drama, dance, writing, painting, sculpture, craft work, music and any other Aboriginal art in Western Australia".[2] The corporation rose to national prominence during its campaign to expose a book, 'Mutant Message Down Under', as fraudulent, and its author, Marlo Morgan, a white American of Kansas City, Missouri, as an imposter.[3] In January 1996, the head of Dumbartung, Robert Eggington, of mixed English and Indigenous Australian descent, led a delegation of Aboriginal Elders to Los Angeles to confront author and publisher and to protest against a planned film deal with a Hollywood studio.

Dumbartung is essentially a two-person organisation, run by Eggington who has made it his life project to oppose "appropriation and exploitation" of

1 Clontarf Boy's Town was one of the institutions investigated for a history of physical and sexual abuse, cf. Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse: Report of Case Study No. 35. Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne.
2 Dumbartung: First Report on Mutant Message.
3 Morgan's story describes the supposedly spiritual transformation of a white woman from the American Midwest while on an entirely imaginary journey across Central Australia, together with a group of desert Aborigines allegedly named the 'Real People' who had decided to die out (by choosing celibacy!) because of the way they perceived the world was heading towards extinction. Originally self-published, the book became an international 'New Age' bestseller when it was taken up and promoted by HarperCollins.

Indigenous art and culture,[4] and his wife Selena, née Kickett, who looks after the well-regarded health and well-being programs of the Corporation. Selena Eggington's family is from the Narrogin area, and this is where the connection to Mudrooroo comes in. On 26 June 1996, following an approach by his oldest sister, Rebecca Elisabeth "Betty" Polglaze, née Johnson, who had first raised doubts about Mudrooroo's identity, the Eggingtons called a meeting to discuss the status of Mudrooroo. It was "attended by representatives of both families as well as members of the literary and academic communities": fellow writers Archie Weller and Jack Davis, and academics Rosemary van den Berg, Darlene Oxenham and Lorna Little of Curtin University.[5] Jack Davis had sent his apologies. The meeting resolved to invite Mudrooroo to a follow-up meeting to present his side of the story.

A subsequent meeting was held one month later, a few days after Victoria Laurie's article 'Identity Crisis' appeared in 'The Weekend Australian' (20-21 July). It publicly challenged Mudrooroo's claim to Noongar ancestry, based on information provided by Betty Polglaze. On 27 July, Dumbartung Aboriginal Corporation published a press release:

> The Kickett family rejects Colin Johnson's claim to his Aboriginality and any kinship ties to the families throughout the Narrogin and Cuballing region.[6]

Given the imprint of an apparently representative Aboriginal institution, the patchy statement was accepted as final. It was understood as the verdict of the 'community' that refused to recognise Mudrooroo as one of their own. The few barren words mark the beginning of the end of the illustrious career of Australia's most famous Aboriginal writer. Mudrooroo was declared guilty of having fabricated an Indigenous identity for personal gain, and Robert Eggington could claim another scalp in his campaign against imposters who, he said, were defrauding the Aboriginal community. Academics and literary critics quickly fell in line, and Mudrooroo became a persona non grata quasi overnight. Eggington called for Mudrooroo's books to be removed from public libraries and schools' reading lists, and for the author to return the prize money he had earned for his award-winning publications. Mudrooroo initially did not respond; his silence was generally interpreted as confirmation of his sister's version of their family history.

A few comments are needed to put the matter into context. These extraordinary events happened while Mudrooroo was in Europe, on tour with the company of Indigenous performers, including some of Australia's best-known black actors (Justine Saunders, Kevin Smith, Rachael Maza), who had been invited to present Mudrooroo's play 'The Aboriginal Protesters Confront the Proclamation of the Australian Republic on 26 January 2001 with the Production of "The

4 See Robert Eggington (co-ordinator): Bounuh Wongee Message Stick.
5 Maureen Clark: Unmasking Mudrooro, p. 61. "Both families" refers to the Kickett family, represented by Selena Eggington, and Mudrooroo's family, represented by his sister who was convinced of her family's non-Aboriginal background.
6 Roger Martin, Shaun Anthony, quoted in: Maureen Clark, Unmasking Mudrooroo, p. 50.

Commission" by Heiner Müller' at festivals in Germany during June and July 1996.[7] It is not entirely clear when and how Mudrooroo learned about developments in far-away Perth, but it seems reasonable to question whether, under the circumstances, he was able to appropriately respond in a timely manner. In a sense, he was tried in absentia, both by the media and an Aboriginal organisation that people uncritically assumed was speaking for the Aboriginal community at large. Given the timing of Laurie's article and Dumbartung's follow-up intervention, it is easy to understand that Mudrooroo might have felt that he was being 'set up' and not offered a fair chance to respond to the accusations.

The Dumbartung Corporation prides itself on following traditional Indigenous protocols. However, it is not always clear what exactly these protocols are and what they relate to. One might well ask based on what protocol was the Kickett family authorised to speak on behalf of families in the Narrogin and Cuballing districts. In Mudrooroo's statement in which he claims Aboriginal descent on his mother's side, he refers to the Bibbulmun people rather than a specific family or clan.[8] Does the Kickett family represent all surviving descendants of the ancient Bibbulmun? The personal involvement of Selena Eggington also could have raised some concern regarding due process or appropriate protocol: in her dual role as an official of the Dumbartung Corporation and as member of the Kickett family, she was both judge and witness, as it were, in the case against Mudrooroo. Furthermore, the genealogical research into the Barron family that Mudrooroo had conducted some years earlier had shown that his mother's relatives were not, in fact, residents of the Narrogin district, but rather of an area further north, between York and Perth. All of this, Mudrooroo stated wryly in his written response regarding the Dumbartung indictment, Eggington could have easily found out if he had just given Mudrooroo a telephone call.[9] After all, Mudrooroo, at the time Head of Aboriginal Studies at Murdoch University, had been a member of the committee responsible for establishing Dumbartung in the first place.

There is also the question as to why Archie Weller was invited to join Dumbartung's investigation, and why Jack Davis had chosen not to attend. Weller, acclaimed author of 'The Day of the Dog', was one of the writers on Eggington's list of suspected non-Indigenous Australians passing as Aborigines, along with Roberta Sykes and Sally Morgan. It seems odd that he should be asked to judge a fellow writer on a matter of which he himself was under investigation. The credentials of Jack Davis, on the other hand, were beyond doubt. He was one of the most respected Indigenous authors, and Mudrooroo had devoted considerable space in his theoretical writings to Davis' pioneering work as an Indigenous dramatist and poet. The two knew each other well; together, they had founded the National Aboriginal and Islanders Writers Association in 1980 and organised its first literary conference, and in 1990, they had collaborated as editors on the

7 The long title refers to two plays by Peter Weiss, Marat/Sade and Vietnam Discourse; it is usually abbreviated to 'The Aboriginal Protesters'.
8 Cf. Liz Thompson: Aboriginal Voices, p. 55.
9 Cf. Mudrooroo: Portrait of the Artist, p. 18.

first anthology of Black Australian authors, 'Paperbark'.[10] We can only speculate why Jack Davis declined to attend the meeting that 'outed' Mudrooroo as an alleged imposter and sent him into an existential void and cultural no man's land. The respected Indigenous elder may simply have been ill, but he may also have known in advance that the outcome of the meeting was a foregone conclusion which he was not prepared to underwrite.

Of course, it must be said that Mudrooroo's course of action in the whole affair was not very well chosen. With the benefit of hindsight, he might have preferred to confront his accusers immediately after his return from overseas and to present his side of the story publicly. Instead, Mudrooroo decided to ignore the matter. As his contract with Murdoch University was about to expire and he was not interested in continuing an academic career, preferring to return to full-time writing instead, he and his wife left Perth to settle in her native Queensland where they had bought a house on Macleay Island in Moreton Bay. The couple's move was widely interpreted as 'fleeing the scene of the crime', i.e. another indication that Mudrooroo refused to contend his sister's allegation, thus 'proving' the veracity of her 'research', even though he had planned his departure from Murdoch already 12 months earlier. In a letter to the Dean of his faculty, dated 22 May 1995, he had stated his intention of not renewing his contract that ended on 5 June 1996, and, in reply, the Dean had – regrettably – accepted his resignation and thanked him for his services.[11]

It was not until a year later that the article in which he responded to the allegations made by Dumbartung appeared in print: 'Tell them you're Indian' was included as an Afterword in a collection of scholarly essays published by the Aboriginal Studies Press in Canberra.[12] Of course, such a time frame is not unusual in academic publishing, but Mudrooroo's response obviously came too late to make an impact on the public debate at the time. Regrettably, it was also a publication destined to be shelved and wither away in university libraries. Mudrooroo's chance to present his case to a wider public audience would not come again.

The Aboriginal Writer: Anita Heiss

In 2003, Anita Heiss published her Ph.D. thesis, 'Dhuluu-Yalla. To Talk Straight. Publishing Indigenous Literature'.[13] The author describes herself as a "proud Wiradjuri woman" from Central New South Wales, following the identity of her Indigenous mother.[14] Her father was a first-generation immigrant from rural Austria. Anita was educated at a private girls' school and the University of New South Wales, in the affluent Eastern Suburbs in Sydney. According to her memoir, 'Am I Black Enough for You?', she had a privileged childhood; there was "a lot of

10 See Stephen Muecke's poem 'Shuffle' in the present volume, pp. 17 f.
11 Cf. NLA, 01.036, Item 8.
12 Gillian Cowlishaw, Barry Morris (eds.): Race Matters. Indigenous Australians and 'Our' Society, pp. 259-268.
13 Anita Heiss: Dhuluu-Yalla.
14 Anita Heiss: Am I Black Enough for you? (back of front cover).

love" in her family, and neighbours always had a key to her house. With tongue in cheek, Heiss identifies as an "urban, beachside Blackfella, a concrete Koori with Westfield Dreaming".[15] It is difficult to imagine a starker contrast to the upbringing of Colin Johnson.

In the first few lines of the first chapter of her thesis, 'Indigenous Writing and Identity', Heiss lists five pioneers of Aboriginal Australian writing: David Unaipon, Kevin Gilbert, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Jack Davis, and Monica Clare. The name of Colin Johnson, who is usually credited as the author of the first Aboriginal novel, 'Wild Cat Falling' (1965), is conspicuously absent. His place is now awarded to Monica Clare who is mentioned only one more time by Heiss: surprisingly, in a chapter on Maori literature, and only concerning a date, 1972. As Heiss reveals, the first Indigenous novel in New Zealand (Pounamu, Pounamu, by Witi Ihimaera) was published in 1972, and this was also the year when Monica Clare's manuscript Karobran was presented to the office of Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI). This is all readers learn about what Heiss identifies as "the first Aboriginal novel".[16] She is not really interested in Monica Clare; otherwise – one should think – she might have written at least a few sentences about the author who she credits with being the first Aboriginal novelist, and perhaps a few words also about her work.[17] But then, she does not discuss the literary achievements of the other pioneers on her list either.

This is all very curious, to say the least, but the purpose behind Heiss' strategy in her opening chapter becomes clear very quickly: it is to expunge Mudrooroo's name from the canon of Indigenous Australian literature. The tone of her thesis is set on the first page by introducing the topic of identity fraud. She recalls the notorious case of the falsely proclaimed Aboriginal autobiography, 'My Own Sweet Time' (1994), by Wanda Koolmatrie (aka Leon Carmen), and then turns her attention immediately to a discussion of Mudrooroo's identity. Heiss does not claim outright that Mudrooroo has wilfully and knowingly claimed an Indigenous ancestry. Rather, she proceeds by way of insinuation, using an anonymous passive voice and rhetorical questions to raise doubts concerning Mudrooroo's authenticity and his motivations as a writer. 'Wild Cat Falling', according to Heiss, is still selling "as the first novel by an Aboriginal author"; but she asks, "would it have done so well if Johnson was not thought to be Aboriginal?" Colin Johnson, Heiss proclaims, "arguably can be regarded as someone who has made a successful career partly built on perceptions of his identity and his role in the Aboriginal literary arena".[18] She conveniently ignores the obvious fact there was

15 ibid., pp. 6, 1.
16 Anita Heiss: Dhullu-Yala, p. 191.
17 Karobran was published posthumously in 1978; the author had already died in 1973. It is a slight (95 pages) but important autobiographical work about the life of a courageous young Aboriginal woman, one of the victims of the 'stolen generation'. Prior to Mudrooroo's 'outing', Clare was usually identified as the first Aboriginal women's novelist. For more details see Jennifer Jones: Yesterday's words.
18 Anita Heiss: Dhullu-Yala, pp. 4, 3.

no such thing as an 'Aboriginal literary arena' when Johnson began his literary career in the early 1960s.[19]

Heiss also challenges the writer's name change, referring to the supposedly "widespread use of pseudonyms throughout Australian literary history" as not unusual, while pointedly ignoring the specific act of political protest by Johnson against the official Bicentennial Celebration of a Nation in 1988. She claims that the "assumption of an Aboriginal name […] requires community validation", something that was not an issue for Heiss when Kath Walker, Australia's first Indigenous female poet ('We are going', 1964), had changed her name to Oodgeroo Noonuccal.[20] "It has been asked", Heiss muses in her preferred passive voice, "whether Johnson may have believed by Aboriginalising his name that somehow his Aboriginal identity would be consolidated".[21] The insinuation is immediately followed by a series of rhetorical questions: should Johnson return the prizes he had won as an Aboriginal writer? Should he repay his senior writing fellowship award to the Australia Council? Should his affiliation with the Black Australian Writers Series with the University of Queensland Press be terminated?

While Heiss does not recognize Mudrooroo as an Indigenous writer, she does make an allowance of some kind for his contribution as a literary critic, based on the advice of Rachel Bin Salleh, the Indigenous publisher of Magabala Books. Salleh insists that Mudrooroo "has impacted quite heavily on Aboriginal literature" and "that his intelligent writing and thinking […] have opened doors for many Aboriginal people".[22] Consequently, Mudrooroo's critical studies of Aboriginal literature and culture, 'Writing from the Fringe' (1990) and 'Us Mob' (1995), are referenced in Heiss' thesis, whereas all his creative works are ignored. In her bibliography, Heiss lists Mary Durack's preface in 'Wild Cat Falling', without, however, mentioning Colin Johnson's name: the author is disassociated from his work, making him invisible.[23] The way Heiss proceeds to undermine Mudrooroo's public persona and to question his motivation at the outset of her thesis

19 Colin Johnson's first publication, 'Finish', a short story was published in: Westerly, 1960, 3, pp. 30 f.

20 Mudrooroo recalls his discussion with Oodgeroo during the "coming together of the tribes in January 1988 in Sydney" in his article 'Paperbark', pp. 388-400. In the introduction to the Macquarie PEN Anthology of Aboriginal Literature (eds. Anita Heiss, Peter Minter), p. 6, Heiss writes that Kath Walker "readopted her traditional […] true name" which is, at best, misleading, but clearly indicative of her superficial knowledge of Indigenous affairs. Similarly, Anglo-Irish journalist Lesleyann Lingane has described Mudrooroo's name change as reverting to his "tribal name" [!], (cf. clipping from 'Sunday Living', The West Australian, in: NLA, MS Acc 13.042, Box 02, Item 14).

21 Anita Heiss: Dhullu-Yala, p. 3. Heiss is not the only person to interpret Colin Johnson's name changes as proof of a fraudulent strategy to assume Indigenous ancestry (see also Maureen Clark: Unmasking Mudrooroo). In reality, the matter is much more prosaic. Johnson had chosen only Mudrooroo as his professional writer's name, but due to legal requirements he had to add a family name. He opted for Narrogin in the mistaken belief that this was his place of birth. When he found out later that he was in fact born on a farm in East Cuballing, he dropped Narrogin and choose Nyoongah (NB: alternative spellings elsewhere), the original name of the first inhabitants of South-West Western Australia. Cf. document of Change of Name by Deed Poll, dated 26 October 1989, Supreme Court of Queensland, in: NLA, MS 01-036, Box 1).

22 Anita Heiss: Dhullu-Yala, pp. 7 f.

23 Ibid., p. 276.

leaves a bitter taste in the perception of her readers, of mauvaise foi. The dissertation's first chapter amounts to nothing less than a demolition job: writing a writer's work out of existence.[24] It is tempting to imagine that Heiss – as a literary character – would have loved to play a role as an eager junior staff member in Orwell's Ministry of Truth.

The irony, of which Heiss is quite unaware, is that by conceding the theoretical contributions of Mudrooroo towards defining and analysing Aboriginal literature, especially his concept of Aboriginality in Indigenous writing, she highlights the huge influence he has had on other Aboriginal authors and artists, and by extension, the importance of his own literary creations that are routinely mentioned in his critical studies. Mudrooroo's concept of a 'maban' (magic) reality, that links contemporary empirical reality with facets of traditional Aboriginal mythology as part of the cultural heritage of the Dreaming, which enters, questions, and overlays the exclusive dominance of what Mudrooroo calls the 'scientific Western' worldview, has become a narrative mode among Indigenous writers as different as Jack Davis, Lionel Fogarty, Sam Watson and Sally Morgan. Xavier Pons, who investigates Mudrooroo's influence on Indigenous authors, writes that Kim Scott, for example, may have listened to Mudrooroo's message of "transcending Western realism" to "incorporate the spiritual and the supernatural", concluding that "Aboriginal interests are better served by a literary mode that reflects this worldview, namely magic realism".[25]

The academic discipline of Heiss' degree at the University of Western Sydney is 'Communication and Media'. Curiously, for a book on writing and literature, hers is an empirical study that lacks any underlying literary or cultural theory; her methodology can best be described as academic bean counting and name dropping. Heiss' sources are interviews, e-mails, and the evaluation of a questionnaire she has sent to several Aboriginal authors. Kim Scott, for example, is listed six times in Heiss' index, but the only information provided in the text are the names of literary festivals Scott attended, and the fact that he is a joint winner of the Miles Franklin Award.

The main issue Heiss is interested in is to identify her respondents' Indigenous credentials, and then harvesting their opinions on various matters of literary production, most of which circle around the question of an author's identity. The point here is that her thesis is not about Indigenous literature and the literary works per se, their perhaps characteristic or innovative qualities, their topical relevance or artistic values, their place within a tradition of writing, etc. It is rather single-mindedly about the authors, their background and identity, the way they have managed to publish, the prizes they have won, the genres or categories in which they publish. The reader of the thesis cannot help but suspect that, perhaps with a few exceptions, the author has not read any of the books she mentions. By contrast, Heiss is quite expansive when she writes about her own work or about her treatment as a "token Koori" author.[26]

24 Heiss deals in a similar way with Roberta Sykes, Archie Weller, although her primary concern is with Mudrooroo.
25 Xavier Pons: I have to work right through this white way of thinking, p. 38.
26 Cf. for example Anita Heiss: Dhuluu-Yala, pp. 133 ff.

To Heiss, Indigenous identity is solely a matter of bloodlines. She has accepted the narrative of an amateur genealogist, Mudrooroo's sister, of their family history as beyond critical scrutiny,[27] and she simply relies on Robert Eggington as the unquestioned authority on 'community' acceptance. No allowance is made for the actual life experiences of Colin Johnson and his sister Shirley who grew up with their Aboriginal neighbours and were treated just like them. None of the patchy family history, nor the history of institutionalisation and incarceration of the young 'blackfella' Colin Johnson, are of any concern to Anita Heiss.

In the short academic career that followed her Ph.D., Heiss continued to work towards cancelling Mudrooroo's record as a writer. It must be said that she was quite successful and influential in her endeavour. In 2008, she co-edited (with poet Peter Minter) the 'Macquarie PEN Anthology of Aboriginal Literature', a prestigious and representative collection in which Mudrooroo does not appear, neither in the introductory essay nor in the body of texts presented. Earlier, Heiss was responsible for the section on Aboriginal literature, entitled 'Black Words', a major part of the AustLit database, an internet-based project launched in 2001 by the National Library of Australia in co-operation with several universities. Here again, Mudrooroo's work is obliterated, while Heiss' own books are highlighted. She is the sole writer of the eleven (!) introductory essays in the 'Black Words' section, and she liberally references her own work.

To give one last example, Heiss' essay on 'Writing Aboriginality: Authors on Being Aboriginal', in a publication aimed at the US college market, makes no mention of Mudrooroo while her own work is put upfront again, most glaringly by including the publication in full of her poem, 'Making Aborigines', as the end piece of her article.[28] Earlier, she had inserted the same poem in her essay on 'Writers on Identity' in the AustLit database. Readers may shake their heads at such blatant exercises in self-promotion; however, there is no denying that Heiss played a major role in expunging Mudrooroo's name and suppressing knowledge of his seminal contributions to Australian Aboriginal literature. This is especially so regarding her control of the 'Black Words' section of the AustLit website that has become an important research tool for students of Australian literature.[29] Heiss' influence can also be seen in the Wikipedia page on Indigenous Australian Literature where she is mentioned as a "prominent" author and her thesis as a "guide for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers". Mudrooroo does not rate a mention.

Greg Lehman, professor at the University of Tasmania and artist and writer of Trawulwuy descent, has written a critical appraisal of Heiss' dissertation from an Indigenous scholarly perspective. He takes the author to task for providing

27 Cf. the chapter by Paul Spickard in the present volume, pp. 30 f., 33.

28 Nicholas Birns, Rebecca McNeer (eds.): A Companion to Australian Literature since 1960, pp. 41-59. Heiss' poem (pp. 56 ff.) is an embarrassingly juvenile piece of writing, artless and bland, that appears to contradict Heiss' own belief in the essence of Aboriginal identity, as shown in the lines when the text addresses an imaginary reader, presumable of white Euro-Australian origin: "My parents didn't create me | I didn't create me | You created me | You made me different | Then asked me why I was so | You said I was an Abo".

29 Similarly, Mudrooroo's name is also omitted on the Indigenous Australia website, published by the Australian National University.

"an incomplete survey" that misses out on discussing "local publications" – often "the most raw and naked accounts of Aboriginal experience […] with rare and precious locality that lies at the heart of the community experience" – as well as many works in collections "not constructed primarily by Aboriginal authors or […] editors". Lehman deplores Heiss' "assertive role"; his observation that her "simplified language of race" and her "essentialist analysis of Indigeneity […] have difficulty in accounting for the flux of identity as a social construct" is particularly relevant to the case of Mudrooroo whose life story confirms that the "formulation of neat notions of 'authenticity' usually falls well short of the complex reality of cultural identity". According to Lehman,

> to dismiss Johnson, Sykes and Weller from the body of 'Aboriginal' literature is to simplify the phenomenon of Aboriginal writing because Aboriginal writing and writing about Aborigines are often interchangeable and difficult to discern. Both these pursuits occur within the realm of what Marcia Langton calls the 'inter-subjectivity' of Aboriginality [that] 'arises from the subjective experience of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who engage in any intercultural dialogue,' either through lived or mediated experience.[30]

Lehman's review was published in 2004; thus, the author could not have foreseen that Heiss would go on a mission to obliterate Mudrooroo and his body of work in her subsequent interventions.

Perhaps there is a place for Heiss' kind of research within the wider confines of the academy. She is clearly no literary scholar, as she acknowledges in her memoir, even though her self-disclosure is formulated with a degree of chutzpah that transfers the onus of proof onto the reader: "Some may see me as a failed academic. I can live with that".[31] She has since made a career as an 'expert' on Indigenous writing and as an Ambassador for the Indigenous Literacy Foundation, and she has carved out a niche for herself as a popular author of 'Chic–lit' – or 'Choc-lit' novels, as she refers to them – that feature trendy, mixed-race Indigenous heroines. Notably, Heiss likes to remind readers that she is "the only Aboriginal author of commercial fiction in Australia".[32]

The White 'Celtic Australian (not Australian born)' Academic:[33] Maureen Clark

Within the relatively short time of five years (2001-2006), Maureen Clark, at the time a graduate student in the Department of English at the University of Wollongong, published five separate articles on the topic of her Ph.D., and soon became an often-quoted authority on Mudrooroo's literary career. There are a several features that the writing of Heiss and Clark have in common. One is the reference to cases of imposture in Australian literary culture, presented in

30 Greg Lehman: Authentic and Essential, pp. 3,5. The quote from Marcia Langton is from her 'Well, I heard it on the Radio, 1993'.
31 Anita Heiss: Am I Black Enough for You?, p. 132.
32 Ibid, p. 213.
33 See Clark's own identification statement in Maureen Clark: Mudrooroo and the Death of the Mother, p. 85, as well as the introduction in her thesis.

conjunction with questions regarding Mudrooroo's identity. Although Clark concedes that the literary merits of Mudrooroo's work are of a different order, the comparison with discredited writers such Streten Bozic or Leon Carmen clearly has the desired effect of placing Mudrooroo in the company of proven literary fraudsters. Another shared feature is the reliance on insinuations and rhetorical questions. Conclusions regarding the writer's background and motivation are often couched in a suggestive language of intimation: 'likely imposture', 'appears to have known', 'may have entailed' and such like. The intended message quite unambiguously reveals a strategy of casting doubt on the writer's authenticity. Both Heiss and Clark rely on the alleged missing bloodline in Mudrooroo's genetic make-up: the identity of a Black American grandfather is used to explain the dark skin colour of father and son, and the genealogical study of Mudrooroo's sister is taken for granted to 'prove' a 'direct link' on the mother's side to the white Anglo-Irish immigrants who arrived at the Swan River colony five generations earlier.

The title of Clark's thesis, 'Mudrooroo: A Likely Story. Identity and Belonging in Postcolonial Australia' along with those of some of her essays, are programmatic; they reveal the ultimate intent of her writing, which is to suggest that Mudrooroo's career as an Indigenous author is based on a fraudulently taken identity.[34] In 'Unmasking Mudrooroo', which is largely identical with Chapter 2 of her thesis, Clark sets out to 'prove' who the real Mudrooroo is. At the very end of the article, she surprises her readers with what she presents as akin to some kind of monumental discovery, namely the importance of a date, 1829, that supposedly links the writer with three 'significant' persons, and 'three significant relationships' that are said to have 'strongly influenced the Mudrooroo narrative': George August Robinson, Dame Mary Durack, and Mudrooroo's sister Betty Polglaze.[35] Leaving aside the theoretical and methodological problems arising from the slippage involved in presenting real-life, contemporary persons (Durack, Polglaze) on the same narrative level as an historical character in a work of fiction, the significance of the date itself is rather doubtful. 1829 marks the beginning of British invasion of the West Coast of Australia, and the first reaction of the Indigenous Nyoongar people, Mudrooroo's "alleged forebears", who, according to Mary Durack, welcomed the intruders as "the spirits of their dead returned".[36] It is also the year when the first white child was born in the new colony, which apparently explains the link to Polglaze (although this is nowhere directly stated). How Robinson fits into this time frame is not quite clear, but it is equally circumstantial. He was appointed as 'the first Conciliator and Protector of the Aboriginal people' in 1829, but by that time he had already lived in Van Diemen's Land for fifteen years and had slowly climbed up the ladder in

34 Maureen Clark: Unmasking Mudrooroo (2001); Reality Rights in the Wildcat Trilogy (2002); Mudrooroo and the Death of the Mother (2003); Mudrooroo: Crafty Impostor or Rebel with a Cause? (2004); Terror as White Female in Mudrooroo's Vampire Trilogy (2006). The essays were ultimately integrated into the thesis that was submitted to the university's research office in 2004 (available online https:/ro.uow.edu.au/theses); a print version was published in 2007 by Peter Lang.

35 Maureen Clark: Unmasking Mudrooroo, p. 59.

36 Preface to Mudrooroo: Wild Cat Falling, p. xiv.

the colonial bureaucracy. Clark describes these connections as 'uncanny', 'even more uncanny', or 'stranger still', while simultaneously admitting that they may be entirely 'coincidental'.[37] A historian would of course agree that the arrival of the first white settlers is an important date but would perhaps be hard-pressed to discover any meaning in the events or relationships that Clark attaches to that particular date. Sceptical critics might prefer to dismiss the whole argument as speculative, or as cabbalistic nonsense.

The whole point of Clark's far-fetched exposition is her claim that Robinson, the literary character as constructed in Mudrooroo's fiction, reflects the actual, real life-story of the author. She writes "that the parallels that can be drawn between the worlds of these two men of words" are "remarkably self-evident", the most disturbing parallel being that of 'imposture'. Robinson pretended to be a friend of the Aborigines only to betray them. The question to be asked, according to Clark, is whether Mudrooroo is "similarly guilty of an act of imposture".[38] She does not provide a simple 'yes' or 'no' answer, but the implication is unambiguous: Mudrooroo is supposed to have assumed and publicly performed the role of an Aboriginal person to advance his career and his own material interests. In a curiously worded sentence that recalls Heiss' rhetorical strategy of insinuation, Clark suggests that Robinson, as he appeared in Mudrooroo's writing, served as a kind of role model for the author:

> Robinson adds an intriguing dimension to the shape of Mudrooroo's narrative to the extent that the author could arguably be said to have moulded his persona around that of the man who had provided so much material for his writing.[39]

What does that mean, one is inclined to ask. No person ever 'argued' that Mudrooroo 'moulded his persona' around that of Robinson except Clark herself, just as nobody ever drew any parallels between the lives of the two men apart from Clark. Nevertheless, she maintains that her claim is 'self-evident'. The rhetorical question implied in her sentence, along with the use of an anonymous, passive voice, may not convince every reader of the plausibility of Clark's argument. Nor does her conclusion reveal any significant new insight into the literary dimensions and merits of Mudrooroo's work. Clark simply follows the narrative of Mudrooroo's sister and the circle of Aboriginal elders associated with Curtin University and Dumbartung.[40] Her very close relationship with Betty Polglaze, as documented in the dedication of her thesis, has led Mudrooroo later to speculate that it was, in fact, Clark who did the research into the history of the Johnson family, rather than Betty.[41]

37 Maureen Clark: Unmasking Mudrooroo, pp. 58, 59.
38 Ibid., p. 59.
39 Ibid.
40 See Maureen Clark's "Acknowledgements" in her thesis, 'Mudrooroo. A Likely Story', p. 263. Clark does, however, distance herself from the more radical demands of Eggington, e.g. the call for Mudrooroo's books to be removed from libraries to be pulped.
41 In a diary entry dated 24 November 2010, Mudrooroo speculates that it was Maureen Clark, "the Irish woman, […] who did Betty's research and used it later. Betty because of her problems about her Aboriginality became a weapon to be used against me". Mudrooroo does not offer any confirming evidence, but, as Polglaze lacked any academic qualification and experience, it is not an unlikely proposition that Clark may have assisted Mudrooroo's sister in her research. Admittedly, however, both women were not trained in either

The focus of Clark's thesis was initially Mudrooroo's fiction, i.e., the ten novels published between 1965 and 2000. It seems, then, that the public 'outing' of the author's alleged identity fraud and the ensuing public debate caused a re-orientation of Clark's original plan that in turn led her to investigate Mudrooroo's family history. As a result, the thesis now consists of two rather uneven parts, three chapters that deal with biographical-genealogical aspects and six that offer Clark's interpretation of the literary work. The two sections sit somewhat uneasily together, and the methodological linkage is unconvincing.[42] However, I am not concerned here with a critique of Clark's literary interpretations, and I will restrict myself to a discussion of her reconstruction of Mudrooroo's life story and family history, with a focus on three essential points that Clark singles out: (1) the role of Mary Durack and the alleged complicity with Mudrooroo in adopting an Indigenous identity to facilitate a career as the First Aboriginal Writer in Australia; (2) a reference to the communitarian philosophy of Charles Taylor, in particular his theory of identity formation and recognition in a dialectical communal relationship with significant 'Others'; and (3) a reading of the Johnson/Barron family history culminating in Clark's claim that Mudrooroo had always been aware that his mother was not black but white, and that there was no genetic link to the Indigenous people of South Western Australia. Unsurprisingly, her claim is again formulated as a rhetorical question: "Has Johnson always known that she [his mother] was of English/Irish descent?"[43]

Mary Durack and Colin Johnson

In early 1998, I wrote an essay, entitled 'Mis-taken Identity: Mudrooroo and Gordon Matthews'.[44] I attempted to come to terms with my shock and confusion, as well as the subsequent mixed feelings upon the discovery of the writer's questioned identity. The public scandal revealed that Mudrooroo was apparently not the person I thought I knew. His paternal grandfather, it suddenly had been revealed, was Afro-American, and his mother was of Anglo-Irish extraction; there seemed to be no Indigenous heritage. I was not quite sure what to think about all this at the time.[45] I eventually concluded that Mudrooroo was likely not born an Aborigine but had *become* one, and that "it was Mary Durack who made him what he was to become, an Aboriginal author".[46] The question I did not ask

genealogical or historical studies. In her article 'Mudrooroo and the Death of the Mother', Clark acknowledges that her work "has the support of Johnson's biological family as well as members of the Nyoongah community", p. 86.

42 Cf. for instance, Annalisa Oboe, who suggests a similar concern in her review of Clark's thesis: "Whether it may be useful to identify fictional characters and real women in the author's life (as Clark attempts to do) remains open to debate", Annalisa Oboe: Australian Literary Studies, p. 491.

43 Maureen Clark, Mudrooroo and the Death of the Mother, p. 87.

44 John Docker, Gerhard Fischer (eds.): Race, Colour and Identity in Australia and New Zealand, pp. 95-112.

45 Cf. Gerhard Fischer: Remembering Mudrooroo (1938-2019), pp. 5-20.

46 Gerhard Fischer: Mis-taken Identity, p. 101.

at the time was *when* and *how* exactly this could have happened. Maureen Clark, who made copious use of my article, provided an easy answer: during the time of Durack's association with Colin Johnson in 1958, after his release from Fremantle Gaol, Johnson fraudulently "engaged in a 'politics of the body' when negotiating his Aboriginal identity in dialogue with Durack".[47] Clark goes one step further by suggesting that he was "involved in a conscious act of complicity", which seems to imply that the two of them, Durack and Johnson, had embarked on a joint conspiracy.[48] The outcome of this process, then, was Duracks' racial profiling of the author in the now infamous preface to 'Wild Cat Falling'. Clark sees the book that the twenty-year old would-be author had begun writing under Durack's guidance, as a kind of blueprint for a planned life-long literary career as an Aboriginal author: "It was from this historical encounter that the whole pattern of his future life and writing career emerged".[49] Curiously, she then quotes a remark by J.J. Healy that seems to contradict her own assessment: 'Wild Cat Falling' "is the preface to a career that did not then know that it was going to be a career".[50] In other words: freed from state tutelage and supervision, after moving from Perth to Melbourne, Colin Johnson faced unknown territory. His future was a blank slate based on a fuzzy, confused sense of identity linked to a single, concrete experience: that of being non-white and discriminated because of it. In 1958, there was no predictable outcome to his dilemma.

Clark supports her theory by quoting Mudrooroo himself as "having been textualised by a white person" and having "to go along with that". Two comments are in order here. Clark uses Mudrooroo's own words regarding the "politics of the body" in support of her allegation; but the quote is taken out of context: Mudrooroo speaks about Blackness, not about Aboriginality.[51] Mudrooroo relates his indebtedness to Black American writers like Richard Wright and Chester Himes and their roles in the Civil Rights movement in the United States which became an important model for young Black Australians in the early 1960s. "Himes and I", Mudrooroo wrote in 1997, "engaged in the existential being of the black man and did not try to escape it by claiming a fraudulent ancestry and thus incurring the guilt of an act of bad faith".[52] In other words, Mudrooroo explicitly rules out what Clark constructs, and accuses him of, ten years later. Clark's selective, partial quotation is symptomatic of her questionable scholarship; she simply ignores the other person's point of view, even though he is the primary focus of her investigation. Another instance of this is her complete disregard of the role of Gordon Matthews, who plays an essential part in my essay that Clark repeatedly quotes. Matthews' life story is remarkably like that of Mudrooroo, except that his commitment to the Aboriginal cause and his acceptance by the Aboriginal

47 Maureen Clark: Mudrooroo: A Likely Story, p. 54.
48 Ibid, p. 240.
49 Ibid, p. 54.
50 Maureen Clark: Mudrooroo: Crafty Impostor, p. 108. Cf. J.J. Healy's essay, Colin Johnson/Mudrooroo Narogin, p. 22.
51 Mudrooroo: Tell them you're Indian, p. 263.
52 Ibid., p. 261.

community was never in doubt, despite the proven lack of a genetic link. But that does not fit in Clark's narrative, so it is simply left out.[53]

Clark's strategy of selective reading can also be seen regarding the notion of 'textualisation'. Mudrooroo used the term three times in his essay:

> I had been textualised by Mary Durack and given a race which did not affect my being in the slightest but did affect my work when I went on to write my novel which was about a part-Aboriginal youth, and which was edited into publishability by Mary Durack.
>
> A textualisation of identity went against the grain for me, especially when, in Melbourne, I became acquainted with existentialism in which man created his own values and man simply is. […] Having been textualised by a white person, having been officially designated the native, in other words, I had to go along with that, though in a different climate I might have claimed my Irish ancestry.[54]

In her thesis, Clark quotes only the last sentence of the second paragraph, suggesting that Mudrooroo went along with Mary Durack who introduced him to the world as a writer of part-Aboriginal descent. His own statement that this "'went against his grain'" but at the same time did not affect him "in the slightest", is something she prefers not to quote or engage with. Again, it does not fit her narrative, so she ignores it.

Durack was no doubt an influential person in Mudrooroo's life, but Clark exaggerates her importance. By 1958, the 'textualisation of identity' is supposed to have determined not only the uncertain racial background of Durack's protégé but also foreshadowed his whole future. It might be useful to recall that Colin Johnson only stayed a few days in Durack's house; there was some concern about the young ex-convict living under the same roof with the two teenage daughters of Mary Durack, and the family seemed to have arranged for his departure to Melbourne as soon as possible. The two stayed in contact by correspondence afterwards but, given Mudrooroo's nomadic travels soon after the publication of 'Wild Cat Falling', their relationship was clearly defined by distance. Mudrooroo's experiences in cosmopolitan Melbourne, his experimentation with existentialism and a bohemian lifestyle filled with drugs, his journeys to Europe and Asia where he continued to write without the supervision, as it were, of Dame Mary, and his life as a wandering Buddhist monk are all out of the sphere of her influence, while clearly important in the development of Mudrooroo's intellectual and personal identity. Describing Johnson's meeting with Durack, Clark resorts to an embarrassing cliché: "The rest, as they say, is history. Colin Johnson went on to perform the role of a celebrated academic writer and critic".[55] In other words: the ex-convict, after being released from jail in 1957, meets his mentor and benefactor, and immediately embarks on a career to become a celebrated academic performer. Mudrooroo's success as an academic critic rests on the pub-

53 Unlike Mudrooroo's, Matthews's story has a happy ending: after researching his family history, he found that bis father was Sri Lankan and his mother British/Australian. However, his Aboriginal credentials were not questioned. Maureen Clark finds it easier to omit this part of the equation rather than engage with it, critically or otherwise.

54 Mudrooroo: Tell them you're Indian, pp. 262 f.

55 Maureen Clark, Mudrooroo and the Death of the Mother, p. 99.

lication in 1990 of his 'Writing from the Fringe'; but such details are of no concern to Clark. She presents a simplified version of his life story, leaving out huge chunks and ignoring the complicated historical trajectory of the writer's highly unusual biography.

The chapter of Mudrooroo's life story after her encounter with Dame Durack, is, indeed, characterized by a period of experimentation, of trying out different options of self-identification. In Melbourne, his Indigenous identity was readily accepted by his new friends, but at the time, it did not play a major part in his life and had no practical consequences. He lived for a while in the house of Leo Cash, a radical leftist poet with links to the New Theatre, and his daughter Deirdre Cash-Olsen, a jazz singer and successful author of a 'cult novel', 'The Delinquents'.

> I told her (Deirdre), that I was part Aborigine as I didn't want to make a secret of it nor did I go around broadcasting it as it wasn't all that important to me […] I considered existentialism sometimes and at other times Buddhism the most important parts of my sense of self with the Bodgie gone with my youth.[56]

As Victoria Grieves has put it: "He wore his Aboriginality lightly".[57] More than anything, Johnson was determined to become a professional writer with all the freedom of an independent artist. The image of a free-floating intellectual in the wake of French existentialism offered the greatest attraction, with prominent authors as role models. There was the French nouveau roman and the nouvelle vague French cinema, with writers like Robbe-Grillet and Nathalie Sarraute, auteurs like Godard and Truffaut, and philosophers like Sartre and Camus. Furthermore, Johnson attended meetings of the Melbourne Buddhist Society; his interest marked the beginning of a life-long attachment and study of Eastern religions, and Buddhism in particular.

Finally, the experience of living as a Buddhist practitioner in Asia for nearly ten years marks a decisive break in Mudrooroo's life. Clark hardly mentions this period, even though the Buddhist doctrines of no-self, impermanence and everlasting human suffering were to have a defining influence on the developing identity of a young Australian of colour on the threshold of an autonomous, mature life experience. The concept of a transcendent personal identity that is always in flux became a cornerstone of Mudrooroo's sense of Self: "My identity […] rests on my Buddhism".[58]

56 Mudrooroo: The House with the Yellow Door, pp. 70 f. The Olsens, father and daughter, lived in the 'House with the Yellow Door'. Mudrooroo relates this episode in a chapter with the same title in the second (unpublished) volume of his autobiography, as well as in a separate article in Southerly. Deirdre Cash had published her novel under a pseudonym, Criena Rohan, in London, as it had been rejected by Australian publishers. Coincidentally, it had the nearly same title as the play Mudrooroo was working on at the time but never finished, 'The Delinks'. The manuscript of a later novel by Cash, entitled 'The House with the Golden Door', is considered lost. See the entry in the Australian Dictionary of Biography by James Griffin, 'Cash, Deirdre (1924-1963)'.

57 Personal communication, March 2024.

58 Opening sentence of Mudrooroo: Portrait of the Artist.

Charles Taylor on Identity and Recognition

In her writings, Clark repeatedly quotes my essay on Mudrooroo and Gordon Matthews, published in a collection entitled 'Race, Colour and Identity in Australia and New Zealand'. In the book's introduction, 'Adventures of Identity', written by John Docker and myself,[59] I refer in some detail to the philosophy of Charles Taylor, notably his theory of identity formation as part of a dialogic process with significant others that results, ideally, in mutual recognition whereby both individuality and communal belonging are publicly assured.[60] It appears that Clark picked up my reference to Taylor and applied his theory to her interpretation of the relationship between Durack and Mudrooroo.[61] However, in doing so, she basically disregards the policy of communal recognition that is central to Taylor's communitarian philosophy, while simultaneously offering a naïve, uncritical view of the notion of 'community'.

Clark finds it "problematic" that at the time of Colin Johnson's release from Clontarf, or later from Fremantle Prison for that matter, "the resolution of [his] Aboriginal identity did not involve interaction or dialogue with the Indigenous people and/or their authorities".[62] Apart from the fact that it is not clear at all whom Clark has in mind when she speaks of Indigenous "authorities", one must wonder whether she has thought through the alternatives available to the young man. What or where was his 'community'? Should he have gone back to the scene of his precarious and aborted childhood in Beverley? In any case, both at the end of his time at Clontarf and of his prison term, he was not a free agent but still a ward of the state, released into the care of the Catholic Welfare Agency and of Mary Durack, respectively. It comes as no surprise that he saw in Durack the only chance to escape the fate that was awaiting the ex-convict, by "saving" him from a "roller coaster ride to the bottom of the social pile".[63]

According to Taylor, it is a characteristic of the modern age that the process of identity formation can fail, if the right circumstances for self-identification

59 John Docker, Gerhard Fischer, (eds.): Race, Colour and Identity, pp. 3-20.

60 Cf. the discussion on the 'Politics of Recognition' between Taylor and Jürgen Habermas in Charles Taylor: Multiculturalism.

61 Clark does not mention my name in relation to Taylor, nor does she acknowledge the 'Introduction to Race, Colour and Identity'. It is, of course, entirely possible that she knew of Taylor's work independently. Yet, I find it curious that she identifies some of her sources while withholding others. She identifies me in her thesis as Mudrooroo's "friend and colleague": as she and I never met (regrettably), I presume she decided this after reading my 'Mudrooroo/Müller Project'. However, she does not mention my name in her discussion of that book, neither as editor nor as Mudrooroo's collaborator. Perhaps she wanted to spare me the embarrassment of being associated with Mudrooroo's play 'The Aboriginal Protesters', the centrepiece of 'The Mudrooroo/Müller Project', that she evaluates as "disappointingly unsuccessful on a number of levels". She neglects to point out what these levels might be, only to go on in the next sentence to quote her supervisor, Professor Jerry Turcotte, who criticizes the "unperformability" of Mudrooroo's play. According to Turcotte, being 'unperformable' was nevertheless proof of the success of Mudrooroo's playtext in a "political sense", a case of twisted logic indeed (cf. Maureen Clark, Mudrooroo: A Likely Story, p. 33). The performance of the play at the Festival of Sydney in January 1996 put Turcotte's theory to rest. As Bertolt Brecht was fond of saying, the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

62 Maureen Clark: Mudrooroo: A Likely Story, p. 54.

63 Mudrooroo: Portrait of the Artist, p. 6.

and community recognition are not present. This certainly seems to have been the case for Mudrooroo. Both during his uncertain childhood and the subsequent long years of institutionalisation and incarceration, there were no significant others and no community that could have helped him to develop a secure personality. Strangely enough, then, Maureen Clark identifies Mary Durack as the sole and decisive significant other who succeeded in helping him find his Indigenous identity. Clark maintains that Colin Johnson began "negotiating his Aboriginal identity in dialogue with Durack", who, in the process, led him to discover "his 'true' self as a member of the Aboriginal race".[64] It is a breathtaking conclusion, but blooming nonsense, of course. The interaction between Durack and her protégé was an individual, one-on-one relationship, without any communal involvement. Disregarding Clark's questionable use of the term 'Aboriginal race' and given Durack's socio-economic and ethnic background as a member of West Australia's conservative, privileged, white *colonial squattocracy*, Dame Mary was in no position to 'negotiate' anybody's Indigenous identity. If there was anybody who performed a 'politics of the body' in this encounter, it was Dame Mary Durack. She simply declared her ward to be part-Aborigine, based on her own racialised prejudice typical of her time and place, without bothering to enquire about his background, and then helped him to secure an entry into the world of publishing dominated, then and now, by white Australian cultural and business interests, introducing him to an Australian reading public that was overwhelmingly white, middle-class and of Anglo-European extraction. When Mudrooroo stated that he was 'textualised' by Durack, this is exactly what he meant, and there is no reason to believe that he was disingenuous by stating that "it did not affect his being in the slightest". His existence as a writer was associated with the outcome of his creative labour, i.e., a 'text', but that was never the total horizon of his existential self-perception. One may accuse him of opportunism for accepting the lifeline that Durack offered at the time, but what choice did he have?

Maureen Clark mistakenly applied Charles Taylor's theory of individual self-identification and communal recognition to the relationship between Durack and Johnson. However, the Canadian philosopher's ideas are clearly relevant when it comes to describe and interpret a different, later time in Mudrooroo's life. The importance of a second stage of identity formation has been all but ignored in the debate on Mudrooroo's career. Characteristically, Clark pays scant attention to the time frame around and after 1975. Her focus is the much shorter, transitional phase (from Perth to Melbourne) associated with the publication of 'Wild Cat Falling' and the introduction on the Australian literary scene of its author as "part-Aborigine". In fact, it was two decades later that Colin Johnson was finally ready to establish a firm Aboriginal identity, in a process of dialogic, communitarian exchange precisely as described by Charles Taylor.

After almost 15 years 'on the road', he had decided to return to Australia and to *become* an Aboriginal writer, in earnest and on his own direction, by way of learning and studying, in an intensive interaction and dialogue with prominent members of the Indigenous community: among others, Harry Penrith (Burnum

64 Maureen Clark: Mudrooroo, A Likely Story, pp. 54, 63.

Burnum), Colin Bourke, Jack Davis, the Mansell family in Tasmania, Gary Foley, Brian Syron, and poets Oodgeroo and Ruby Langford Ginibi. These and other Indigenous people from all over Australia made up the community of which Mudrooroo became part: it was not a community in the traditional, tribal understanding of the word, based on extended family connections and attachment to 'country', but a community of like-minded artists, intellectuals, students, scholars and writers united by similar life experiences and a shared commitment to the Aboriginal cause. Indeed, as a pioneer of Indigenous Studies, Mudrooroo became a leading representative of his community: "His was the voice of Indigenous Australia", as Clark succinctly states.[65] He had become who he was not depending on biological determinism based on the racist misconception of the Duracks, but due to a self-determined process of social and cultural development grounded on experience and learning, study and research, supported by a sense and a conviction of communal identity, engagement and recognition.

To Clark, none of this is of any importance; she hardly mentions Mudrooroo's travels or his intellectual development and professional contacts in her study. In a sense, a great deal of the case she presents in her thesis is immaterial because of her reliance on a single matter that, to her, is self-evident. According to Clark, you cannot 'become' an Aborigine, you must be born one: it is genetics that settles the question of identity.

The Mother's Story: A Tale of Two Narratives

The role of the mother is a major concern in any interpretation of Mudrooroo's life. As I wrote in my initial article: "The pivotal part of [Mudrooroo's] unexplored history may well be his unexplained relationship to his mother".[66] There are basically two narratives on offer. The first one, as told by Betty Polglaze and Laurie Taylor in 'The Weekend Australian', is quite simplistic: Mudrooroo's mother, Elizabeth Johnson née Barron, is white and the direct descendant of the first British immigrants to settle in the Swan River district of Western Australia. Supposedly, they were early 'pioneers' and became a well-to-do pastoral family. What this story does not explain is how, over a span of five generations, a line of direct descent can be shown without the benefit of proven actuarial documentation, such as church or civil registries, or at least some oral history.[67] What is also unclear is how the family, or one of its branches, became destitute, except for general comments regarding 'hard times' during periods of economic downturns. Finally, what is not explained is why Mudrooroo's siblings never attempted to establish contact with their mother after their release from orphanages during the 1940s and 1950s.

65 Maureen Clark: Unmasking Mudrooroo, p. 48.

66 Gerhard Fischer: Mis-taken Identity, p. 101. Mudrooroo's sister was two years old when their father died, eight weeks before Mudrooroo was born. Mudrooroo remembers that the only thing their mother told them about their father was that he was originally from Victoria.

67 Cf. Paul Spickard's account on Betty Polglaze's research in the present volume, pp. 30 f., 33.

Mudrooroo, who had previously investigated the Barron family as part of his research into early Western Australian history, tells a different story. Edmund, the first Barron to arrive from the UK, was a sergeant in the army. His wife opened a pub in the fledgling Swan River settlement, but the couple could not make a go of it: Mudrooroo speculates that they were their own best customers. Given a land grant, husband and wife were equally unsuccessful as farmers, so Edmund had to take a job as a police constable. The family never "achieved a respectable position in the colony".[68] Rather than becoming well-off pastoralists, the history of the Barrons in their new country seems to have been one of slow decline in social and material status, until the precarious state of Mudrooroo's immediate family was reached in the 1930s.

What happened to the second and subsequent generations of the Barrons in Western Australia remains a blank in the story told by Maureen Clark. What could have happened is succinctly narrated by Mudrooroo:

> The British government took over the land and doled it out without a thought for the original owners that continued to occupy it. Indeed, they had nowhere else to go. They shared the land with the white families and provided labour which was short in the colony. Women, too, were in short supply and liaisons began and continued between white men and black women so that many of the first settler families fathered a counter black one. […] The local Noongar families and the first settlers are in a position of reciprocal relations, father, mother and offspring.[69]

Of course, it is unlikely that anyone can ever be sure, and prove, that this is exactly what happened to Mudrooroo's ancestors since the 1830s, given the absence of documentary evidence. However, an interracial relationship in the early evolution of the family would not have been unusual, and it would explain the non-white skin colour of Mudrooroo's mother. It might also explain why the person involved in such a relationship might have been ostracised, or otherwise discriminated by other family members, and that such discrimination could have intensified if another racial mixing had occurred further down the track in the family history, namely the marriage to a 'Negro', the son of a Black American immigrant. "During her life", according to Mudrooroo, "she [Mudrooroo's mother] had nothing to do with what was supposed to be her family".[70] All this might help explain the mother's life, characterised by poverty, neglect, anomie, promiscuity, and social isolation.

Clark relies on a line from Mudrooroo that supposedly establishes he misrepresented his mother's identity. In 'Aboriginal Voices', a series of portraits of Indigenous artists compiled by Liz Thompson, he wrote:

> I was always aware of my black heritage. This awareness came from my mother: the Bibbulmun people are matrilineal, so the female line is very important to us. It was from my mother that I got most of my culture and also most of my complexes – one of the latter was not being white. […] You were always discriminated against since the time you were born. This discrimination becomes part of your psyche.[71]

68 Mudrooroo: Portrait of the Artist, p. 3.
69 Ibid, p. 4.
70 Ibid.
71 Liz Thompson: Aboriginal Voices, pp. 55, 57.

The statement, written in 1988, deserves a closer look. It begins with a notion of colour, of blackness, the pivotal point, as it were, of Mudrooroo's racial identity. It is noteworthy that Mudrooroo does not mention any specific feature of Aboriginal culture, except a learned fact about the Bibbulmun (that they are matrilineal). The only other fact he mentions in relation to the heritage of his mother is, again, the fact of being black, which significantly dominates his psychological make-up, i.e., what he calls his complexes. The conclusion then is that a statement like "most of the culture that I got from my mother" is a euphemistic way of saying "I got very little culture, if any at all, from my mother". This is, indeed, exactly how he puts it elsewhere: "I didn't get much from my mum and dad to fasten unto except the colour of my skin".[72] His lack of knowledge about family matters was also confirmed by Mary Durack and her sister when they met the young ex-convict who showed up at their home in the prestigious Perth suburb of Nedlands: an "unhappy youth" who could "sum up" all he knew about his family in "a few bare lines" (Patsy Millett) and who "professed to know little and care less about his Aboriginal heritage" (Mary Durack).[73] His skin colour had determined Johnson's identity for others in the environment he grew up in.

Clark makes no allowance for the actual life experiences of Colin Johnson. His mother, semi-literate and without any family support, was mindful that her other siblings had been taken away by the government, and she took great pains to disassociate herself from any relationship or connection with her Aboriginal neighbours. But she could do nothing to prevent Shirley and her brother growing up among Aboriginal children, all of them exhibiting skin colours in varying shades of black. In school, where racist discrimination was a daily reality, the coloured children had to sit at the back of the classroom where they were routinely ignored by their teachers. Mudrooroo remembers that "we were poor and black" and "nobody would talk to us".[74] After school, the siblings played together with their neighbours despite their mother's order to avoid the 'native' children. It is here that they might have acquired a rudimentary knowledge of traditional bush skills, such as fishing for gilgies (small freshwater crabs) in the nearby river or extracting 'chewing gum' from native banksia trees. At one time, the mother collected cobwebs from an old shed to heal a cut on her boy's knee.[75]

Mudrooroo recalls that "colour dominated the landscape" in Beverley; there was no "choice of identity":

> In the small towns of Western Australia, you were classified as to degrees of Indigenality and denied any right of appeal […] As most if not all coloured people existed on the outskirts of the white population, intervention by government agencies was clearly foreseen and even waited for.[76]

The mother prepared for this by having her children baptised, so – when the time came – they were taken to Catholic institutions rather than native missions.

72 Mudrooroo: Portrait of the Artist, p. 5.
73 Patsy Millett: Identity Parade, p. 74, and Mary Durack: Foreword, Wild Cat Falling, p. v.
74 Mudrooroo: Portrait of the Artist, p. 5.
75 Using spiders' web to heal lesions was known in Greek and Roman antiquity. It is unclear whether this incident represents a knowledge of Indigenous tribal medicine or whether it is part of a general folk medicine tradition used in Australian bush culture.
76 Mudrooroo: Tell them you're Indian, pp. 259 f..

It seems that her fear the two children could be taken away just like their four elder siblings was the overriding concern in her life.[77]

Without a father and breadwinner, the family lived precariously on the borderline between black, coloured, and rural poor white. The only feature that distinguished them from the town's Aborigines was that the three lived in a 'house', ramshackle though the abandoned storefront may have been, as opposed to the huts of the native reserve across the street. In fact, this 'privilege' was the reason why the mother had moved to Beverley; Clark maintains it was for "reasons unknown".[78] The owner of the dilapidated weatherboard building was a white man, Mr William Henry Willey, a woodcutter who seems to have seen better days but was still reasonably secure financially; he owned a horse-and-cart and a motor-driven saw. In 'Balga Boy Jackson', Mudrooroo identified him as his "mum's bloke".[79] We can assume that he was the father of the two children born after the death of Colin's father (one daughter, Margaret, survived infancy). We can only speculate what Shirley and Colin must have felt as they experienced how the image, or memory, of their father was slowly being usurped by Mr. Willey who regularly appeared in the afternoons to visit their mother who then sent the children to play outside. It must have been a confused mix of emotions, anxiety and frustration, incomprehension and anger, loneliness, and defiance, perhaps not unlike the uncertain state of mind expressed in Mudrooroo's 'Bicentennial Gift Poem' in which he tried to capture the essence of his lost childhood.[80]

Clark "strongly suggests the possibility that Johnson may have always known that his mother was white and not a Bibbulman woman as he has often claimed".[81] Clark's language of insinuation once again opens up a space for ambiguity, regarding the veracity of her account, especially in the light of what Clark refers to in her next lines as "Johnson's many-sided narratives".[82] She writes: "The evidence appears to support no other view than that Elizabeth was white and that her son had always known this to be so".[83] The problem is that Clark provides no evidence that supports her claim, nor does she offer a definition of 'white'. Mudrooroo always insisted that his mother was "brown'", or "light coloured", in other words that there must have been some degree of racial mixing in her family before she was born in 1897. This is unsurprising. Since around the turn of the century, most Noongars in south-west Western Australia were considered mixed-race 'natives', i.e., non-white according to the 'one-drop rule' ascribed to by the local white settlers.

Mudrooroo's statements regarding his mother's skin colour have been consistent over the years. In his 'Portrait', he recalls seeing his mother "in Beverley

77 The mother's ban was ignored, of course. Playing with the children of the town's Aboriginal reserve might have given Colin and Shirley some insight into local Indigenous customs, but these experiences seem to have been the limit of a 'native' cultural capital that the children accumulated during their childhood.
78 Maureen Clark: Mudrooroo and the Death of the Mother, p. 96.
79 Mudrooroo: Balga Boy Jackson, p. 9.
80 Cf. Liz Thompson: Aboriginal Voices, p. 56.
81 Maureen Clark: Mudrooroo: A Likely Story, p. 16.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid., p. 79.

sitting on the steps of the kitchen door and her face is brown".[84] The mother had warned her children not to play with the black kids:

> Mum's always at me about this Noongar mob, though some of them seem to be related to us in a vague way. A few of them are light coloured as herself, some even as near white as me but most of them are pretty dark skinned. None of them are real aboriginal.[85]

Maureen Clark cannot visualize any variation outside a stark black/white pattern. She takes it for granted that the mother's skin colour could only be lily-white since, as Betty Polglaze claims, she was the 'direct descendant' of early British-Irish settlers. We are not given any details about what 'direct descent' over five generations might imply concretely. But colour, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. Clark does not accept that in the early part of the 20th century in Beverley, WA, on the fringe of an isolated rural settlement, there was only one possible explanation that would account for the mother's 'light coloured' skin, namely that someone in her family had previously been 'tarred with the brush', as the euphemistic, and racist, Australian bush jargon has it.

What remains to be explained is Colin Johnson's decision, at the age of 17, to follow Mary Durack's initiative to present himself as an Aborigine. What seems to have been decisive was the realisation that her suggestion offered an escape from the dire situation in which the teenager found himself trapped: a one-way street towards a life of crime and incarceration. There was a questionable family history as well the experiences in childhood and youth that offered a possible, and legitimate, connection to an Indigenous identity, but clearly none of the traditional attributes associated with being an Aboriginal person: no sense of belonging, of being part of a *mob* with uncles and aunties and cousins, no identification with a special place of origin or attachment to *country*. By contrast, the young Colin Johnson, after orphanage and jail, found himself as the proverbial existentialist hero, a solitary, anonymous outsider like the hero on a deserted beach in Camus's 'The Stranger', or the hapless tramps caught in a featureless, static environment that promised limitless freedom but no escape, not unlike in Beckett's inhospitable landscape in 'Waiting for Godot'. Both books illuminate the psycho-social and cultural horizons that are apparent also in 'Wild Cat Falling'. Under other circumstances, as Mudrooroo observed in 'Tell them, you're Indian!', he might have opted for his Irish heritage to claim an identity. Had he known about his African American paternal grandfather, possibly an ex-slave from the southern United States, other literary models might have presented themselves as character blueprints: perhaps 'Uncle Tom's Cabin', or Mark Twain's 'Huck Finn' novels, or indeed his own contemporaries such as Langston Hughes, Richard Wright or James Baldwin. He would have been excited, and happy, to find a family connection to the legendary Southern blues singer Robert Johnson. But a search for his roots in America proved unsuccessful.

In his 'Ballad of Mudrooroo', one of the many poems in his diaries, the poet Mudrooroo reveals the humiliating treatment he suffered after the public

84 Mudrooroo: Portrait of the Artist, p. 516.
85 Mudrooroo: Wild Cat Falling, p. 10.

rejection of his Aboriginal identity. He considers changing the title of his autobiography to 'Mongrel'. A keyword in the 'ballad' is "ploy", perhaps implying a strategy of presenting a new persona. Elsewhere in the same diary, Mudrooroo speaks of "camouflage".[86] The term seem particularly apt to shed light on Mudrooroo's existential situation in 1958: the decision to eschew a dire, seemingly unavoidable future and a way to mask a thoroughly unsatisfactory identity (as ex-convict), to disguise his appearance and to become invisible, blending in with a new and larger environment by negating his individual fate and starting a new life, on his own terms.

'Tall Poppy Syndrome' and 'Paying the Rent'

There is a peculiar tradition in Australian popular culture known as 'tall poppy syndrome' that supposedly is proof of the egalitarian spirit of its white majority population. The poppy that towers over all others in the field is interpreted as an outward sign of distinction and privilege, such as the Imperial honours awards inherited from medieval Britain, and openly disapproved of by many Australians. The tall poppy must be cut down to size, and it is sometimes ridiculed or otherwise publicly humiliated. Within Australian Aboriginal society, there is a roughly equivalent custom and practice, known as 'paying the rent', sometimes referred to as 'paying your dues,' as in a trade union to which a member owes a duty of solidarity. If a 'career Aborigine' is perceived as 'having made it' in the society at large, she or he is often criticized as having advanced in life at the expense of the Aboriginal community. It is believed that such persons, sometimes referred to as 'coconuts' (brown on the outside and white inside), need to be held to account and sanctioned. The motives of the players involved in campaigns to 'bring a person down' are not always characterized by sincerity, good will or fair play, or a desire to be generous and just. Lesser motives such as personal ambition and professional jealousy are not unheard of. Of course, if the tallest poppy in the field is cut down, a space opens awaiting to be filled by an ambitious newcomer.

Mudrooroo's initial reaction to the debate generated by the sensationalist article in 'The Weekend Australian' did not help his case. His decision to ignore the matter proved calamitous; his silence was interpreted as confirmation of Laurie's article, as an admission of guilt in other words, and his decision to leave Perth was regarded as corroborating evidence: the perpetrator had fled the scene of the crime. When, a year later, his defiant defence was published – "Whatever my identity is, it rests on my history of over fifty years and that is that"[87] – it was interpreted as arrogance. By that time, many of his academic colleagues had turned his back on him, and he had few friends left. Among his Aboriginal peers, Gary Foley and Ruby Langford Ginibi stood up for him in public, the latter

86 Cf. NLA, 01.036, Item 19, and in the present volume, p. 19.
87 Mudrooroo: Tell them you're Indian, p. 264.

writing a spirited defence that appeared on the letters' page of Rupert Murdoch's nation-wide daily.[88]

What had made matters worse for Mudrooroo was that he had been an outspoken critic of some of his colleagues' writings, especially on the question of whether a particular piece of literature confirmed to his criteria of authentic Aboriginal writing. His critique of Sally Morgan's 'My Place', that she was writing from an unpolitical outsider's perspective while lacking the foundation of being part of the Aboriginal struggle, and that she was successful because she was "young, gifted and not very black",[89] was widely condemned. The accusation, not wholly unfounded, that Mudrooroo's motivation was partly professional jealousy (Morgan's book is the best-selling publication by an Aboriginal writer to date, with an unheard of over 500 000 copies sold), and that there is generally an underlying stream of misogyny in his work,[90] contributed to a climate of hostility against Mudrooroo that quickly spread. He was not the only critic who had reservations about Morgan's book, but he was singled out as the most visible, prominent representative of the Indigenous cultural establishment. Mudrooroo subsequently tried to make amends and modified his criticism of Sally Morgan; in 'Us Mob', he confirms that she is "one of Us Mob in Western Australia", and in 'The Indigenous Literature of Australia. Milly Milly Wangka', Mudrooroo has high praise for "the movement towards a maban reality" in 'My Place', describing the book as "perhaps the best Indigenous life story to date".[91] But the apology came too late. The damage had been done, and it could not be made good again.

A quarter of a century later, Mudrooroo's death was all but ignored by the Australian media,[92] and his work and the story of his life have become a distant memory. Today, readers interested in Aboriginal culture and literature may never come across his groundbreaking contributions. Students who routinely consult the internet will find that neither the AusLit nor the Wikipedia website devoted to Indigenous Australian literature mention his name. The Wikipedia page on Mudrooroo contains a list of his works (almost all of which are still available on the ETT Imprint list), but the editorial material is extremely short and sketchy. The major source listed is Maureen Clark's ill-conceived thesis.

References

The Australian, 7 August 1996, p. 12 (Ruby Ginibi Langford: The Right to be a Koori writer).

Australian National University: Indigenous Australia, www.ia.anu.edu.au, accessed 9 June 2024.

Birns, Nicholas, Rebecca McNeer (eds.): A Companion to Australian Literature since 1960. Rochester, NY: Camden House 2007.

88 Ruby Langford Ginibi: The right to be a Koori writer, p. 12.
89 Mudrooroo: Writing from the Fringe, p. 149.
90 Cf. Adam Shoemaker: Mudrooroo. A Critical Study, pp. 60 f., 157 f.
91 Cf. Mudrooroo: Us Mob, p. 27, and id.: The Indigenous Literature of Australia, p. 93.
92 See Ben Etherington: The Living and the Undead.

Clark, Maureen: Mudrooroo. A Likely Story. Identity and Belonging in Postcolonial Australia. Brussels: Peter Lang 2007.
——: Mudrooroo. Crafty Impostor or Rebel with a Cause? In: Maggie Nolan, Carrie Dawson (eds.): Who's Who? Hoaxes, Imposture and Identity Crises in Australian Literature. In: Australian Literary Studies (UQP), 21, 2004, 4, pp. 101-110.
——: Mudrooroo and the Death of the Mother. In: New Literatures Review, 40, 2003, pp. 83-102.
——: Unmasking Mudrooroo. In: Kunapipi, 23, 2001, 2, pp. 48-62.
Cowlishaw, Gillian, Barry Morris (eds.): Race Matters. Indigenous Australians and 'Our' Society. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press 1997.
Davis, Jack, Mudrooroo, Stephen Muecke, Adam Shoemaker (eds.): Paperbark. A Collection of Black Australian Writings. St. Lucia, QLD: UQP 1990.
Docker, John, Gerhard Fischer: Adventures of Identity. In: John Docker, Gerhard Fischer (eds.): Race, Colour and Identity in Australia and New Zealand. Sydney: UNSW Press 2000, pp. 3-20.
Dumbartung: First Report on Mutant Message, www.dumbartung.org.au/mutant-message-down-under-campaign, accessed 13 June 2024.
Durack, Mary: Foreword. In: Colin Johnson, Wild Cat Falling. Sydney: Angus & Robertson 1965.
Eggington, Robert (co-ordinator): Bounuh Wongee. Message Stick. A Report on Mutant Message Down Under. Waterford, WA: Dumbartung Aboriginal Corporation (No. 1, no date [1995]; No. 2, Jan. 1996; No. 3, April 1997).
Etherington, Ben: The Living and the Undead. In: Sydney Review of Books, 29 April 2020.
Fischer, Gerhard: Mis-taken Identity. Mudrooroo and Gordon Matthews. In: John Docker, Gerhard Fischer (eds.): Race, Colour and Identity in Australia and New Zealand. Sydney: UNSW Press 2000, pp. 95-112.
——: Remembering Mudrooroo (1938-2019). In: ANGLICA, 30, 2021, 1, pp. 5-20.
——: The Mudrooroo/Müller Project. A Theatrical Casebook. Sydney: UNSW Press 1993.
Ginibi, Ruby Langford: The Right to be a Koori writer. In: The Australian, 7 August 1996, p. 12.
Griffin, James: 'Cash, Deirdre (1924-1963)'. In: Australian Dictionary of Biography, www.adb.anu.edu.au/biography/cash-deirdre-9707/text17137, accessed 15 May 2024.
Healy, J. J.: Colin Johnson/Mudrooroo Narogin. In: Robert L. Ross (ed.): International Literature in English. Essays on the Major Writers. New York [et al.]: Garland 1991, pp. 21-38.
Heiss, Anita: Am I Black Enough for you? North Sydney: Bantam 2012.
——: Dhuluu-Yalla. To Talk Straight, Publishing Indigenous Literature. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press 2003.
——, Peter Minter (eds.): Macquarie PEN Anthology of Aboriginal Literature. Sydney: Allen & Unwin 2008.
Hoad, Brian: Tense Tale of Future Past. In: The Bulletin, 116, 1996, 6008, p. 73.
Jones, Jennifer: Yesterday's words. The editing of Monica Clare's Karobran. In: Journal of Australian Studies, 24, 2000, 64, pp. 128-134.

Langton, Marcia: Well, I heard it on the Radio and I Saw it on the Television. Sydney: AFC 1993.
Lehman, Greg: Authentic and Essential. A Review of Anita M. Heiss' 'Dhuluu-Yala (To Talk Straight). Publishing Indigenous Literature'. In: Australian Humanities Review, 8, 2004, 1, http://australianhumanitiesreview.org/2004/08/01 (printout).
Millett, Patsy: Identity Parade. In: The Bulletin, 27 August 1996, pp. 74-75.
Mudrooroo: Balga Boy Jackson. Sydney: ETT Imprint 2017.
——: Paperbark. In: Geoffrey V. Davis and, Hena Maes-Jeline (eds.:) Crisis and Creativity in the New Literatures in English. Amsterdam/ Atlanta, GA: Rodopi 1990, pp. 388-400.
——: Portrait of the Artist as a Sick Old Villain. 'Me Yes I Am He the Villain'. Reflections of a Bloke from Outside. In: JASAL 11, 2011, 2, pp. 1-23 (printout).
——: Tell them you're Indian. In: Gillian Cowlishaw, Barry Morris (eds.): Race Matters. Indigenous Australians and 'Our' Society. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press 1997, pp. 259-268.
——: The House with the Yellow Door. In: Southerly, 74/3, pp. 62-76.
——: The Indigenous Literature of Australia. Milly Milly Wangka. Melbourne: Hyland House 1997.
——: Tripping with Jenny. Sydney: ETT Imprint 2019.
Oboe, Annalisa: Mudrooroo. A Likely Story (Review). In: Australian Literary Studies, 23, 2008, 4, pp. 489-491.
Pons, Xavier: I have to work right through this white way of thinking–The Deconstruction of Discourses of Whiteness in Kim Scott's Benang. In: Commonwealth Essays and Studies 30, 2007, 1, pp. 37-48.
Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse: Report of Case Study No. 35. Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, https:// childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/Report of Case Study No. 11, accessed 13 June 2024.
Shoemaker, Adam: Mudrooroo. A Critical Study. Sydney: Angus & Robertson 1993.
——: Mudrooroo. Waiting to be surprised. In: JASAL 11, 2011, 2, pp. 1-10 (printout).
Spickard, Paul: Mudrooroo – Aborigine No More. In: Paul Spickard, Ingrid Dineen-Wimberley, Lily Anne, Y. Welty (eds.): Shape Shifters. University of Nebraska Press 2020, pp. 350-362.
Taylor, Charles (with contributions by Jürgen Habermas, Amy Gutman and others): Multiculturalism. Princeton University Press 1994.
Thompson, Liz: Mudrooroo Narogin, Writer. In: Aboriginal Voices. Contemporary Aboriginal Artists, Writers and Performers. Sydney: Simon & Schuster 1990.
The West Australian, 27 July 1996, p. 15 (Roger Martin, Shaun Anthony: Family adds fuel to literary fire.)

DOI: 10.35515/zfa/asj.41/2024.06

Australian Studies Journal
Zeitschrift für Australienstudien
41 — 2024

Laura Singeot

'Truth bedecked in Halloween drag'

Rewriting History from G. A. Robinson's Journals to Mudrooroo's Novels

Abstract: In the first half of the 19th century, George Augustus Robinson's journals, which he had written after being officially appointed Protector of the Aborigines, show the growing interest in Indigenous populations, from the very first voyages of discovery to the beginning of the 18th century. Informed by Victorian attitudes, these first accounts contributed to forging the stereotypes which have since been rewritten and subverted in novels written by white or Indigenous Australian writers alike. Wavering between the 'noble savage', who may benefit from education, and the 'ignoble savage', violent and dangerous, these stereotypes feed on accepted attitudes and fuel them with new anecdotes and experiences. The present article explores how Mudrooroo engages with the relation between fiction and History in his novels that are set at the time of the first contacts between settlers and Indigenous Australians, 'Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World' (1983) and the 'Master of the Ghost Dreaming' tetralogy (1991). Mudrooroo's rewriting of historical events starts either a conversation or a confrontation with the depositories of the first historical accounts about those encounters – white European authors.[1]

If the epigraph from 'The Undying' explicitly defines the following text as fictional – "To my friends and enemies. This story is fiction and should be treated and read as such. No reality where none intended" – the one opening 'The Promised Land', the last novel from Mudrooroo's tetralogy, invites the readers to rethink the status of and the relation between reality and fiction: "'Allegorical,' she said, her voice raw, sounding as if she smoked and drank heavily, awaiting exit from the womb. 'Truth bedecked in Halloween drag'".[2] The narrative, therefore, is a matter of historical truth, albeit cloaked in a morbid disguise. This author-reader contract, simultaneously clear and yet ambiguous, can be applied to the five novels under consideration in this article, insofar as these texts refer, to a greater or lesser extent, to the writings of George Augustus Robinson, missionary and 'Protector of Aborigines' in the first half of the 19th century.

Indeed, 'Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World' (1983) and the 'Master of the Ghost Dreaming' tetralogy (1991) take place during the period of the first contacts between white settlers and Indigenous

1 This article is a translation and partial rewriting of 'Des carnets de G. A. Robinson aux romans de Mudrooroo: la figure de l'indigène en marge de l'Histoire australienne' published in E-rea in 2016.

2 It is noteworthy to recall here that the publication of the tetralogy happened in the wake of a heightened controversy, intertwined with the same notions of authenticity and hybridity elucidated in the present article. Indeed, its author, Colin Johnson, in 1988 had adopted the nom de plume Mudrooroo, meaning paperbark – as a professional trade name – to protest against the official Bicentennial celebrations and to assert his Nyoongah identity. In 1996, he faced accusations of fabricating his Indigenous origins. This revelation had a profound impact on the Australian artistic scene, particularly given the contextual backdrop. Mudrooroo had, in fact, emerged as a prominent figure in Indigenous Australian literature and had even become its leading academic theorist after publishing 'Writing from the Fringe' in 1990.

Australians; the novels raise the question of the texts' relation to History.[3] In the following, I propose to examine the position of these novels within a broader genealogy of Australian literature, particularly historical texts. Contrary to established narratives, Mudrooroo's novels, which belong to the genre of travel literature, while reimagining a more distant era at the dawn of the 21st century, are contemporary interrogations concerning the authenticity of official historical discourse. History is no longer construed as a singular and authentic version of reality; rather, it emerges as a discourse, constructed by various actors in History – preferably the 'victors', i.e. the Europeans, and more specifically in this context, George Augustus Robinson. History in these novels becomes both an 'art' and an artifice, primarily a discourse with double entendre that is achieved through the recurrent use of irony, parody, and imitation, ultimately advocating the hybridity and multiplicity of History.

Factual truth and History: between narrative strategy and discursive choices

If the first chapters of the inaugural novel, 'Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World', invite the readers to discard the cartesian vision of the world in order to better embrace the perspective of the Indigenous protagonists, the text bears the marks of an intention to anchor the narrative in a reality presented as authentic. This authenticity is reinforced by the author's use of various excerpts from Robinson's journals, for example, the petition signed by the group of Indigenous Australians,[4] or the reproduction of a newspaper front page detailing the dismissal of Governor Arthur. Acting as both a backdrop and the underlying grounding for the novel's 'realistic' framework, History is only accessible in a fragmentary form, known through pre-existing texts presented as historical documents. Other elements, the historical accuracy of which is asserted, punctuate the novel, notably passages recounting the Cape Grim massacre, which Robinson had investigated, even going so far as to interrogate several presumed participants. In 'Doctor Wooreddy', not only is the massacre described from an external perspective – with a third-person omniscient narrator and a narrative presented in the present tense, akin to a historical account – but the point of view shifts when Robinson's investigation is mentioned, incorporating some of his interviews with the shepherds.

Furthermore, without delving into specifics, the depiction of Robinson's character, as well as how he is perceived by other historical figures such as Governor Arthur, relies on period testimonies and the findings of researchers after scrutinizing Robinson's writings. Simultaneously, other historical events are employed to construct a referential framework, only to be subsequently questioned, such as references to the Napoleonic Wars, the triangular trade, or London's Great

3 In this article, the term 'History' will be capitalized when referring to the Western official discourse, implying all its related paradigms, such as power, hierarchy, and domination. If it is used in quotes, it will remain as found in the original text.

4 The term 'Aborigines' is used in the novels, but the expression 'Indigenous Australians' is preferred in the body of this article.

Exhibition in 1851. Consequently, a preliminary distancing from History occurs through this intertextuality: the texts provide an initial mediation as historical facts are already presented as absent, relegated to the past. Their textual trace is what remains, as Linda Hutcheon suggests: "Such novels [= historiographic metafiction] demand of the reader […] the recognition of textualized traces of the literary and historical past".[5] This intertextuality is particularly significant as it entails the use of parody, a theme that is further explored in this article. Thus, by virtue of its 'textual' status, History shares all the attributes of fiction and can be questioned.

The other point of criticism concerning History is its prevailing narcissistic complacency, theorized by Fabian in 'Time and the Other', particularly through the analysis of what the author terms "visualism" in anthropology.[6] Serving as both a witness and a conveyer of a discourse that emerges through various writings, the character of Robinson, in Mudrooroo's works, is employed to problematize the production of both historical and ethnological discourses: it is perilous to position oneself as a witness while attempting to maintain a semblance of scientific objectivity, as the latter becomes questionable. This is vividly illustrated in the novels through Robinson, who, in his letters, reports, and journals, embellishes or outright 'rewrites' history according to what would be most beneficial to him. When, after raping a young Indigenous woman in 'The Promised Land', he subsequently describes the massacre of her tribe as a case of 'frontier justice', the ostensibly scientific language becomes performative: Robinson's account of the incident starts with "I declare", suggesting that what follows is to be considered what really happened.[7] This also appears to be what Robinson himself retrospectively believes as he does not want to compromise himself in what is in fact a genocide: "Sir George was pleased, for the evidence [= the bodies] had been destroyed and now only the official (*his*) version of the events would remain".[8] In this quote, the parentheses insist on the underlying irony of such a camouflaging endeavour, as is explicitly made clear a few pages later with the use of expressions such as "constructing a report", "to render accurate a report", "composition", or "structuring".[9] They all underscore the artificiality of such accounts, forged by their "author",[10] who may succumb to the allure of manipulating facts, just like Robinson. Undoubtedly, if someone claims to be the sole witness of an event and tells what they saw, who may be in the position to question their account? If in the disciplines of ethnology and anthropology the sense of sight is considered as a guarantee of truth, here, discourse takes precedence over sight in the sense that it always reveals intentionality: in the discourse of Europeans, the observation of different Indigenous peoples often served to justify colonial enterprises and European power. The alteration of testimonies and writings also aligns with

5 Linda Hutcheon: A Poetics of Postmodernism, p. 128.
6 Johannes Fabian: Time and the Other, p. 106.
7 Mudrooroo Nyoongah: The Promised Land, p. 141.
8 Ibid., emphasis added.
9 Mudrooroo Nyoongah: The Promised Land, pp. 142 f.
10 This term is used in Mudrooroo Nyoongah: The Promised Land, p. 169.

this, casting doubt on the reliability of so-called historical documents, such as Robinson's journals.

Still, in 'Time and the Other', Fabian underlines the importance given to sight – on which "the rhetoric of vision" is based and which denies the Other's "coevalness".[11] It temporally distances the Other while emphasizing one's hegemony and culture, which determines the anthropologist's intrinsically political intervention. In Mudrooroo's novels, the 'denial of coevalness' is constantly attributed to Robinson's civilising mission, whose purpose is to 'civilise' the Indigenous Australians and give them access to 'progress'. Indeed, in Mudrooroo's narrative, the very idea of civilisation and progress is always articulated with reference to the protagonists' future. For instance, in 'Doctor Wooreddy', while showing Hobarton to Trugernanna, Robinson says: "Look, look, my child […], this is your future and the future of all your race now living in miserable nakedness in the hidden fastnesses of the island".[12] However, Robinson's vision, which he considers his ideal world, is counterbalanced by the Indigenous protagonists' own perception of this "future" when they come face to face with the 'rejects' of white Australian society, namely the convicts and the drunkards: "The future loomed worse than the present".[13] The prevalence of European agency in the determination of "the future" informs the impossible return to a pre-contact Australia, as Wooreddy suggests: "Leaving the future to take care of the future".[14] As a matter of fact, Robinson's actions lead to the genocide of Wooreddy's people, as implicitly mentioned by Mudrooroo's reference to the mythical trope of the Ouroboros, which emphasizes the inevitability of the protagonists' doom:

> The past, which was fixed, had fixed the present and the future, just as the future had fixed the present and the past. […] Now that that long-ago past had become the present, the unsettled present filled with events as great as those of that long-ago past, and this made the future hideous with uncertainty. The future then itself wound back on itself like a serpent with its tail in its mouth.[15]

Future as progress made accessible by becoming 'civilised' is annihilated, as already suggested in the novel's title, 'Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World', alluding to what is today recognized as the cultural genocide of the Tasmanian people.[16] In The Promised Land, the Indigenous Australians are literally erased from the white Australians' personal stories and experience, as is the case with Rebecca Crawley:

11 Johannes Fabian: Time and the Other, pp. xii, 151 f. ("rhetoric of vision", "denial of coevalness"). More specifically, Fabian defines this concept as follows: "As long as anthropology presents its object primarily as seen, as long as ethnographic knowledge is conceived primarily as observation and/or representation (in terms of models, symbol systems, and so forth) it is likely to persist in denying coevalness to its Other", pp. 151 f.
12 Mudrooroo Nyoongah: Doctor Wooreddy, p. 49.
13 Ibid., p. 50.
14 Ibid., p. 73.
15 Ibid., pp. 84 f.
16 Recalling the colonial and racist idea that Indigenous peoples were doomed to extinction, Trugernanna was believed to be "the last of the Tasmanians" when she died in 1876. This has since been corrected as Tasmanian culture and heritage are very much still alive and vibrant.

> Such a dirty, dirty, lazy lot, existing as they always had existed at the very bottom of civilisation. Why, they had been worth only a line or two in the letters she used regularly to send home, and now not even a line.[17]

In 'Time and the Other', Fabian calls these temporal hierarchies "Typological Time":

> It signals a use of Time which is measured, not as time elapsed. Nor by reference to points on a (linear) scale, but in terms of socioculturally meaningful events or, more precisely, intervals between such events. Typological Time underlies such qualifications as preliterate vs. literate, traditional vs. modern, peasant vs. industrial, and a host of permutations which include pairs such as tribal vs. feudal, rural vs. urban. In this use, Time may almost totally be divested of its vectorial, physical connotations. Instead of being a measure of movement it may appear as a quality of states.[18]

This consequently results in the establishment of a temporal distance which prevails in what Fabian termed the "denial of coevalness", thereby contributing to the justification of colonial enterprise in 19th-century anthropology, the direct effects of which are described as follows:

> It [= anthropology] promoted a scheme in terms of which not only past cultures, but all living societies were irrevocably placed on a temporal slope, a stream of Time – some upstream, others down-stream.[19]

Consequently, Mudrooroo's novels are part of what Linda Hutcheon defines as "historiographic metafiction":

> It puts into question, at the same time as it exploits, the grounding of historical knowledge in the past real. This is why I have been calling this historiographic metafiction. It can often enact the problematic nature of the relation of writing history to narrativization and, thus, to fictionalization, thereby raising the same questions about the cognitive status of historical knowledge.[20]

Mudrooroo's novels' initial form of engagement with History is more of a questioning of the very processes of "collecting" and ordering historical elements to "make a narrative order": "Historiographic metafiction acknowledges the paradox of the *reality* of the past but its *textualized accessibility* to us today".[21] It is because they are accessible in the form of texts and documents, and thus "textualized", that these facts share the same characteristics as fiction: they no longer form an objective and scientific testimony but rather a construction, inherently artificial in nature.

History as Art(ifice)

History is first conceived as an individual construct. As in historiographic metafiction, Mudrooroo's novels particularly enhance the creative process at play in the writing of History through the presentation of Robinson's journals as being entirely fabricated, hence their "fictional" dimension. Robinson is not

17 Mudrooroo Nyoongah: The Promised Land, p. 12.
18 Johannes Fabian: Time and the Other, p. 23.
19 Ibid., p. 17.
20 Linda Hutcheon: A Poetics of Postmodernism, pp. 92 f.
21 Ibid., p. 114, original emphases.

an anthropologist, a missionary, or an explorer anymore, as he becomes an "author".[22] The documents he leaves behind will bear witness to his work, much like the remnants of the buildings on Bruny Island. The description of these structures, as he departs, reveals the fictional nature of History that needs to be "signed", claimed as one's own to avoid being questioned: "If history was to be history, it had to be signed and thus secured for all time".[23] The author's signature seemingly serves as a guarantee of truth, necessarily implying a belief in the reality of what is signed. In the novel, this signature of the historical monument dominating the mission (the church), left in the form of a plaque that Robinson plans to hang on one of its walls, echoes the same gesture as that of the early explorers. They left medals with the Queen's effigy to the Indigenous Australians they encountered and erected plaques on the capes and mountains they were the first to "discover", to claim "authority" and to testify to their presence. Such a signature tends to "individualize", to appropriate a text and identifies it more as a work of fiction than History. Quite ironically, not only History is invented, but so is the more personal story (his-story): thanks to the Reform Act of 1832, Robinson gained a higher status (ironically as a "self-made knight"), but he still needs to create an aristocratic genealogy worthy of his new position.[24]

Thus, History provides a privileged access to an individual's subjectivity, as well as to the functioning or mindset of an entire society. The novels indeed show historical events as having been filtered through the European perspective. Hayden White emphasizes that these historical narratives are first and foremost subject to the culture of the historian, further highlighting their artificiality and discursive status:

> While events may occur in time, the chronological codes used to order them into specific temporal units are culture specific, not natural; and, moreover, must be filled with their specific contents by the historian […]. The constitution of a chronicle as a set of events that can provide the elements of a story is an operation more poetic than scientific in nature. The events may be given, but their functions as elements of a story are imposed upon them – by discursive techniques more tropological than logical in nature.[25]

History is informed by European culture at a specific time – "[it is] culture specific". For instance, when setting foot on Pacific islands, it was not uncommon for explorers to express in the ship's logs an idyllic vision of the peoples they encountered. These descriptions, reflecting a discourse influenced by the beauty standards of the time, often relied on comparisons borrowed from the classical era and on a romanticized, even at times fantastical, vision. Thus, in 'Doctor Wooreddy', Robinson appears to be already influenced by a particular perspective, likely shaped by his readings of previous accounts detailing earlier experiences and contributing to his own romanticized perception:

22 Mudrooroo Nyoongah: The Promised Land, p. 169.
23 Mudrooroo Nyoongah: Master of the Ghost Dreaming, p. 125.
24 Mudrooroo Nyoongah: The Promised Land, pp. 10 f.
25 Hayden White: Figural Realism, p. 9.

> George Augustus Robinson […] leered at the forbidden fruits of the bare-breasted maiden who conjured up *romantic visions* of beautiful South Sea islands where missionaries laboured for the salvation of delightful souls.[26]

In all the novels studied here, various expressions regularly reflect these cultural codes through which the scenes witnessed by Robinson should be read and perceived. Several times, scenes are described as reminiscent of idyllic paintings of a prelapsarian era. In 'Doctor Wooreddy', for instance, Trugernanna appears to Robinson as a character, or a 'figure of romance', straight out of an Oriental narrative, leading him to rename her Lalla Rookh.[27]

If History departs from reality, it is notably because power and money – or the hope for personal advancement – are constantly sought and ensured by the strategy adopted behind such writings, which end up being arranged according to circumstances. This manipulation, which forms an intrinsic part of History, becomes a true 'performance', aiming to justify Robinson's missionary enterprise and the need, according to him, to establish true segregation between Aborigines and Europeans.[28] The emphasis laid on the idea of 'performance' or representation echoes the way in which Indigenous Australian culture is treated in the novels, namely as something that can be manipulated for personal gain. Culture becomes a commodity that can be bought, and the Indigenous Australian characters become its main 'actors', in the literal sense of the term. Thus, Robinson asks Ludjee to pose for his sketch: he temporarily turns into a stage director and even goes so far as to ask her to fetch some 'props', traditional Indigenous tools from his personal collection, although the protagonists themselves no longer use them. Robinson hopes to restore an authentic 'flavour' to this scene while erasing its overly 'modern' aspect.[29] These staged scenarios reveal a personal intention emanating from a specific individual, i.e. Robinson. The anthropological endeavour, involving the creation of sketches or study drawings, thus becomes a discourse[30] generated by the victors of History – the Europeans – with a purpose and intention that are far from objective.

Similarly, the Indigenous protagonists themselves are aware of what is asked of them: on the one hand, they have to sell their culture as a mere commodity (without reaping the benefits that are reserved for Robinson and his missionary enterprise), and on the other hand, to adapt it to European expectations, following the questionable 'improvements' demanded by Robinson.[31] Not only objects

26 Mudrooroo Nyoongah: Doctor Wooreddy, p. 32. My emphasis.
27 ibid., p. 151. Lalla Rookh is the heroine of Thomas Moore's eponymous romance published in 1817.
28 Mudrooroo Nyoongah: Doctor Wooreddy, p. 67.
29 Mudrooroo Nyoongah: Master of the Ghost Dreaming, pp. 51 ff.
30 For more detail on anthropology as discourse, see Král's comment (on 'Master of the Ghost Dreaming'): " [It] can also be interpreted in a post-modern perspective as implicitly questioning the possibility of true discourse since anthropology is clearly represented not as mimetic rendering of a clearly identifiable object but as discourse – a discourse which implies certain choices and a specific focus", Françoise Král: The Empire Looks Back, p. 165.
31 Robinson wants to start a trade of Indigenous artefacts with the Europeans: "He must encourage the natives to manufacture implements and tools (suitably improved by himself) to be sold as amusing artefacts for profit. Already there was a ready market amongst the earnest Christians in England who, now that slavery had been abolished, were ready to turn their full attention on the poor, but noble savage", Mudrooroo Nyoongah: Master of

are targeted, but also representations of ceremonies, orchestrated by Robinson and later described by Waau as "rubbish entertainment".[32] Exoticism prevails over authenticity, reminiscent of the sanitized versions specifically created for settlers and later for tourists to meet the market and customer expectations.[33] Lastly, the relationship between money and missionary enterprise is extensively explored in 'The Promised Land', where the term 'prospector' used to describe Robinson ironically reminds the reader of Robinson's official title as a Protector. Indeed, Robinson literally makes money off the Indigenous Australian corpses: as gold is discovered in the tunnel, he blows it up to erase all traces of the massacre of the tribe. The "golden light" toward which Robinson's mission leads the Indigenous Australians – "That golden light you saw was but His light shining out over those who live in darkness" – turns out to be, in fact, the light of gold nuggets, rather than the light of progress and civilization that religion and missionaries are supposed to bring to Indigenous people.[34]

Even though History presents itself as an artifice or an individual creation aimed at gaining advancement or profits, far from being just a critique of colonial history where only the victors have the right to speak, Mudrooroo's novels engage in a conversation with this European perspective. His engagement with History becomes a source of inquiry and interrogation, particularly through the use of imitation and parody.

History and Hybridity: Imitation and Parody

While Mudrooroo's novels indeed evoke a Eurocentric vision of History, they quickly distance themselves from it. But far from merely opposing it, the novels enact a series of reversals and subversions, with the aim of questioning the entire process to formulate the idea of an ostensibly universal History, which only turns out to be the privilege of a few individuals who create it to make their version of events, their voice, heard. The first notable reversal lies in the fact that the gaze of the Europeans is turned back upon them by the Indigenous characters on several occasions. In all five novels, while they are alternately portrayed as savages, primitives, "sable friends", or "blighters" in European discourse, the Indigenous Australians, in turn, consider the Europeans as "ghosts", opposed to the "humans", an expression in 'Doctor Wooreddy' that exclusively refers to

the Ghost Dreaming, pp. 94 f. These fabricated tools contrast with the "real native artefacts" evoked at the very beginning of Underground (ibid., p. 1) which provide George with a genuine legitimacy to tell his story.

32 Mudrooroo Nyoongah: Doctor Wooreddy, pp. 175, 181.

33 Similarly, the visitors of Great Exhibitions attending so-called 'ethnographic' shows are explicitly mentioned in Mudrooroo Nyoongah: Doctor Wooreddy, p. 112, and at the end of Mudrooroo Nyoongah: The Promised Land – where the group of Indigenous Australians is sent to England and appears in a spectacle observed by the Queen. The narrative, in fact, concludes with Queen Victoria's testimony in the form of an excerpt from her personal journal.

34 The action takes place during the Australian gold rush. Mudrooroo Nyoongah: Promised Land, pp. 71, 77.

the Indigenous Australians.[35] Similarly, in this novel, cannibalism is mentioned by the Indigenous characters who fear that the Europeans might start eating them – ironically, a fear conventionally attributed to settlers regarding Indigenous populations.

This play of reversals extends not only to specific expressions but to the entire speech of the Indigenous Australians. Ironically, the allegedly primitive natives must simplify their language to make themselves understood by Robinson, to the point where their speech becomes "barbaric": "He [Wooreddy] was stripping his language down to the bare essentials in order to be understood […] The result sounded barbaric to his ears".[36] Regarding the first contacts, reversals take place as well: they are, indeed, entirely organized and staged by Wooreddy himself, according to what he believes Robinson expects. It is no longer Robinson who controls Indigenous ceremonies, but the Indigenous characters who stage them, so to speak, paradoxically making him believe that his mission is a success.[37] However, the most significant subversion in 'Doctor Wooreddy' is the reversal of the scientific, particularly anthropological, gaze and discourse. This discourse is parodied by Ummarrah when he describes European society to Wooreddy. All the codes are taken up in this exchange to be turned back against the Europeans themselves, not once again to contradict them but to question them. This is indeed the purpose of parody according to Hutcheon: "To parody is not to destroy the past; in fact to parody is both to enshrine the past and to question it. And this, once again, is the postmodern paradox".[38] The following remarkable passage leaves no doubt concerning the type of discourse it aims to parody:

> They have families as we do, but they are not very important to them. Instead, they leave such natural groupings to cling together in clans called 'convicts'; 'army'; 'navy', and so on. You can identify which group they belong to by the colour of their coverings.[39]

The following enumeration, classification and hierarchisation of the different groups the Indigenous character has observed clearly exemplify what Bhabha describes in his chapter on imitation in 'The Location of Culture': "The observer becomes the observed and 'partial' representation rearticulates the whole notion of identity and alienates it from essence".[40] This return of the gaze, grounded

35 Continuing within the same semantic field, Europeans are referred to as "inhumans", Mudrooroo Nyoongah: Doctor Wooreddy, p. 80, ultimately being accepted as humans towards the end of the novel. This notably reflects a shift in time, alluding to the end of the world mentioned in the title of the novel: "[Wooreddy's] mind swung back to the old days, not so long ago, but now seemingly an eternity in the past, when they had regarded those with white skins as ghosts. Now they were only men, evil men perhaps, but humans for all that", Mudrooroo Nyoongah: Doctor Wooreddy, p. 131. This reflection here speaks to the resignation of the doctor but also to the triumph of the whites, who have, in a way, "integrated" into Australian life.

36 Mudrooroo Nyoongah: Doctor Wooreddy, pp. 34 f.

37 Ibid., pp. 86, 118 f.

38 Linda Hutcheon, p. 126. Hutcheon also states that "one of the postmodern ways of literally incorporating the textualized past into the text of the present is that of parody. […] The parodic intertexts are both literary and historical […] [Parody] uses and abuses those intertextual echoes, inscribing their powerful allusions and then subverting that power through irony", Linda Hutcheon, p. 118.

39 Mudrooroo Nyoongah: Doctor Wooreddy, p. 61.

40 Homi Bhabha: The Location of Culture, p. 127.

in imitation and parody, thus rejects the "essentialism" that formed one of the foundations of early anthropology – namely, the desire to categorize peoples based on characteristics considered intrinsic or essential to them. However, in Mudrooroo's novels, the Indigenous Australians explicitly oppose this categorization, of which they are aware, and denounce the mechanisms, as well as the often-unspoken goals, used by the Europeans. Thus, Trugernanna declares to Robinson: "We are not savages. That is only your excuse for not listening to us".[41] The term 'savages' refers to a category established by Western thought and challenged here – alongside latent essentialism – by Trugernanna. Indeed, according to Fabian,

> a discourse employing terms such as primitive, savage (but also tribal, traditional, Third World, or whatever euphemism is current) does not think, or observe, or critically study, the "primitive"; it thinks, observes, studies *in terms* of the primitive. *Primitive*, being essentially a temporal concept, is a category, not an object of Western thought.[42]

According to Hutcheon, every parody necessarily involves irony, which is found in Mudrooroo's texts in certain comments attributed to the omniscient narrator regarding the work done (or not) by Robinson. These recurring jabs at Robinson, such as "the Great Conciliator, who had yet to begin conciliating", "The Great Conciliator who still had done no conciliating", or "The Great Conciliator, who still had not begun his work of conciliating",[43] leave no doubt about the pervasive, and subversive, humour and irony in these texts, especially knowing now that Robinson's actions eventually led to cultural genocide. The experience acquired in the present[44] is what allows readers to detect irony, as Hutcheon points out, concerning the "metafictional self-consciousness" of the text: "Postmodern fiction suggests that to re-write or to re-present the past in fiction and in history is, in both cases, to *open it up to the present*, to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological".[45] We have already discussed the limitations of visualism and empirical knowledge, and here, this is further evidenced by the treatment of "corroborees":[46] Robinson is convinced that the fact Aborigines adorn themselves with paintings symbolizing European attire signifies the success of Aboriginal assimilation.[47] However, this is not the case at all: sight is deceptive, and Robinson

41 Mudrooroo Nyoongah: Doctor Wooreddy, p. 202.
42 Johannes Fabian: Time and the Other, pp. 17 f.
43 Mudrooroo Nyoongah: Doctor Wooreddy, pp. 70, 73, 77.
44 There are also instances of dramatic irony, under the form of comments explicitly referring to future events, while emphasizing that the characters do not know what awaits them, as if it were a privilege of readers who would thus know the end of the story before the characters do. For example, Robinson ultimately decides not to capture two Indigenous Australians he sees in the distance, and he says to Wooreddy: "We'll leave them in peace until the time is ripe". It is followed by the narrator's comment: "And although Wooreddy and Trugernanna did not know it in detail, the time would soon be ripe for the West Coast Nations", Mudrooroo Nyoongah: Doctor Wooreddy, p. 94.
45 Linda Hutcheon, p. 110; emphasis added.
46 The term 'corroboree' refers to Indigenous Australian ceremonies involving music and dance, during which people wear body paintings and/or costumes.
47 This opinion is also shared by the Queen when she describes the 'corroboree' she attended at the Great Exhibition: "I was startled to see how the natives mimicked some of the aspects of our customs. Sir George explained that this revealed that the process of civilising such creatures was well underway", Mudrooroo Nyoongah: The Promised Land, p. 232.

cannot grasp the latent irony of such practices. At the beginning of the tetralogy, the "corroboree" ceremony, considered by Robinson as "shenanigans", is imbued with a much more complex meaning and symbolism.[48] If the Indigenous Australian characters are covered in white paint depicting European attire, including hats and buttons of frock coats, it is not just to mimic European society but to create a new ceremony – "a Ghost Dreaming Ceremony"[49] – in order to protect themselves from "ghosts":

> [Jangamuttuk, creator and choreographer] was not after a realist copy, after all he had no intention of *aping* the European, but sought for an adaptation of these alien cultural forms *appropriate* to his own cultural matrix […] Not only was he to attempt the act of *possession*, but he hoped to bring all of his people into contact with the ghost realm so that they could capture the essence of health and well-being, and then break back safely into their own culture and society.[50]

The use and adaptation of European attire only serves to reassert the Indigenous characters' own culture. In her article 'Overwhelming Bodies and Faint Voices: Mudrooroo's Quest to Write the Native', Françoise Král declares: "The body becomes a palimpsest and bears witness to the changes entailed by colonisation. As a visible and readable page of history, it expresses, informs and brings in front of our eyes abstract notions such as integration, hybridity and assimilation".[51] However, in the novel, imitation becomes the privileged tool for questioning and subverting, leaving the European spectators completely in the dark when it comes to deciphering the meaning of such ceremonies:

> [if there had been European eyes present to be startled], it was highly doubtful that the signifiers could have been read. What was the ultimate in a sign system, might still be read as primitive.[52]

Imitation, or "mimicry" according to Bhabha, creates a discourse, "a writing', which influences the perception of History and which can be found in the descriptions of the corroborees performed by the Indigenous Australian characters:

> What emerges between mimesis and mimicry is a *writing*, a mode of representation, that marginalizes the monumentality of history, quite simply mocks its power to be a model, that power which supposedly makes it imitable. Mimicry *repeats* rather than *re-presents*.[53]

Lastly, in 'Doctor Wooreddy', irony also heavily relies on the use of parentheses and italics, which take on another meaning. In one such passage, Wooreddy

48 Mudrooroo Nyoongah: Master of the Ghost Dreaming, p. 12.
49 Mudrooroo Nyoongah: The Promised Land, p. 215.
50 Mudrooroo Nyoongah: Master of the Ghost Dreaming, pp. 3 f.; my emphasis. The reference to "essence of health" is ironically highlighted by Ludjee when Robinson asks her to pose for him: "I want you to pose for me. I'll put you down on paper". Ludjee then replies under her breath: "Capture my soul". This also echoes the impression that the Indigenous Australians have that Robinson is "killing" them by putting them on paper, that is, by wanting to do his missionary-anthropologist work. Thus, Ludjee, speaking of him, says: "Why it's that ghost, Fada, who placed us in that book of his, so that we died each time he numbered one of us", Mudrooroo Nyoongah: Doctor Wooreddy, p. 53. Ludjee underlines the cause-and-effect relationship between the actions of the Europeans and their harmful impact on the Indigenous community.
51 Françoise Král: Overwhelming Bodies and Faint Voices, p. 79.
52 Mudrooroo Nyoongah: Master of the Ghost Dreaming, p. 3.
53 Homi Bhabha, p. 125.

remembers one of Robinson's sermons and tries to compare it with the primordial myth of the "Great Ancestor"; parentheses are used to share either his own interpretation of Robinson's words or his interrogations: "Great Ancestor stop sky; demon stop below fire (*this must mean that he stayed in the dark places of the earth and ocean*)".[54] If the readers' initial reaction is to consider parentheses as an unnecessary addition and therefore as denying the importance of these words, another interpretation is possible if we depart from the conventional Western perspective: on the contrary, here, typography refocuses on the words of the Indigenous character who undertakes the translation of Robinson's sermon. The parentheses somehow form open circles that bring Wooreddy's interpretation back to the center of attention. Paradoxically, the parentheses enact this re-centering while recalling the initial distancing associated with the Western perception of this typographic element. By capturing the reader's gaze, they are ultimately, and ironically, what will be most remembered from the original discourse – Robinson's sermon aiming to differentiate between good and evil. Engagement through irony (the use of parentheses also functions as a comic counterpoint here) thus highlights a possibility of reclaiming one's voice.

Therefore, what must be emphasized from these ironic instances is that they highlight the necessary hybridity of the text, as mentioned earlier, between History and fiction, between reality or truth, and the distancing from the official, singular and chronological version of History, between what is shown and what must be understood. The idea of hybridity signifies the rejection of the Manichean, imperial, or colonial vision. Officially, Robinson becomes the spokesperson for European moralizing discourse[55] when he opposes the hybridity represented in 'Doctor Wooreddy' and expresses his repulsion towards children born to Aboriginal mothers and European fathers. As for Wooreddy, his reflection on truth – or what he believed to be the truth – reflects the necessity of rejecting this Manichean vision in favour of a pluralistic perspective or a broader overview: "It seemed that all that he had believed, the scheme that had supported his life, had been but part of the truth. Things were not the simple black and white he had imagined them to be".[56] Truth is not singular and requires continuous questioning – a sentiment that holds true for the treatment of History as well. Moreover, if the very nature of the studied novels reaffirms the need for generic hybridity, especially by combining elements of gothic, thriller, and fantasy in 'The Promised Land', Amelia's vision that 'mixes up the stories' in confusing the scene of the Fates with that of Penelope weaving her tapestry while awaiting Ulysses' return ultimately parallels Mudrooroo's approach in his novels.[57] These two distinct stories are particularly relevant here as they reflect a different relationship with time – and History: one the one hand, the myth of Penelope refers

54 Mudrooroo Nyoongah: Doctor Wooreddy, p. 40; emphasis in original. One can once more note here the oversimplification of Robinson's English, while Wooreddy's thought is grammatically correct and much more complex.

55 Quite interestingly, the other opinion also appears in the text when another settler contradicts him: according to him, colonisation is the real problem, not hybridity, Mudrooroo Nyoongah: Doctor Wooreddy, p. 144.

56 Mudrooroo Nyoongah: Doctor Wooreddy, p. 196.

57 Mudrooroo Nyoongah: The Promised Land, pp. 29, 45, 46.

to a cyclical time, the time of art that starts over indefinitely.[58] On the other hand, historical discourse and its various versions, illustrated by the reference to the Fates, emphasizes the linear time of life and, therefore, the thread of the Indigenous Australians' lives severed by colonisation. This hybridity, also found in instances of imitation and simulacra, signifies the rejection of a singular version of History and truth, while revealing various possibilities and providing a text that becomes a palimpsest in itself – as an alternative version of history (uncapitalised) and one of many possible histories.

Conclusion

Mudrooroo's treatment of History reflects a desire not for outright contradiction but rather for questioning, while addressing its colonial version and various other possible perspectives, opinions, or interpretations. Different points that have been addressed here also partake in the decolonial agenda of History as described by Linda Tuhiwai Smith in 'Decolonizing Methodologies'. According to Smith, the epistemological violence inflicted upon Indigenous peoples, of which History was a key feature, was detrimental to their sovereignty and helped the implementation of colonial power and the spread of its ideology:

> The negation of Indigenous views of history was a critical part of asserting colonial ideology, partly because such views were regarded as clearly 'primitive' and 'incorrect' and mostly because they challenged and resisted the mission of colonization. Indigenous peoples have also mounted a critique of the way history is told from the perspective of the colonizers. At the same time, however, Indigenous groups have argued that history is important for understanding the present and that reclaiming history is a critical and essential aspect of decolonization. The critique of Western history argues that history is a modernist project which has developed alongside imperial beliefs about the Other.[59]

According to Smith, History, as a discourse participating in colonial domination, entails, or hinges upon, some other elements that have been discussed in the present essay : the relation between History and the discipline of anthropology, for instance, both being totalizing discourses relying on a specific system of classification in order to construct knowledge as a coherent whole; "the idea that History is one large chronology, […] chart[ing] the progress of human endeavour through time"; and finally, the idea that the "story of history can be told in one coherent narrative", that it tells the truth and "is constructed around binary categories". To this version of History, she opposes "alternative histories" and other systems of knowledge, amongst which are Indigenous oral accounts, that, if indeed they are to be accepted as alternative knowledges, may pave the way to the decolonization of History.[60]

58 Lucy's blank canvas, eagerly awaiting one of Amelia's drawings, serves as a reminder that History itself is a blank page more frequently filled by Europe during colonization than by other peoples.

59 Linda Tuhiwai Smith: Decolonizing Methodologies, Research and the Indigenous Peoples, p. 33.

60 Ibid., pp. 33, 34, 38.

Going back to the novels under scrutiny, one may argue that they offer an alternative version of history. The use of different textual techniques, such as irony, imitation, and parody, illustrates that History as a discourse can only be questioned through discourse itself. Paradoxically, by appropriating and subverting European discourse, the status and voice of the Aboriginal people of Tasmania are reaffirmed.[61] The novels function as palimpsests, offering different layers of overlapping stories and diverse versions of history without asking the reader to make a choice or accept them. Ultimately, what matters most are not these different versions, but rather how they are written – not what the historical discourse tells us but how and by whom it is generated. Thus, according to Hutcheon:

> Novels […] do not trivialize the historical and the factual […], but rather politicize them through their metafictional rethinking of the epistemological and ontological relations between history and fiction.[62]

This narrative choice can ultimately be viewed as more political than one that would have led us to place one version of events above another. By challenging the writing of History, Mudrooroo's novels question not only power relations and the resulting discourses but also the very foundations of society.

References

Bhabha, Homi: The Location of Culture. New York: Routledge 2004.

Fabian, Johannes: Time and the Other. How Anthropology Makes Its Object. New York: Columbia University Press 2002.

Hutcheon, Linda: A Poetics of Postmodernism. Taylor and Francis e-Library 2004.

Johnston, Anna, Mitchell Rolls, eds.: Reading Robinson. Companion Essays to George Augustus Robinson's Friendly Mission. Clayton, Victoria: Monash University Publishing 2012.

Král, Françoise: Overwhelming Bodies and Faint Voices: Mudrooroo's Quest to Write the Native. In: Belgian Essays on Language and Literature, 2002, pp. 26-36.

——: The Empire Looks Back. Turning back the gaze on the observing subject. A comparative study of Mudrooroo's Master Series and Kneale's English Passengers. Representing Otherness. Confluences, 25, 2005, pp. 153–169.

Nyoongah, Mudrooroo: Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World. Melbourne: Hyland House 1983.

——: Master of the Ghost Dreaming. North Ryde, Australia: Angus & Robertson 1991.

——: The Undying. Sydney: Angus & Robertson 1998.

——: The Promised Land. Sydney: Angus & Robertson 2000.

——: Underground. Sydney: Angus & Robertson 1999.

61 Smith also mentions the necessity to going back to the European version of History: "Transforming our colonized views of our own history (as written by the West), however, requires us to revisit, site by site, our history under Western eyes. This in turn requires a theory or approach which helps us to engage with, understand and then act upon history", Linda Tuhiwai Smith: Decolonizing Methodologies, Research and the Indigenous Peoples, p. 38.

62 Linda Hutcheon: A Poetics of Postmodernism, p. 121.

Singeot, Laura: Des carnets de G. A. Robinson aux romans de Mudrooroo: la figure de l'indigène en marge de l'Histoire australienne'. In: E-rea, 14, 2016, 1, http://journals.openedition.org/erea/5470.
Smith, Linda Tuhiwai: Decolonizing Methodologies, Research and the Indigenous Peoples. London: Zed Books 2021 [1999].
White, Hayden: Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1999.

DOI: 10.35515/zfa/asj.41/2024.07

Australian Studies Journal
Zeitschrift für Australienstudien
41 — 2024

Lorenzo Perrona

Literature, Representation, Politics

Mudrooroo's Writings in 2001

Abstract: The paper is an attempt to outline Mudrooroo's take on globalization, based mostly on his texts 'The Spectral Homelands', 'Globalization in Dharamsala, Genoa and Singapore Airport', and two short stories, 'How I Tried to Change My Name' and 'School Boy Hero', set in and around Dharamsala. Written immediately after having witnessed the 2001 G8 Summit in Genoa, where the globalized institutional power replied to the democratic contestation of concerned citizens with a massive display of violence, Mudrooroo's texts envisage two versions of globalization, represented by Singapore Airport on the one hand and the northern Indian city of Dharamsala on the other. While the airport appears as a global marketplace where local content and culture are 'submerged', granted only a token presence, the capital-in-exile of Tibetan Buddhism features a global dimension still founded on local roots. Following Derrida, Mudrooroo emphasizes the airport as pure spectacle while the provincial city is described as 'spectral': here, "certain underground forces" are still attempting to "humanize globalization", to render it "homely". In the paper, I argue that Mudrooroo's conceptualization of two versions of globalization is politically useful to analyze the events of the following decades which, after 9/11, produced the wars of the 21st century.

> I have just come from Genoa from a conference and am now at this unusual gathering [in Dharamsala]: a global gathering, but one much different from Genoa where European intellectuals debated the effects of globalisation just before the G8 meeting in which the status of Tibet was not discussed or were the plight of other minorities throughout the world. We are not important. So now I sit before this man, His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, the exiled head of a non-existent state, how ironical.[1]

1

In the first half of July 2001, Mudrooroo was invited to attend a seminar in Genoa, Italy, organized by the European Biennial of Cultural Journals. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss globalization, but from a different point of view than the one adopted by the G8 heads of state who met in Genoa a few days later. Other aims of the seminar were exploring alternative remedies for economic injustices and social issues produced by the great shift in international financial flows, exchanging information on pharmaceutical multinationals, genetically modified organisms, and biotechnologies.

At the conference, Mudrooroo read his paper 'The Spectral Homeland'. Nobody had bothered to provide the organizers with a copy of the speech in advance. So, the simultaneous translators, disconcerted by the density of the text, remained silent, and the audience that tried to follow Mudrooroo's rather speedy reading

1 Mudrooroo: Globalization in Dharamsala, Genoa and Singapore Airport, p. 1.

was somewhat puzzled. His listeners did not understand the important and original contribution which was only subsequently published in the proceedings of the conference.[2]

In the following days, from 19-21 July, protest demonstrations against neo-liberal globalization were brutally repressed by police forces that had been assembled from all over Italy. More than 1 000 demonstrators were injured, one shot dead, and over 250 detained. A night raid on a school that housed out-of-state protesters turned into an orgy of police brutality. The demonstrations in Genoa followed those during similar events in Seattle (30 November 1999), Davos (27 January 2001), Naples (15-17 March 2001), and Gothenburg (15 June 2001).

On 11 September 2001, the attack on the Twin Towers in New York took place.

It was precisely in that month of September that Mudrooroo wrote his article 'Globalization in Dharamsala, Genoa and Singapore Airport'. Dharamsala is the city in Northern India that hosts the Tibetan government in exile, and in his text Mudrooroo recalls that, after arriving from Genoa, he is one of "thousands of people from many nations" who have come to pay their respect to the Dalai Lama, "the exiled head of a non-existent state". He underlines the fact that he is living in exile, too, calling himself "a Global Nomad with an Australian passport".[3] During the same month, he also wrote two stories, 'How I Tried to Change My Name', and 'School Boy Hero' which are both set in the same area, the towns of Leh and Dharamsala, near the Tibetan border.[4]

In these works, all close to events that as we now know certainly were not positive turning points during the historical period we are living in, Mudrooroo, surprisingly enough, does not mention the violence he had recently experienced in Europe. It is the violence of state power that suspends civil rights, suppresses and tortures; the terrorist violence that then justifies the wars of the following decades decided by the imperium of the United States. Of course, one can perceive the violence, says Mudrooroo with sarcastic irony: "I enjoy the metal detector, sometimes on, sometimes off; the growing perversion of male hands caressing my body".[5]

In the 'state of exception', liberal rights can be suspended and our lives are worth little.[6] This can also be seen in Dharamsala:

> The absurd rifles of the police; the not so funny threat of the ugly machine pistols of the plains clothes security men, which if used in an emergency will spray us dead or wounded. I know that such monsters are not accurate, but then witness

2 Mudrooroo Nyoongah: The Spectral Homeland (typescript). A slightly different version with the same title was published in Southerly in 2002. In the following, I quote from both texts. Cf. also the Italian version: Patrie spettrali, with contributions, among others, by Frei Betto, Noam Chomsky, Luciano Gallino, Vinko Globokar, Rigoberta Menchù, Edoardo Sanguineti.

3 Mudrooroo: Globalization in Dharamsala, p. 1.

4 The two stories belong together and are being published here (pp. 93-98 and 98-101) as such for the first time. 'How I Tried to Change My Name' was separately published in Hecate in 2016.

5 Mudrooroo: Globalisation in Dharamsala, p. 1.

6 Cf. Giorgio Agamben: State of Exception. In Ukraine and in Gaza we are witnessing the implementation of these potential carnages.

> the irrationality of the police actions in Genoa. An oversized world population means that life is cheap and becoming cheaper.[7]

Mudrooroo uses an ironic understatement to say that, before physical violence, repression, war, there is *civil* violence against those who cannot be citizens because they live on the margins, in the political and existential dimension of the "Non-Resident Person, the displaced person who wanders the globe in search of a better life or even a better sense of spirit, only to find himself or herself in the global supermarket".[8] As usual, proceeding through stylistic stratifications in his writing strategy (the layering of different textual levels), Mudrooroo immediately develops this idea narratively:

> We wander down the rows of shelves loaded down with a plethora of goods and services, even identities for us to buy. Thus we may seek to barter our spectre of a homeland outside on the pavement where other NRPs in their flimsy stalls are desperate to take, barter, buy or steal and replace it inside with a more substantial product (though these too shimmer with the aura of the spectral).[9]

The criticism of neo-liberal globalization is here expressed in the forms of Derrida's spectrology, which resonates in a new and suggestive way with the Buddhist doctrine that Mudrooroo has constantly cultivated throughout his life. 'The Spectral Homeland' in fact talks about those spirits or ghosts, inherited from the past, which are those "things" that tie us to a sense of belonging or identity.

> The past has bequeathed us its ghosts, its spectres, apparitions and phantoms. One such is that of the homeland, the place to which we supposedly belong and which belongs to us […] But, if I […] shift beyond the national apparatus, beyond any spectre of race and confront the spectre of *homeland*, that ghostly apparition beyond mentality and physicality, an "is and is not", of belonging to a spiritual geography, some "thing" to which we cling, some "thing" to which we aspire to belong or gain, though always it escapes us, as does identity for that matter. We may pay homage to this spectre, we may even discourse learnedly about it, but the question is from what position do we observe and identify?[10]

The article ends with the warning that 'morality' is a criterion for controlling globalization – a warning that is more necessary than ever, but it would appear anachronistic in a world of capitalist drift that does not want to put a stop to the excessive power of private or state financial holdings.

> Globalization cannot become a well governing system without morality, and it is this morality we must formulate, adjust and accept if this new world order is not to become another oppressive, colonizing apparatus prepared only to prop up old political and economic structures at the expense of the aspirations of peoples all across the globe.[11]

7 Ibid., p. 1.
8 Mudrooroo: The Spectral Homeland (Southerly), p. 26.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., p. 25.
11 Mudrooroo: The Spectral Homeland (typescript). One year later Mudrooroo modified the final part of the article: "Apparitions are apparitions simply because they are not 'real' and often when approached dissolve into voidness, or pulling visors over the emptiness of their faces continue on only as ghostly ideals beneath the armour of what is. There is no gaining of the spectral homeland in this life […]. After all, it is a certainty that all such pilgrimages will find an end in death when we enter the beyond and if successful into our 'true' homeland, be it, as in this sample, a Buddha land, or heaven world, that is some sort of spectral

This is what lies behind the violence: an amoral global practice that is supported by an oppressive and colonizing apparatus aimed at reproducing old political and economic structures to the detriment of the aspirations of people all over the world. The mass of people, which neo-capitalist globalization considers exclusively as consumers of products and services – a mass to be governed, shaped, healed, contained, always and only for the sake of a certain economic profit – is in reality the human mass made of many identities (also on sale in the global supermarket, "identities for us to buy"). But above all – this is what Mudrooroo's speech underlines – the mass is made up of people who are bearers of dignity. It is the mass of living and dignified bodies, eager to be active in that non-alienated and non-mourning work that Marx and then Derrida question in the first instance. But for this discussion to be made – according to Mudrooroo – it is fundamental to know from what position we observe and identify. In fact, an organic positioning within the neo-liberal system is inevitably hierarchical; it predisposes to the exploitation of those who are inferior, to the annihilation of their dignity (of course, with the soul at peace due to the faith sworn to the specter of freedom, to the specter of democracy, to the specter of welfare, to the specter of public health, to he specter of the homeland). Instead, an eccentric "other" positioning, such as that of the native or the refugee (who also inevitably chase their own ghosts) predisposes to the reinvention of relationships, giving space to the recognition of the plurality of people, more easily guaranteeing their dignity. This is a contemporary reformulation of the concept of democracy.

> I would hypothesise that this position is that of refugee always seeking to give substance to the spectre, always striving for a sense of belonging, of an absolute surety that this phantom has the reality of substance; but alas, when we confront the spectre of our longings we find that there is little substance there, that the face beneath the visor merely reflects back to us the emptiness in our own selves. Ghost confronts ghost and the homeland, the fatherland, the motherland lacks substance and when it speaks it utters only one word, "Swear", and what is this swearing to, but an oath of allegiance to the spectre itself of *homeland*.[12]

The Indigenous condition, as outlined by Mudrooroo in 'Us Mob. History, Culture, Struggle: An Introduction to Indigenous Australia' (1995) involves a kind of social and global affinity with the pain that Indigenous people share with other peoples, an 'acquaintance with grief' that is both Aboriginal and universal. It is the life experience of the loss of one's own land, culture, language, identity. And on the basis of this universal experience Mudrooroo suggests an intellectual way of acting that overcomes the disturbing double of 'master/colonized'.[13] But on closer inspection, in 2001, when Mudrooroo, following Buddhist spectrology, read Derrida, the motif for the spectre (of the Father–Homeland) is also useful to alleviate the universal pain, to avert despair in the face of the hurtful imposition by removing consistency to the "thing" (pain) that "is and is not". Thus, Mudrooroo's 'Buddhist deconstruction' objectifies pain and by defining the pain not as fundamental, spectral, one can sever any attachment to pain itself.

homeland which we must achieve by dying and becoming spectral ourselves", Mudrooroo: The Spectral Homeland (Southerly), p. 34.

12 Ibid., p. 25.

13 Cf. Lorenzo Perrona: Inside 'Us Mob'.

This leads to some considerations on Mudrooroo's literary representation in the two stories which belong to the same period of these reflections. For Mudrooroo the literary representation must lead to a cultural awareness of that sense of loss that characterizes the Indigenous existence. The modes of representing reality in his work range from magical realism of direct Indigenous ancestry (maban reality), to the gothic novel – with reference to the vampire colonialism of the 19th century. In these writings of 2001, a 'gothic' representation appears only once, when the chaos of ghosts prevails; they crowd together in useless orgies, not for erotic satisfaction but to grieve the loss. Talking about the "refugees", the "displaced persons", Mudrooroo writes:

> Their homeland has changed forever, and completely from the one they seek to memorise and by which they are haunted. Their memories, their stories give "ghastly existence" to spectres, ghosts and "things" that go bump in the night. We enter a realm of ghosts, in which spectre lies with spectre seeking comfort in the dry bones of corpses from which such ghosts as that of homeland arise at the moment of incomplete orgasms. The coming together is not for erotic fulfilment, but is a ritual of bereavement for the loss of love.[14]

On the other hand, the two stories 'How I Tried to Change My Name' and 'School Boy Hero' surprise with their formation tale narration that reconstructs cultural existences, spiritual paths and civic commitment. This narration also provides evidence of an eccentric point of view ("the question is from what position do we observe and identify?"), which renders theme and style somewhat 'lighter', less 'heavy', less serious. This is a mode of representation that refers to the concise clarity of intellectual adventures and life experiences, that can also be observed in 'Wild Cat Falling', the first, and 'Balga Boy Jackson', the latest of Mudrooroo's novels.

2

In August 2001, Mudrooroo points out that the author's ego moves into a world characterized by the "binary confusion" of globalization: "Heterogeneity as against homogeneity; though both represent globalization, it is this binary confusion that is reflected across much of the world through which I travel".[15] His journey takes the writer from Genoa to Dharamsala.

> Globalisation in Dharamsala: thousands of people from many nations from China to me, the Global Nomad with an Australian passport, come to this hill town in the Himalayas to be part of the teachings of His Holiness, the Dalai Lama. […] I have just come from Genoa from a conference and am now at this unusual gathering: a global gathering, but one much different from Genoa where European intellectuals debated the effects of globalisation just before the G8 meeting in which the status of Tibet was not discussed nor were the plight of other minorities throughout the world. We are not important. So now I sit before this man, His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, the exiled head of a non-existent state, how ironical, and he is giving the transmission of the Ngakrim Chenmo, which has recently been translated into Mandarin. […] Indeed, at this gathering there is a surplus

14 Mudrooroo: The Spectral Homeland. Southerly, p. 26.
15 Mudrooroo: Globalization in Dharamsala, p. 3.

> of women, many Westerners who are pushy and arrogant in that Western way I am accustomed to; but then the Tibetan clergy are pushy to, and one is liable to get an elbow in the ribs when a session ends and there is a rush towards the narrow exits.[16]

The writer (who is a "Global Nomad", a "Non-Resident Person") writes the two stories 'How I Tried to Change My Name' and 'School Boy Hero' just after being immersed in these environments of "binary" globalization where ghosts of belonging, recognition, and desire linger.

The two paired tales are carefully devised: the stories of a sister and a brother, like yin and yang, in two movements: andante con moto at the beginning, the misadventure of the judicious, virtuous and obedient girl, Pedma, and a vivace at the end with the picaresque restlessness of Jamphel, the wild boy. The sequence is indicated by the dating (25 September 2001 for the first, and 26 September 2001 for the second) which Mudrooroo placed at the end of the tales. Both are first-person narratives, told by their respective heroes.

This is the plot: in Leh, a small Tibetan Buddhist center on the Indian side of the Himalayas, the young Jamphel, a good-for-nothing boy who day-dreams of being Superman, rises miraculously from the bottom of his class to suddenly score the best grades of his school after his sister had promised him a large sum of money. During the award ceremony at the end of the year, he causes a violent uproar between professors and students and escapes permanently from home. (The absent father seems to be an adventurer, a petty thief and a two-bit politician in Tibet, under Chinese occupation.) Following this scandal, his mother sends her teenage daughter Pedma out of town, to study in Dharamsala. Here, Pedma, the good, traditional daughter falls under the influence of her schoolmates who aspire to a Western lifestyle, including trendy fashions and make-up, boyfriends and visits to bars. She eventually becomes infatuated with an image of the Western world, embodied by the Hollywood figure of Julia Roberts. Desperately seeking to experience love, as in the celluloid stories of her idol, she falls pregnant to a boy who then brutally rejects her. Like her brother she is expelled from school but, finally, Pedma accepts the meaning of her real life by welcoming the *new* life that is growing inside her.

The focus in both stories is that of two teenagers, with their natural power of subversion and autonomy. First the girl is alienated from her own identity by American modernity. As her new, Westernized friend in Dharamsala puts it, while "bursting into a giggle and shaping the mouth in a way to force me [Pedma] to see how pretty she was with lipstick": […] "here we are not in Leh, we are in the capital of our Free Tibet and His Holiness said that we must change because we have to become 'free spirits'".[17] Pedma eventually recovers and accepts her identity as confirmed by an old monk who happens to be passing by. Her reckless brother, however, lives on in fantasy and imagines freedom and justice through the American myth of the super-hero, always on the run, elusive, inconsistent.

In these stories, other subjectivities appropriate the clichés of American pop culture spread by globalization and test them with disastrous effects that

16 Ibid., p. 1.
17 Mudrooroo: How I Tried to Change my Name – reproduced in the present volume, pp. 93-98.

undermine the absoluteness with which they are perceived in common discourse. One example is the figure of the director of the school, a colonized Americanophile, hostile to his own people, who boasts and inflates his own importance on account of the alleged merits of modern American education that he has internalized. His favourite authors are Danielle Steele and Joan Collins. In contrast, the two teenage characters live and appropriate Western pop mythology according to their own cultural coordinates. This brings to light an alienating misunderstanding that deconstructs the Western cultural dominance: icons of popular culture are naively, but sincerely, acted out and appropriated as if they were the gods of a spectral pantheon to which believers shape their own action according to their devotion. If the birth of a life in the womb of the girl is a fact that reconciles her with existence and leads her to find herself, the cultural and political struggles in life that her brother exhibits (which make us think of the struggles and vicissitudes of Mudrooroo's career) always remain something chaotic, self-delusive, egotistic and exhilarating, but also self-destructive.

Both the denied and recovered tradition, and the Western mythologies, deceptively asserted, are worn-out, prone to failure, and useless in the end. They are "spectral", but they activate a dynamic that is still vital: the topics of the narration are putting into play, deconstructing every cultural construct, but (once made use of all the cultural constructs – and become lived experiences under one's own skin) the narration reveals a partial, conditioned possibility of finding some space for self-determination and freedom (choosing to have a child, travelling and disappearing into the world, to 'save the world'). Politics does not affect the life and the unpredictable, impatient and anarchist desire of the two young people; rather, they aim for a burning, vitally imperative dimension of life, closer to religious faith, in the most unconventional sense of the term.

3

In his essays and narrative texts from 2001, Mudrooroo asserts that in the contemporary world, ideology, religion, homeland, identity, etc. are ghosts that haunt or enliven our lives. Our action is an act of faith in the appearance of the specter. And the ghost orders, commands us to swear loyalty to the mourning of his absence. As it can be seen, Mudrooroo follows Derrida's discourse, referring to the scene of Hamlet and the ghost of the Father, in the narrative that constitutes Derrida's own point of departure.

> It is rite of mourning as well as an act of faith in the apparition, which orders us to "swear" and regain what has been lost even through acts of bloody vengeance. Such specters and apparitions when they make their appearance do so with such a force that it is "hair raising".[18]

But, as we see in the words "bloody vengeance", "force", "hair raising", the aggressive nature of the specter that instills fear and generates violence is clearly present. Compared to 'The Spectral Homeland' (written before the G8 in Genoa), in

18 Mudrooroo: Spectral Homeland, p. 27.

'Globalization in Dharamsala, Genoa and Singapore Airport' (written after the violence of the G8 and the Twin Towers), Mudrooroo introduces a new characteristic to neo-capitalist globalization: it is "spectacle", that is, surface vision, obstinate repetition, large-scale performance, violent emptiness, uniform consumerism. This is the globalization of "Singapore airport" and "of the G8 in Genoa". On the other hand, the globalization of Dharamsala continues to be simply "spectral", paradoxically "homely".

> Dharamsala and Singapore airport represent two versions of globalization. The airport seeks to submerge local content, or culture which is allowed only to have a token presence, whereas in Dharamsala the local is still the foundation on which globalization rests or in which it has its roots. The former is absolute spectacle and the latter I may term "spectral" in the sense that certain underground forces are still seeking to humanize globalization, to make it "homely" as it were. […]
>
> In contrast, Dharamsala, although it too has a fervid globalization, lacks the complete attention to spectacle, which we are used to. Events rise out of an underground world, which is local and remains so, even though the background of the temple may remind us of the 'Temple of Doom' and scenes found in any number of computer games.[19]

This drive towards violence also takes inspiration from Derrida's pages, as when he explores the dimension of a totalizing and totalitarian visibility of the spectrum:

> The specter, as its name indicates, is the *frequency* of a certain visibility. But the visibility of the invisible. And visibility, by its essence, is not seen, which is why it remains *epekeina tes ousias*, beyond the phenomenon or beyond being. The specter is also, among other things, what one imagines, what one thinks one sees and which one projects – on an imaginary screen where there is nothing to see. Not even the screen sometimes, and a screen always has, at bottom, in the bottom or background that is, a structure of disappearing apparition. […]
>
> The latter does not always mark the moment of a generous apparition or a friendly vision; it can signify strict inspection or violent search, consequent persecution, implacable *concantenation*. The social mode of haunting, its original style could also be called, taking into account this repetition, *frequentation*.[20]

A visibility "beyond the phenomenon or being" is a visibility on the void of a screen. Its persistent return may be, in the society, the exercise of a "severe inspection" or a "violent search", in other words, a total visibility that is actually inconsistent and deceitful.

Mudrooroo expresses the need to free ourselves from this totalitarian spectrality. For him, in all spectrologies (hauntology) there are many specters, and it is necessary and possible to navigate among this multitude. It is up to us to choose which specter to be devoted to, to swear faith to, to renew the mournful cult. Therefore the globalization "spectacle", besides being violent and totalitarian, is also devoid of substance because it is based on an emptied vision: deconstruction, by revealing this lack of substance, creates a lightness of being that is less serious, less 'heavy', offering the awareness of the void crossed by the trajectories of our existences.

19 Mudrooroo: Globalization in Dharamsala, p. 2.
20 Jacques Derrida: Specters of Marx, pp. 100 f.

There is a profound continuity in Mudrooroo's discourse on the Indigenous condition and the consequent condition of the 'displaced person', and on the way in which he conceives and experiences globalization, be it spectacular and violent or ghostly and passionate. The indigenous condition – that is, the familiarity with pain, loss, uprooting – has become globalized, universalized. The Indigenous condition, which Mudrooroo described while living and studying the Australian situation, appears increasingly relevant. A condition that we discover is ours. We are realizing, naively surprised, that the new colonized people of the third millennium are also European peoples – no longer just African, Asian or South American peoples. We, Europeans, are also living in a land of conquest, we too have military bases of a foreign state on our soil (such as the controversial MUOS ground station in Niscemi, Sicily, owned by the US Department of Defense, or a similar station in Kojarena, Western Australia, built in partnership with the USA). Today, Sicily is the platform in the center of the Mediterranean that hosts global military bases and is involved in war activities that have also been taking place on European territory.

We too suffer from the "solastalgia" of those who feel dispossessed in their own home.[21] Today we have suddenly to face a new sentimental attitude and a subsequent cultural change that in peacetime we refused to consider: the collapse of Eurocentrism, and the Indigenization of many European cultures.

The work that Mudrooroo has done starting from the Indigenous Australian condition therefore proves to be increasingly important. The cultural battle to continue and always renew is to stop the endless repetition of the opposition 'colonizer/colonized' or 'master/servant'. For Mudrooroo, the figure of the double serves not to hide the different realities of experience and, by recognizing them, serves to dissolve the categories of positive/negative. If we find ourselves immersed in the "binary confusion" of globalization, it is because there is a lot of intellectual work to do, a lot to deconstruct and clarify.

The two stories from 2001 depict precisely this dissolution of the double thanks to the vital and desiring prevalence of our non-spectral existences, which act in their essential anarchic freedom. Mudrooroo's literary representation is humorous and light-hearted, but strong in political, cultural and even spiritual awareness, characteristic of the displaced person who travels the globe with little luggage in search of a better life or even a better spiritual dimension.

Translated from the Italian by Cristina Mauceri, Sydney.

References

Agamben, Giorgio: State of Exception. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2005.

Albrecht, Glenn: Solastalgia and the Creation of New Ways of Living. In: Nature and Culture: Rebuilding Lost Connections. London: EarthScan 2010, pp. 217-234.

21 Glenn Albrecht: Solastalgia and the Creation of New Ways of Living, p. 2.

Derrida, Jacques: Specters of Marx. The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International. Trans. by Peggy Kamuf. With an Introduction by Bernd Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg. New York [et al.]: Routledge 1994.
Johnson, Colin: Wild Cat Falling. Sydney: Angus & Robertson 1965.
Mudrooroo: Balga Boy Jackson. Sydney: ETT Imprint 2018.
——: Globalization in Dharamsala, Genoa and Singapore Airport. Author's typescript, 2001.
[Cf. Italian version: Globalizzazione a Dharamsala, Genova e Singapore Aeroporto. Trans. by Lorenzo Perrona. In: Nuovi Argomenti, ottobre-dicembre 2001, pp. 155-163].
——: How I tried to Change my Name. Author's typescript, 2001.
[Cf. also: How I tried to change my name. In: Hecate, 42, 2016, 1, pp. 49-54].
——: School Boy Hero. Author's typescript, 2001.
——: Us Mob. History, Culture, Struggle: An Introduction to Indigenous Australia. Sydney: Angus & Robertson 1995.
Nyoongah, Mudrooroo: The Spectral Homeland. Author's typescript, 2001. Also in Southerly, 62, 2002, 1, pp. 25-36.
[Cf. Italian version: Patrie spettrali, transl. Lorenzo Perrona. In: Globalizzazione e nuovi conflitti. Roma: Derive/Approdi 2002, pp. 91-99}.
Perrona, Lorenzo: Inside 'Us Mob'. In: Annalisa Oboe (ed.): Mongrel Signatures. Reflections on the work of Mudrooroo. New York [et al.]: Rodopi 2003, pp. 153-166.

DOI: 10.35515/zfa/asj.41/2024.08

Australian Studies Journal
Zeitschrift für Australienstudien
41 — 2024

Mudrooroo

Two Stories from Dharamsala

How I Tried To Change My Name

My name is Padma (pronounced Pema). It means Lotus as in our sacred mantra, *Om Mani Padme Hum* (Oh jewel in the lotus), and in our religion it has many layers of meaning, one of which is purity, as a lotus thrusts itself out of the mud and ooze at the bottom of a pond, so are we to rise above the slime of the world; but like many young Tibetan exiles in these days exposed to all of – I shall call it the winds of change, for I don't wish you to think me holy or pious, like a nun. I enjoy being very much a part of the world and don't see myself ever entering a nunnery. No, I enjoy things too much. Yes, indeed, perhaps too much, but unlike my younger brother, Jamphel, I have a head on my shoulders. In fact, my dear mother considered me the little lady incapable of doing any wrong and bringing shame on our family as he had done.

I admit I tried to live up to my mother's estimation of me and even tried to be a good influence on my brother, even offering him a hundred rupees for every subject he topped in his class. He was a bit of a stupid, for he didn't once consider where in the world I would get what would amount to over a thousand rupees if he succeeded. Unfortunately, I under-estimated him, and he managed not only to top his class, but the whole school. After again making a fool of himself and bringing shame on us, he came to me for his money, and he had to be content with three hundred I managed to scrape together. He accepted the money and used it to run away south, just as he had before. He disappeared leaving us to clean up the mess he had left behind. Through him, we had lost our status in society, and it was then that my dear mother decided to send me away to finish my last year of schooling in Dharamsala. She believed that there, close to our beloved leader, His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, I would be safe. I thought so too, for with one scamp in the family and with our father long gone into Tibet either smuggling or politicking, we certainly did not need another. We needed peace, though this was difficult to achieve what with Jamphel roaming somewhere or other and constant news on the radio of a Chinese crackdown in our poor homeland and many arrests. We prayed that father would be safe.

And so, I followed my brother south to Manali, then veered from his track southwest to Dharamsala. I had to wait in Manali for the connecting bus and sought to find him. At the bus station I even looked under the stairs where he had told me he had camped during a previous escapade. An Indian man was sitting there, and he stared at me until I grew uneasy and moved away. I went to my aunt's place to see her and learn if there was any news. There wasn't and she told me in no uncertain terms to leave Jamphel to his dreams and go to Dharamsala and concentrate on my studies. I promised to do this, but as soon as the bus

pulled away from her kind, but stern face, I could not help tears starting to my eyes. I felt ashamed of them and quickly wiped them away. I had to put all my energy into my last year at school, if I wanted to win a scholarship to continue on to college.

I thought that Dharamsala as the seat of our government in exile would be a very serious place and for some reason much larger than it turned out to be. Instead, it was the size of Leh, my hometown, but much greener and quite pleasant. Namgyal Monastery, the temple of His Holiness, was right in the center of the town and before going on to the school I went there. You can imagine the thrill as I looked through the gates at his residence, prayed at the main temple and wished for a long life for him. I also vowed to the Buddha that I would study hard and not disgrace my family as my brother had done. I lived up to my promise for some time.

The school was away from the center of town and its distractions. I quietly settled in and immersed myself in my studies. I didn't even go out in my free time. Still, I made friends, one of them was Yungtso who although she was the same age, sixteen, made me feel like a younger sister. She used to tease me about all the work I was doing, until finally she got me to go out with her. I was surprised when I met her and found her wearing tight American jeans and a light blouse under which a bra pushed up her breasts rather than flattened them. Her walk was marvelous to me. She swayed from side to side, pushing out first one hip then the other. I watched in amazement at the way her behind shifted; but what struck me most, in fact I was thunderstruck to stare into her pretty little face and see that she was wearing makeup and lipstick.

She noticed my reaction to her and the expressions chasing each other across my face. More pleased than annoyed, she trilled: `Pema-la, this isn't Leh, it is the Capital of our Free Tibet and His Holiness has said that we must change our ways – why, we must become free spirits,' and she gave a giggle and shaped her mouth so that I had to see how pretty it was with the lipstick.

I tried to answer that older Tibetans, such as my father and mother, also believed in freedom, but still kept to our own customs and good manners. 'Oh,' she retorted, shaping her mouth again in that pretty way, 'they come from Tibet and I, I come from India. We're more modern, more *with it*.' As she said the English expression, she clicked her fingers and did a few steps of a dance that made me smile. Then she hugged me and arm in arm we went down into the streets of the town.

And Dharamsala, our Little Lhasa as I discovered did seem *with it*. Perhaps because it was the capital of our nation in exile, perhaps because of the many tourists strolling the streets, the number of beer bars, His Holiness looking down upon us from his house upon the hill, there was a sense of throbbing newness, of a modernity that I found I wanted to be part of. I let Yungtso drag me into a bar. I was filled with trepidation, then with a growing sense of being where it was all happening, where we belonged as we sat and sipped on our cokes and listened to the throbbing Western music that entranced us towards a different world.

'Don't look now, but that boy is staring at you,' Yungtso hissed in my ear.

I hung my head and glanced sideways. Yes, a boy was looking towards me, at me, for he saw my eyes on him and winked. I quickly removed my eyes, but his image lingered in my mind. He had long hair and a nicely shaped nose in a peaked face.

'He was, wasn't he,' my friend said, then she began to flutter as if she was a bird caught in the net of a hunter, though I was the one that had been snared. Finally, after the display, she said loudly, 'Come on, come on, there's a Julia Roberts film on at the video parlor. It's a new one. Let's go, let's go!' And she bustled me out to the exit, almost forgetting to pay in her haste. She stopped just outside the door. 'They usually follow,' she informed me with an authority that made me realize that such meeting of eyes had occurred to her too and that she knew the route to follow from such first glances.

But he didn't follow, and I don't know if I was relieved or not, though Yungtso was angry because she had thought that he would pay for our tickets if he was that keen. We went to see the film and it was then that I found another love: Julia Roberts! The only other films I had seen before had been of our struggle for freedom; but Julia Roberts was freedom! She was all that any girl could wish to be and, the thought came, all that any boy could wish for. She was sassy; she was strong, alert, beautiful, never frazzled and not only knew what she wanted, but how to get it. She was perfection and beyond anything I had ever thought to achieve. Now, instantly, I wanted not only to be like her, but to be her, *for sure*!

Now I was the one urging Yungtso into modernity and the changing of old ways. I got her to teach me how to apply makeup and lipstick and not content with her went to Zorba's, a beauty salon to study how to apply them properly and to the maximum Julia Roberts effect. I spent hours with Yungtso critiquing my complexion and examining my face in a mirror. All this took money, and I wrote home to dear old mother who sent me enough to satisfy my desires, for a time. Now I too had a bra that made my breasts stand out and jeans that showed my rounded bottom, which alas had not the flatness of Julia Roberts'. To seek for this perfection, I began to diet, to thin myself down and away from my Tibetan chubbiness. I walked her walk and attempted her American talk. I went to all her movies again and again and even bribed the video parlor proprietor to screen them constantly. I thought to have my hair done in her style though the school frowned on short hair; but in one of her movies she wore it long and I copied that style and even applied a reddish tint to it. Finally, I realized the ultimate and bought a pink tee shirt with her portrait on it and her name across my breasts. It fitted like a glove. Now I felt like her, that some magic came from her image, as I strutted my stuff, confidently striding the streets, none of that wriggling for me. I even tried a cigarette in our favorite bar and almost coughed my lungs out, but that was fine, Julia Roberts did not smoke. I gave a brazen laugh that made everyone look across at me as I stubbed it out.

Now Yungtso, my dear friend, became the tame one, India to my America.

'Don't you think you're taking this a little too far? If you are not careful, you'll end up in trouble and even expelled,' she tried to caution.

I knew that my studies were suffering, but what were they to me? I could always catch up. 'Hey, that boy still has eyes for me. I have a good mind to go over and say "Hi"'.

'No, don't do that.'

'Why not, Julia Roberts would.'

'You're not *her*, Pema!'

'That's what you think, and call me Julia from now on. I hate that stupid Pema, it's so, so *unreal*.'

'Just be careful, have some sense.'

'I've got more than enough sense for both of us. Do you think that Julia Roberts ever ever lets a situation get out of her control? She knows where it's *at*, all of it and more than enough to have a good time. Hey, that reminds me, the Tibetan Students Association is organizing a dance – let's go, move our butts and dominate the floor. Perhaps he'll be there?' And I shot a wide-eyed glance at the boy; held his eyes and this time it was he that looked away. It was a small victory.

Yungtso tried to bring me down to earth, down to the reality about me. She said: 'But don't we have to be in school then, Pema, I mean Julia.'

'Who cares, it's not often that there's a disco dance and that boy's been making eyes at me for far too long.' I gave my brazen laugh that made everyone stare at me, darted a look at the boy, then hustled Yungtso away so that we would have plenty of time to get ready for the dance.

It was the first dance that I had been to and when we entered, I clung to Yungtso and felt shy, that is until I remembered that I was Julia Roberts and must be the center of attention. The loud Western music pounded out as disco beat of fun, fun, fun and now I was up and dancing and taking that fun for my own. I was beautiful, I was sexy, I was bitchy, I was quirky and boy after boy asked me to dance, all calling me Julia. Then it was Nyima's turn. He was the boy from the bar, and I had long learnt his name. He swirled me off my feet and I forgot everything. He smiled at as he whispered: 'Julia, you're so *there* and *with it*.' And I replied, 'Nyima, stare at me as you did when you first saw me.' And gave my brazen laugh to hide my thoughts about how I wished that he had a trendy name to go along with his dark flashing eyes, his long flowing hair and lithe jean-clad body.

Julia led him on like a good fisherwoman leads on a fish and soon he was hooked, but so was she. He said that he adored her, and she replied with that laugh and accepted as her due, when she finally gave him what he wanted.

Love was a constant in the Julia Roberts movies, and it was supposed to be fulfilling, but I never saw her in the positions that Nyima loved me. In fact, at first I didn't like it all that much and even wondered if this was because I had never seen Julia Roberts in such a scene. Kisses were fine, I could practice my techniques with him, but the other? – and worse, it had consequences, as had my staying out nights and missing classes. Before I realized it, I was before the headmaster who threatened to expel me. I confronted him with Yungtso and a group of friends, with the result that I was expelled. My persona cracked and for hours I was poor Pema wondering what my dear mother would say. I escaped such thoughts by putting on my favorite tee-shirt, carefully applying makeup over

my skin which had become blotchy and going off to see Nyima who had said so many times that he adored me and cared for me beyond life itself.

He was in our favorite bar. I sat across from him and told him that I loved him more than ever and needed him desperately.

His face was blank, and those dark soulful eyes, seemingly fixed for all time on me, stared off at a blank wall, as he replied: 'How can I help and support you when I barely can help and support myself? See you around,' he muttered, the last words in English and abandoned the frantic girl.

At least Yungtso was a real friend and she urged me to return to Leh. I replied that I would think about it, not knowing then that she had already written to my mother. If I had, I wondered what I might have done, screamed, laughed or simply died feeling that I had been betrayed by all. Luckily, I did not know it then and so at a loss what to do, I decided to go to the temple where I had not been since that first day that seemed so long ago. As I walked along Temple Road, my heart gave a start, then collapsed. There was Nyima sitting at a table outside a cafe and he had only eyes for the girl sitting beside him with her hip pressing against his thigh. She was a Western girl and looked, I had to admit it, more like Julia Roberts than I had ever accomplished. He had found something close to the real thing and all that I was left with were tears streaming down and streaking my face.

I kept my head straight, my expression blank, but those betraying tears… Some men and women looked at me in curiosity and one or two even asked me what was wrong; but he had refused to concern himself with my distress. Now he was behind me and so was Julia Roberts. I was simply Pema, a Tibetan girl from Leh and one in trouble. My tears had dried by the time I entered the temple and bowed before the great image of the Buddha.

I sat and gazed at his large golden face serenely looking down on all the suffering of the world including my own and it was then that I became intensely aware of the life growing within me without any effort on my part. I saw it as a small golden ball incessantly forming into an image of a boy child. A wave of peace flowed from him and all through my body dissolving the Julia Roberts persona once and for all. The past began to seem like a dream, though the consequences were still with me and would be for a long time. It was then that a hand touched my shoulder and I turned to find my dear mother there beside me.

'It is my destiny,' I said to her with a smile.

'It is our fate,' she replied with loving concern.

As we sat gazing at each other, an old monk shuffled towards us and as he passed, he murmured, 'Om mani padme hum.' We put our hands together and bowed our heads. When we raised them, he had disappeared and it was only then that we realized that it had been His Holiness, our leader, the Dalai Lama. We had been blessed by his presence and now we knew that everything would be all right.

I end my story here, which marks the end of my time in Dharamsala. I finished my studies back in my old school in Leh and now I wait with my dear mother for the birth of my child. We both hope that he will grow up strong and

straight and in a Free Tibet. *Om Mani Padme Hum*. Oh, the jewel residing in the lotus of my womb.

25 September 2001

School Boy Hero

The dust of Leh settled on my steel skin and the ruined palace usually scowling over the town smiled as I and my companions recounted our adventures in the huge city of Manali. I grew and grew in each retelling until it became Metropolis filled with ice cream and video parlors and whatever the fertile minds of young boys could invent to dream away the hours in the school where the masters did not welcome me back as a returning hero. This was left to the other students. I strutted and told my stuff, ignored my lessons and felt even less the punishments meted out. I didn't even attempt to bluff my way through the mid-year examinations. What was schoolwork to Superboy, for nowhere in all the comics and film and TV series that have been made can you find that the original Clark Kent excelled in schoolwork. He was too busy saving the world to worry about such stuff as homework. He was too much the hero to worry about any torments the school masters might inflict and smiled as he secretly basked in the glow his flashing form evoked from his school chums. How I wished that I could fly, a blue streak flashing red in the blue sky. *Is that a plane, is that a rocket? – No, it is Jamphel*! However, alas, I could not ascend into the heavens and had to make do with my only super attribute, a skin of steel. No super strength, no x-ray vision, no faster than a speeding bullet, just a Tibetan boy with a super hard skin. No, I refused to admit that, for had I not already had an adventure, journeying to Manali to enjoy the sights of that fabulous city. I knew there would be more adventures and meanwhile I bided my time and put actions to that word, 'Thief!', father had flung at me, before he left for Tibet either to smuggle or politick, one or the other, for he loved both.

In the night I squirmed under the high fences surrounding the army bases and stole bits and pieces of trucks to sell for what else but ice cream and films. Indian Bollywood blockbusters were filled with heroes, and I dreamt my way through many an epic. Then came a reckoning of sorts. I slouched into the examination room and the papers didn't frazzle me one bit, or did it when I achieved the ultimate low, zero, zero, zero, zero in all the subjects I sat for. Yes, it was a school record, one that I could brag about; but my big sister, Pema was aghast. Her smooth brow wrinkled her small face in despair and disgust.

'Zero, zero and all zeros, how could you disgrace our family like this. How could you get only – '

'Yes,' I broke in, 'zero, all zeroes, it is a feat unheard of before – '

'It is no joking matter, think of your poor mother, your father doing his duty for his country – '

'Or for himself. He – '

'You are lazy and – '

'Well, I did try hard.'

'–lacking in, well, not confidence, you have enough of that, but diligence.'

'Perhaps the teachers – '

'You need to set yourself a goal.'

'You mean ascend from zero. I do want to fly and that is a goal.'

'Again, I say that you have brought shame on us. Mother is worried almost to distraction.'

'She has no need to be.'

'But I have a proposition for you.'

'You have?'

'Yes, for every subject you achieve a distinction in, I will give you one hundred rupees.'

'A hundred rupees; but that'll be more than a thousand,' I exclaimed, suddenly gloating over my good fortune.

'Twelve hundred to be precise, but I doubt that you will even be able to claim one hundred.'

I at once agreed, though not from greed. It would be more than enough to subsidize another trip south, why even to Delhi. With the glow of the rupees ever before me, I studied and studied, even improved my handwriting so that I would not lose any marks. The end of year examinations came and I was ready. I sailed through them with ease and ascended from zero to 99.9 percent in every subject. No one had ever come near to my feat, but then I was a superhero, was I not?!

The masters of the school failed to consider this. How could a boy that had been at the bottom of all his classes suddenly be at the top? They held conferences and poured over my test papers. They failed to find a single item they could fault. It was obvious that I had not cheated. They had to let my results stand. I gloated in my knowledge and my ability. I was a hero, just like, say Napoleon, down and up and sideways, then down for ever, but I did not let that worry me.

I still wasn't flavor of the month with my teachers, especially Master Tenzin Samdup, the headmaster that fancied himself a cut above all of us just because he had managed to find large donations for our school in America. In fact, he had been to that land of opportunity more than once or thrice and to show his importance and knowledge of the English, he always carried two or three fat English language tomes about with him. Danielle Steele and Joan Collins were his favorite writers. I knew this because once I had run into him, made profuse apologies and picked up his books. He had snarled at me then: 'Stupid fellow' before strutting away. He walked as if he had a stick stuck up his rear hole and perhaps he did, for he was up himself.

So, when I achieved what they saw as an impossibility and in fact tried to deny it as much as possible, I foresaw trouble ahead and decided to plan some to counter it. Headmaster Tenzin Samdup and his cohorts did not treat us students at all well and we were to put it mildly "pissed off". As a natural leader and hero, it was simple for me to fan these embers of discontent into flickering flames that

were ready to burst forth with a little more wind. I kept the flames low, for it would have to be the masters that applied the bellows.

The day of the prize giving arrived, and there promised to be more entertainment than was usual at such a gathering. Parents filled the main body of the auditorium. We students sat to one side and the masters, in national dress for the occasion, were arrayed on the stage. Now my moment was at hand. As befitting my new status, I was to be called onto the stage first to receive my prize, a plaque of some sort of metal, from the headmaster himself. He glared at me as if I should not have been there, the dummy of the school that had lucked into top spot. I smiled at him shyly and slyly, and then my eyes went to the plaque. Something about it made me uneasy.

Now the headmaster began his spiel. Even on this occasion, with all the parents before him, he could not conceal his dislike for me. His main weapon was sarcasm and he made use of it.

'Wonders will never cease, and at my side I truly have a boy wonder, though it can only show that under my direction our teaching methods have vastly improved. I use the latest techniques from the United States of course and this young man, this Jamphel, who once was the school dummy and a troublemaker to the nth degree has finally come under their influence and methodology. Before in all his classes, he loafed, misbehaved, and slept, that is until now when under my compassionate persistence, he has outdone himself and not only topped his class, but the whole school. It is something that I can be proud of. His aggregate of marks is a record and there is little doubt that he did this through his own work as we checked and double checked his test papers, and though we are not completely satisfied, we have given him the benefit of our doubts and sincerely hope that he will continue to do well –'

He might have droned on in this manner for the next hour or so, but I was already tired with being held up as an example of his imported teaching methods. I stepped to him, took the plaque from his hand and was about to dash it to the floor, when he lost control and slapped me right in front of the parents. What was worse and a surprise to me was that it stung as slaps had never done before. My hand relaxed and the plaque fell to the floor and shattered like cast iron, though it wasn't. The other teachers came to their feet, rushed towards me, and indeed were pummeling me, when there was a roar from the rest of the students as they rushed into the fray. This was what I had expected, but I was in no condition to exult as I was being mercilessly beaten. Then it was the masters' turn, though not exactly, for they quickly went on the offensive and being fully-grown men and women prevailed. The riot was quelled and when all was quiet, I still held center stage lying there battered and bruised and aching all over.

I suppose by now, you must be wondering about my vaunted skin of steel and how could such puny blows and kicks inflict harm on me. I give only one word to explain it: Kryptonite!

Yes, the dreaded bane of superheroes! The headmaster, whatever and whoever villain he might be, had made the plaque out of the metal with dreadful results on me. From the Boy of Steel I became the boy of flesh and – what was more! – in terrible trouble.

I was beaten and bruised, sad, though not disheartened. Perhaps in time my super skin might return, perhaps one day I would be able to fly, perhaps I would learn not to be so trusting, so gullible. How could I think that my sister could have a thousand rupees? Have you ever heard of a student having so much? No, and still I have not come across one. I confronted her and demanded my due and although it was difficult for her she managed to collect together three hundred rupees which she eventually handed over to me. This raised my spirits considerably, for I could escape south again, and if I traveled far and long enough, I might get away from the baneful effects of the metal, though for all I knew and it now seems likely, a meteor had flamed through the atmosphere seeding the entire planet with Kryptonite dust. Still, with or without a super skin, I remained sure that I was a hero with a thousand faces, a thousand tasks to perform and a thousand tribulations to pass through. I had just begun and what I had already done, what had already happened to me revealed beyond doubt that I was on my way to my high destiny. I was no Bizarro, Superman's ungainly alter ego always creating havoc, but the real thing. One day I knew that I too would flash through the sky. 'Is that a plane, is that a rocket? – No, it's Jamphel who is faster than a speeding bullet.' And so, putting on a heroic face, I continued on, doing task after task, suffering tribulation after tribulation, knowing that sooner or later my day would arrive, and I would be complete.

26 September 2001.

DOI: 10.35515/zfa/asj.41/2024.09

Australian Studies Journal
Zeitschrift für Australienstudien
41 — 2024

Tom Thompson

Mudrooroo

A Publishing History

In 1965, publication of 'Wild Cat Falling' (Sydney: Angus & Robertson), described as the "first novel by a part-Aborigine", appeared in hardback with a foreword by Mary Durack. Its critical success prompted a ten-year license to Penguin Books (Hammondsworth, UK), their first edition printed in 1966.

In 1975, Johnson travelled to San Francisco where he met Ferlinghetti; he began work on a second novel, 'Long Live Sandawara'. The following year he travelled to Tasmania to research another work-in-progress, 'Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World'.

In 1977, Johnson began studying towards a B.A. (Hons.) degree at the University of Melbourne. 'Long Live Sandawara' was published in 1979 by Quartet Books (Melbourne), followed by the sixth printing of 'Wild Cat Falling' (Sydney: Sirius). 'Before the Invasion: Aboriginal Life to 1788', co-authored by Johnson with Colin Bourke and Isobel White, was published in 1980 by Oxford University Press. Later the same year, Johnson and Jack Davis co-founded the National Aboriginal and Islander Writers, Oral Literature, and Dramatists Association (AWOLDA).

1983 saw the publication of Johnson's third novel, 'Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World' (Melbourne: Hyland House) to great critical acclaim. In 1986, Tom Thompson, Publisher at the Australian Bicentennial Authority, contracted Johnson to write a volume of poetry, 'Dalwurra, the Black Bittern'. He also commissioned new work for Indigenous writers Glenys Ward, Ruby Langford, Sally Morgan, Nose-Peg, and supported the creation of Magabala Books, the first Indigenous publishing house in Australia.

In 1987, Johnson completed his B.A. (Hons.) degree at Murdoch University, Perth. 'Wild Cat Falling' was among the plays chosen to be workshopped at the First National Black Playwrights Conference, Canberra.

In 1988, Johnson was appointed Lecturer in Aboriginal Studies at the University of Queensland; he moved to Bungawalbyn, Northern NSW. 'Dalwurra, the Black Bittern: A Poem Cycle', edited by Veronica Brady and Susan Miller, was published by UWA Press (Nedlands, WA), followed by another poetry collection, 'The Song Circle of Jacky and Selected Poems' (Melbourne: Hyland House). 1988 also saw Johnson adopt Mudrooroo as his trade name (nom de plume; legal name Mudrooroo Narogin, later Mudrooroo Nyoongah). The second title of the 'Wildcat Trilogy', 'Doin' Wildcat: A Novel. Koori Script as Constructed By Mudrooroo', was published in Melbourne by Hyland House.

1989 witnessed the death of his mother, aged 91. Tom Thompson, as the new Publisher of Literature at Angus & Robertson, commissioned 'Wild Cat Screaming' and 'The Kwinkan'.

1990 saw the publication of 'Writing from the Fringe: A Study of Modern Aboriginal Literature in Australia' (South Yarra, Vic: Hyland House), and 'Paperbark. A Collection of Black Australian Writings' (St. Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press), edited by Jack Davis, Stephen Muecke, Mudrooroo and Adam Shoemaker; it contained a novella by Mudrooroo, entitled 'Struggling' (pp. 199-290). A second printing of 'Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World' was issued by Hyland House (Melbourne).

In May 1990, Mudrooroo participated in Belles Étrangères (Australian Writers Program in Paris), as part of the Angus & Robertson writers' party. Another edition of 'Wild Cat Falling' appeared in Angus & Robertson's Imprint series (Pymble, NSW), while 'Capricornia' by Xavier Herbert, with an introduction by Mudrooroo, was included in Angus & Robertson's Imprint Classics.

In 1991, Mudrooroo's appointment as Head of Aboriginal Studies, Murdoch University, Perth, was followed by the publication of 'Master of the Ghost Dreaming: A Novel' (Pymble, NSW: Angus & Robertson), and 'The Garden of Gethsemane: Poems from the Lost Decade' (South Yarra, Vic: Hyland House).

From July to September 1991, Mudrooroo was Writer-in-Residence at the Centre for Performance Studies, University of Sydney, where he and Gerhard Fischer collaborated on devising a 'frame play' around Heiner Müller's 'Der Auftrag', translated as 'The Commission' by Fischer. The outcome was a new, original play, 'The Aboriginal Protesters Confront the Proclamation of the Australian Republic on 26 January 2001 with a Production of "The Commission" by Heiner Müller', usually abbreviated to 'The Aboriginal Protesters'. At the end of his residency, Mudrooroo's script was workshopped over two weeks by Brian Syron (director) and a group of Aboriginal actors, followed by a staged reading at Belvoir Theatre, Surry Hills. Mudrooroo's novel 'Master of the Ghosts Dreaming' won the Human Rights Commission Award (Media).

1992 saw the publication of the final title in the 'Wildcat' trilogy, 'Wildcat Screaming' (Pymble, NSW: Angus & Robertson), while 'Wild Cat Falling' was re-published as an Imprint Classics Edition, with a new introduction by Stephen Muecke (Pymble, NSW: Angus & Robertson). Mudrooroo's 'Garden of Gethsemane' was a Double Winner of the WA Premier's Award (Best Entry and Best Poetry Collection). This was followed by another reprint of 'Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription' (Melbourne, Vic: Hyland House), and a Dutch language edition of the same title, translated by Regina Willemse, published as 'Hoe Het Einde Van Wereld Te Verdragen: Een Recept van Dokter Wooreddy' (Amsterdam: Bridge Books).

A new novel, 'The Kwinkan' (Pymble, NSW: Angus & Robertson) was published in 1993, along with 'The Mudrooroo/Müller Project. A Theatrical Casebook' (Sydney: UNSW Press), edited by Gerhard Fischer. The book was short-listed for a NSW State Premier's Award where Mudrooroo received a Special Prize for 'The Aboriginal Protesters', the centrepiece of 'The Mudrooroo/Müller Project'. A Text Response Guide to Mudrooroo's 'Wild Cat Falling', by Sue Perry (Ballarat, Vic: Wizard Books), was also published that year.

In 1994, Thompson's commission of Mudrooroo's 'Aboriginal Mythology: An A–Z Spanning the History of Australian Aboriginal Peoples from the Earliest

Legends to the Present Day' appeared in the UK (London: Thorsons) and was reprinted the same year (London: Aquarian). Also published that year was another edition on Mudrooroo's 'Wild Cat Falling', by Rick McLean (Glebe, NSW: Pascal Press).

1995 began with the publication of 'Master of the Ghost Dreaming' in the French language as 'Le Maître de Rêve-Fantôme', translated by Christian Seruzier (La Tour-d'Aigues, Vaucluse, France: Éditions de L'Aube), the publisher and author being assisted by the Australia Council for a promotional tour of France. 'Us Mob: History, Culture, Struggle. An Introduction to Indigenous Australia' (Sydney, London: Angus & Robertson), and 'Pacific Highway Boo-Blooz: Country Poems' (St. Lucia, Qld: UQP) were both published that same year, along with a reprint of 'Wildcat Screaming' (Pymble, NSW: Angus & Robertson). 'The Aboriginal Protesters' premiered at The Performance Space, Redfern, as part of the Festival of Sydney, on 10 January 1996; subsequently, Mudrooroo toured with the all-Aboriginal cast in Germany, with performances in Weimar and Munich, July 1996. While in Germany, Mudrooroo began work on a verse drama, 'Iphigeneia in Buchenwald' (based on Goethe's 'Iphigenie in Tauris'). A German-language edition of 'Aboriginal Mythology' was published as 'Die Welt der Aborigines. Das Lexikon zur Mythologie der australischen Ureinwohner', translated by Wolf Koehler (Munich: Goldmann).

Following the publication of a newspaper article, 'Identity Crisis', by Victoria Laurie in The Australian Magazine (20-21 July), the Dumbartung Aboriginal Association, Perth, released a public statement on 27 July, denying Mudrooroo's claim to Nyoongah identity and Aboriginal descent. Despite this, 'Us Mob' won the Kate Challis RAKA Award later in the year.

1997 saw the publication of 'The Indigenous Literature of Australia: Milli Milli Wangka' (Melbourne, Vic: Hyland House), and a Polish language edition of 'Mitologia Aborygenow / Aboriginal mythology' (Poznan: Dom Wydawniczy Rebis), translated by Misolaw Nowakowski.

In 1998, Mudrooroo's seventh novel, 'The Undying', was published (Pymble, NSW: Angus & Robertson) as the second volume in the 'Master of the Ghost Dreaming' series. A reprint of the French 'Le Maître de Rêve-Fantôme' was offered by Éditions de L'Aube.

1999 saw the publication of 'Underground' (Pymble, NSW: Angus & Robertson), the third volume of the 'Ghost Dreaming' series, as well as a reprint of 'Dr Wooreddy' (Melbourne, Vic: Hyland House). A German language edition in hardback of 'Master of the Ghost Dreaming' appeared in Switzerland as 'Flug in die Traumzeit', translated by Wolf Koehler for Unionsverlag, Zurich.

Australian publishers continued to support Mudrooroo through 2000 with publication of 'The Promised Land' (Pymble, NSW: Angus & Robertson), the final volume of the 'Ghost Dreaming' quartet, and with reprints of both 'Long Live Sandawara' and 'Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription' (Melbourne, Vic: Hyland House).

Mudrooroo left Australia in 2001 to begin a self-imposed exile at Kapan, Nepal. A reprint of 'Wild Cat Falling' under the A & R Classics label (Pymble, NSW: Angus & Robertson) was issued shortly after his departure.

In 2002, Mudrooroo married Sangya Magar, a Nepalese citizen. Following the G-8 Summit in Genoa, Mudrooroo began a lecture tour of Italy, while another reprint of 'Le Maître de Rêve-Fantôme' was published in France. At the conclusion of the lecture tour, Lorenzo Perrona became Mudrooroo's Italian agent, arranging the publication of an Italian edition of 'Wild Cat Falling' in 2003, 'Gatto Selvaggio Cade' (Florence, Italy: Casa Editrice Le Lettere), translated by Perrona. Subsequently, four stories were also published in Italian, all translated by Perrona.

In 2003, Mudrooroo's and Sangya Magar's son, Saman Nyoongah Magar, was born in Nepal.

An international volume of critical studies, 'Mongrel Signatures: Reflections on the work of Mudrooroo', edited by Annalisa Oboe, was published by Rodopi in Amsterdam and New York. After accepting Mudrooroo's request to be his sole agent (outside of Italy), Thompson reverted 'The Song Cycle of Jacky', including stock from Hyland House, all copies and title to 'Dalwurra', and 'The Kwinkan', 'Wild Cat Screamin', 'Master of the Ghost Dreaming', 'Underground' and 'The Undying' from HarperCollins, paying Mudrooroo to move all these titles to Thompson's company, ETT Imprint.

In 2004, 'Flug in die Traumzeit' was reprinted in Switzerland (Unions Verlag). Despite his absence from Australia, over 1 000 copies of 'Wild Cat Falling' were sold in 2007, and Copyright Agency permissions for use of 'Us Mob' by other publishers drew over AUD 2 600 to the author. 'Long Live Sandawara' was reprinted by Hyland House.

In 2010, Thompson contracted 'Wild Cat Falling' in a French translation by Christian Seruzier as 'Chat Sauvage en chute libre' (Paris: Asphalte); the edition included Mudrooroo's Playlist for the writing of this book: 'You Can't Catch Me' (Chuck Berry), 'Heartbreak Hotel' (Elvis Presley), 'Blue Suede Shoes' (Carl Perkins), 'Ain't that a Shame' (Fats Domino), 'Trouble in Mind' (traditional), 'See you later Alligator' (Bill Haley), 'The Great Pretender' (The Platters), 'Young Blood' (The Coasters), 'Rebel Rouser' (Duane Eddy), 'Ready Teddy, Rip It Up' (both Little Richard), 'So Tough, The Wild One' (both Johnny O'Keefe), and 'I'm not a Juvenile Delinquent' (Frankie Lymon).

The international critical reception of Mudrooroo's work continued with scholarly articles in India and in China.[1] Mudrooroo sent his essay 'Me – I am Me!' by email to Thompson and Fischer.

In 2011, Mudrooroo and his family returned to Australia for medical treatment, residing in Brisbane, Queensland. His 'Portrait of the Artist as a Sick old Villain' was published in ASAL, 11, 2010, 2.

In 2012, HarperCollins reverted audio rights to 'Wild Cat Falling', and ETT Imprint acquired all stock and title to 'Doin' Wildcat', 'The Garden of Gethsemane' and 'The Indigenous Literature of Australia' (all from Hyland House).

2013 saw Mudrooroo reading 'Wild Cat Falling' at the Motion Focus Music studios in Brisbane for Bolinda Audio, co-produced with ETT Imprint, as well as

1 Antara Ghatak: Identity and Belonging in Mudrooroo's 'Wild Cat Falling'; Yong-Chun Yang, Xian-Jing Xu: Religious Identity in 'Wild Cat Falling'.

publication of 'Old Fellow Poems' (Kolkata, India: ETT Imprint), with Mudrooroo recording these poems for ETT Imprint Audio.

In 2014, Sue Sherman published a volume on Mudrooroo's 'Wild Cat Falling' for Insight Publications in Cheltenham, Victoria.

2015 saw the publication of Mudrooroo's campus novel 'An Indecent Obsession', as well as a new edition of 'Wild Cat Falling' by ETT Imprint, Exile Bay, NSW, the latter including the essay 'Me – I am Me!'. Gale/Cengage (Detroit, MI) produced a booklet on Mudrooroo containing 5 000 words from 'The Indigenous Literature of Australia', and the journal article 'Portrait of the Artist as a Sick Old Villain'. In September, Thompson contracted with Mudrooroo for two works-in-progress, 'Balga Boy Jackson', and a memoir 'The Hippy Trail' (finally published as 'Tripping with Jenny').

In 2016, a new edition of 'Doin' Wildcat' appeared under the ETT Imprint (Exile Bay, NSW), and Thompson contracted with Mudrooroo a full agency agreement for all his published works. Publication of 'Old Fellow Poems' as both an ebook and audio book were followed by the publication of 'Balga Boy Jackson' under the ETT Imprint (all Exile Bay, NSW), while 'Chat Sauvage en chute libre' was reprinted by Asphalte in Paris, France. Mudrooroo's essay 'The Final Chapter', an addition to Joan Lindsay's 'The Secret of Hanging Rock', was reprinted four times to 2021.

2018 saw the publication of 'Tripping with Jenny' (Exile Bay, NSW: ETT Imprint), with an afterword entitled 'I'm a nomad, it's in my blood' by Gerhard Fischer. While Mudrooroo was too ill to record 'Balga Boy Jackson' as audio book, Thompson commissioned Kirk Page as reader and Thompson's old band King Biscuit to record 31 blues introductions (co-production Bolinda Audio and ETT Imprint).

On 28 September 2018, Mudrooroo wrote a last will, designating his estate to his son Saman Nyoongah Magar, with all literary elements of his estate to be administered by Thompson serving as trustee of his Creative Property Trust.

Mudrooroo died in Brisbane on 20 January 2019, just before the new edition of 'Dr Wooreddy's Prescription' (Exile Bay, NSW: ETT Imprint) was published with an afterword by Paul Spickard.

In 2020, Thompson contracted with Ivan Saporos of Selva Canela (Buenos Aires, Argentina), for the Spanish Language rights to 'Wild Cat Falling'. The same year, new editions of 'Long Live Sandawara', 'Aboriginal Mythology', and 'Master of the Ghost Dreaming' were published by ETT Imprint of Exile Bay, NSW.

In 2021, these titles were followed by the novels 'Underground', 'The Undying' and 'The Promised Land' (all Exile Bay, NSW: ETT Imprint). 'Los sueños del gato salvaje' was published by Selva Canela, translated by Martin Felipe Castagnet. Gerhard Fischer's memoir 'Remembering Mudrooroo' was published.[2]

In 2022, 'Aboriginal Mythology' was reprinted and published under the Imprint Classics label (Exile Bay, NSW: ETT Imprint).

In 2024, rights to Mudrooroo reading 'Wild Cat Falling' were reverted; it will be published by ETT Imprint, along with a new revised edition of 'The Aboriginal

2 Gerhard Fischer: Remembering Mudrooroo (1938-2019).

Protesters' (previously part of 'The Mudrooroo/Müller Project'), edited and introduced by Fischer.

Books by Mudrooroo available in ETT Imprint

The Aboriginal Protesters (2024)
Long Live Sandawara (2021)
The Indigenous Literature of Australia (2021)
Pacific Highway Boo-Blues (ebook 2021)
Aboriginal Mythology (2020)
Tripping with Jenny (2019)
Dr Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World (2019)
Balga Boy Jackson (2018)
Doin' Wildcat (2016)
Wildcat Screaming (ebook 2017)
Wildcat Falling (ebook 2015, audio 2013)
An Indecent Obsession (ebook original 2015)
The Kwinkan (ebook 2017)
The Song Circle of Jacky (ebook 2018)
Old Fellow Poems (ETT India 2011, ETT audio 2017)
The Garden of Gethsemane (1991)

Master of the Ghost Dreaming series: (all ebooks 2017)
Book 1: The Master of the Ghost Dreaming (2019)
Book 2: The Undying (2021)
Book 3: Underground (2021)
Book 4: The Promised Land (2021)

References

Fischer, Gerhard: Remembering Mudrooroo (1938–2019). In: Anglica, 30, 2021, 1, pp. 5-19.
Ghatak, Antara: Identity and Belonging in Mudrooroo's 'Wild Cat Falling'. In: Rupkartha Journal, 2, 2010, 2, pp. 154-161.
Yang, Yong-Chun, Xian-Jing Xu: Religious Identity in 'Wild Cat Falling'. In: US-China Foreign Language, 9, 2010, 6, pp. 398-403.

DOI: 10.35515/zfa/asj.41/2024.10

Australian Studies Journal
Zeitschrift für Australienstudien
41 — 2024

Gerhard Fischer

The Literary Estate

Unfinished Business

Abstract: Nearly thirty years ago, the work of Mudrooroo, a writer who had been celebrated previously as Australia's foremost Black novelist, poet and critic, was publicly cancelled amid a scandal regarding his Indigenous credentials. Today, his vast literary estate, deposited mainly in the National Library of Australia and the State Library of Western Australia, is available to researchers but remains unexplored, his important contribution to Australian literature largely forgotten. The study of the estate adds important new insights into Mudrooroo's life and work; it reveals the existence of a corpus of dramatic works, hitherto largely unknown, as well as extensive writings while in exile after 2001, including a partially completed six-volume autobiography. The private papers confirm a stream of misogyny in his private life that scholars had already detected in his fiction, adding biographical details to the history of his five marriages. The most impressive section of the estate is the comprehensive collection of diaries that allow a nearly daily view of Mudrooroo's Tibetan exile, ending with reflections on his long battle against terminal cancer only a few days before his death.

Overview

Colin Johnson, who was born on 21 August 1938 in a tiny settlement in rural Western Australia, changed his name to Mudrooroo in 1988 to confirm his commitment to the Indigenous people of his country.[1] Meaning 'paperbark', it was originally meant as a pen name, or trademark, to indicate his profession as an Aboriginal writer. When told of the legal requirement to provide a family name (he had obviously not been advised that it was possible to adopt a pseudonym for publishing purposes without having to change one's legal name), he opted for Narogin in the mistaken belief that this was his place of birth.[2] After finding out later that he was in fact born on a farm in East Cuballing, he dropped Narogin and choose Nyoongah (NB: alternative spellings elsewhere), the original name of the first inhabitants of South-West Western Australia. As a result, his published works have appeared under four different author's names: Colin Johnson, Mudrooroo Narogin, Mudrooroo Nyoongah, and, finally, Mudrooroo, the name by which he is today universally known.

Not surprisingly, there has been some speculation about Mudrooroo's motivation to assume a new name. Both Anita Heiss and Maureen Clark have interpreted the name changes as proof of a fraudulent strategy to assume Indigenous ancestry. Other critics, such as Adam Shoemaker, have pointed out Mudrooroo's strategy of performing as a literary trickster who presents shifting, fictional identities. Yet other commentators naively believe that Mudrooroo is the author's original Indigenous name; thus, Anglo-Irish journalist Lesleyann Lingane has

1 Previously, he had already contemplated a name change, namely shortly before the publication of his first book, 'Wild Cat Falling', because he was afraid that his in-laws at the time might find out that he had a criminal record.
2 The name of the town is officially spelled with a double 'r'.

described the name change as reverting to Colin Johnson's "tribal name".[3] The matter is much more prosaic. Mudrooroo was following the example of his mentor in poetry, Kath Walker, who had changed her name to Oodgeroo, meaning paperbark in the language of the Noonuccal, the traditional owners of her home on Stradbroke Island. In both cases, the change of name was meant as a political act, a protest against the government-sponsored celebration of the Australian Bicentennial.

When Mudrooroo died on 20 January 2019, he left behind a vast literary estate that is housed today in two principal depositories: the Australian National Library[4] and the West Australian State Library.[5] The Perth collection comprises mainly earlier material, original manuscripts and copies of published as well as unpublished texts, including whole notebooks filled with poems, in addition to business correspondence and private letters written prior to Mudrooroo's exile in Nepal. The Canberra collection is much larger, a yet unexplored treasure trove that opens up unique insights into much of Mudrooroo's later work and life. Additionally, the library of the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA), likewise in Canberra, also holds several manuscripts and documents by Mudrooroo; these are part of the papers of Tom Thompson, Mudrooroo's final publisher.[6]

The first impression on perusing the collections is the enormous range of Mudrooroo's literary output during his career as a writer that covered over half a century, from the beginnings in the 1960s to literally within days of his death. There are copies of some of his novels in various stages of editing or re-writing, finished playscripts along with notes and plans for theatrical productions and performance texts, short stories and essays, film scripts and treatments, university course readers, outlines for lectures, as well as numerous autobiographical sketches and genealogical documents, and much more. Frequent references identify manuscripts that have been lost, such as a crime/mystery story, 'St. Francis and the Detective', supposedly destroyed in a Brisbane publisher's basement during one the regular big floods in that city.[7] Also, most of the Indian prose writings composed during Mudrooroo's seven-years stay in Asia (1967-1974), including a novel, 'Valley of the Blessed Virgins', are nonextant. The manuscript of what would have become the author's second published Australian novel, 'Escape from the Great White Land', is considered lost as well, though it may still be found in the vaults of his publisher Angus & Robertson who rejected a first version.

The text of what seems to have been Johnson's first play, 'The Delinks' (about a revolt by inmates in Fremantle Gaol), has likewise disappeared. By sheer

3 Cf. clipping from 'Sunday Living', The West Australian, in NLA: MS Acc 13.042, Box 02, Item 14. For reference to Heiss and Clark, see Chapter Three, The Obliteration of a Writer, in the present issue. For Shoemaker, see Mudrooroo: A Critical Study, pp. 3 and 18. For sake of clarity, I am using the name Mudrooroo throughout this chapter.

4 NLA: Papers of Mudrooroo, 1979-2012, MS7600, MS Acc01.036, MS Acc13.042; NLA: MS-SAV012163, Cassette-Box 671 (Cassette 5).

5 SLWA: Mudrooroo papers, 1972-1992, Acc 4619 A; Mary Durack, correspondence with writers and others, Acc 7273 A, 42.3.

6 ADFA: Papers of Tom Thompson and Elizabeth Butel, Special Collections, UNSW Canberra, Australian Defence Force Academy, MSS 009, Series G, Folders 169-175.

7 Cf. Mudrooroo: The Confessions of Mudrooro, Book Two, p. 238.

coincidence, it had (nearly) the same title as Deirdre Cash-Olsen's successful 'cult novel' 'The Delinquents' (published in London under the pseudonym Criena Rohan two years prior to Mudrooroo's first book 'Wild Cat Falling').[8] Mudrooroo had met Olsen after moving from Perth to Melbourne and, as he wrote to Mary Durack, he "got to know her quite well": "she is very much a woman".[9]

Dramatic Works

Mudrooroo's literary reputation rests mainly on his poetry and prose fiction as well as his critical, theoretical writings, so it comes as no small surprise that the estate also comprises some plays written throughout his career, with the formal variety of his dramatic output indicating the author's astonishing versatility. One interesting example is his adaptation of 'The Little Clay Cart', a famous fourth-century Sanskrit play about the love between a Brahmin and a commoner, written by the Hindu king and playwright Shudraka. Mudrooroo transferred the plot to present-day New Delhi and changed the title (somewhat misleadingly perhaps) to 'The Little Red Car'.[10] Although the cover page indicates that the play was "adapted from the Sanskrit and Pakrit (sic) drama", one wonders whether the translation by Arthur William Ryder, published by Harvard in 1905, may have been a likely source.

Three other plays of Mudrooroo deal with Aboriginal topics. A dramatization of 'Wild Cat Falling' was written as a Theatre-in-Education piece, to be toured to complement the inclusion of the novel in the curriculum of secondary schools in Australia. Directed by Alan Becher for the SWY Theatre Company, the play had its 'World Premiere' in the Narrogin Town Hall, near Mudrooroo's birthplace, on 24 July 1992.[11] 'Big Sunday', Mudrooroo's drama about the 1934 murder trial of Tuckiar Wirrpanda, was successfully workshopped at the Second National Aboriginal Playwright's Conference in 1987, directed by Brian Syron. The play's protagonist, a Yolngu man, was sentenced to death for allegedly killing a police constable and subsequently set free by the High Court only to disappear without a trace after his release from the local jail.[12]

Ann Nugent, in her article on the Conference for 'The Age/Monthly Review', praised the play as a "significant piece of writing', both for its "message" and its theatrical innovations, including the "ghost like quality of its setting": the author "interleaves lengthy monologues between black and white protagonists in dream-like sequences"; the "ghosts of the past still walk", suggesting that

8 Cf. Criena Rohan: The Delinquents.
9 Cf. SLWA: Acc 7273 A/Box 42.3 (Part 2).
10 Cf. SLWA: 4619A, item 200. It is a love drama, not a children's story.
11 The only documented critical reception relates to a performance by the Tin Roof Theatre Company of Wollongong on 31 May 1994 at Belvoir's Downstairs Theatre in Sydney; a review in the Sydney Morning Herald identified a production of "glaring inadequacy", "theatrically sterile" with "none of the vitality of Mudrooroo's prose". Cf. NLA Acc 01.036, item 3.
12 Cf. Egon Erwin Kisch who provides a critical commentary on the trial in the chapter on 'Schwarz-Australien' (Black Australia) in his 1935 book on his visit to Australia, id.: Landung in Australien, pp. 157-167.

"no peace between Black and White is possible while the injustices of the past remain unresolved".[13] There are different versions of this play, variously entitled 'Whiteman's Corroboree' (with the audience acting as jury in the murder trial), and 'Tuckiar and the King'. However, none of the scripts seems to have made it to the stage. Another play with an Aboriginal setting and characters is 'Mutjingabba – Old Woman's Place', seemingly inspired by autobiographical references involving the author's mother. There is no record of this play being performed either.

A rather unexpected text is the detailed outline for a 'tragedy' that uses Sophocles' 'Antigone' as a dramatic model. Entitled 'The President', it features Richard Nixon after the Watergate crisis, with excerpts from his speeches as well as press reports, tapes, etc. The prologue introduces Nixon along with Kissinger and "the leader of China", while a mob of media reporters act as chorus. Later, the Rev. Billy Graham makes an appearance in the role of Tiresias, warning of a coup against Nixon's government. Unfortunately, there is not enough extant material to determine whether the play was meant as satire or serious political drama; the author's comment that democracy was to be "triumphant" in the end could be read either way.[14]

Mudrooroo's versatility as dramatist, and his original and shrewd use of classical models can also be seen in his 'Iphigeneia in Buchenwald' (sometimes referred to as 'Weimarer Schwarze', or 'Blacks in Weimar'), a fully completed drama, much of it written in verse. When on tour in Germany with the cast of 'The Aboriginal Protesters', Mudrooroo was shown the manuscript of Goethe's famous play 'Iphigenie auf Tauris', considered one of the outstanding works in the classical humanist tradition of Germany's greatest writer. Subsequently, following a visit to the infamous Nazi concentration camp of Buchenwald on the outskirts of Weimar, Mudrooroo decided to write his own version of the Greek myth, by focussing on the horror of the Holocaust. His Iphigeneia is a Gypsy Jewish whore in charge of the brothel within the Buchenwald compound, with the plot a series of sordid encounters involving various inmates, Nazi guards and SS-officers, including the camp's commandant and his wife. In this instance, Mudroorooo's effort as a playwright proved to be too clever by half. The attempt to scale up the moral degradation and all-pervasive violence inside the camp to accentuate the perversion of all standards of civilized behaviour in the Holocaust was met with no understanding by his hosts in Weimar. He had to accept that his expectation to have the play performed in Germany was utterly unrealistic; to this day, it remains buried in the archive.

Mudrooroo's 'The Aboriginal Protesters' (1991) was the outcome of a collaborative process, based on a concept developed by me as dramaturg, about the questionable prospects of the Australian Republican movement and its failure to

13 SLWA: 4619 A/7. The review is uncannily prescient of the theatre of Heiner Müller that Mudrooroo was to engage with three years later. Cf. Hans-Thies Lehmann, Heiner Müller's Spectres.

14 NLA Acc. 01.036, item 62.

integrate any Indigenous concerns.[15] The play that incorporates Heiner Müller's 'The Mission' ('Der Auftrag') as a play-within-a-play turned out to be the "highlight" of the Festival of Sydney 1996.[16] Staged at the Performance Space in the Sydney suburb of Redfern (home of the local Indigenous community), the original production featured an all-Aboriginal cast; it was a critical as much as a popular success, described as a "landmark" in Australian theatre.[17] The show was equally well received during its tour to Germany in the European summer of the same year. As a playwright, Mudrooroo's career culminated in Weimar.

Personal Correspondence

Mudrooroo's correspondence with the significant women in his life constitute a central part of the Perth collection; it also includes the letters exchanged with Dame Mary Durack (part of the Durack papers archived separately in the WA State Library). The Duracks did not expect to hear any more from their protégé after their brief encounter; but unlike all the other juvenile Indigenous delinquents they had taken into their home, Mudrooroo proved to be a respectful and loyal correspondent.

In his letters, he politely enquired about the health of the family, especially mentioning the Durack daughters, and regularly reported on his progress in Melbourne where he worked during the day at the Motor Registry Office and studied at night for his high school matriculation. Soon after his departure from Perth, he had grown a "small beard" and confessed that he is "a Bohemian type now", or rather "a Beatnik engaged in the holy search for myself". Socializing with a circle of poets and artists, he "temporarily" adopted "a Marxist attitude to society". He kept contact with the Melbourne Aboriginal community, writing about his work with the Tjuringa Aboriginal Dance Company (a dismal artistic failure), but he carried his Aboriginality lightly.[18] After meeting Kath Walker, he wrote to Mary Durack: "A marvellous woman/speaker", and: "Believe it or not, I find myself committed to a race". Nevertheless, he concluded his letter with the Hippie incantation: "Oim Peace Peace Peace". In return, Dame Mary encouraged his writing, occasionally sending him books or money, and correcting his manuscripts.[19] While Mudrooroo's attitude towards older female role models, especially Dame Mary and Kath Walker, was always characterized by politeness, gratitude and respectfulness, a different picture emerges in his relationship to other women.

15 Cf. Gerhard Fischer, Genesis of a Theatre Project. In: The Mudrooroo/Müller Project, pp. 3-17.
16 Cf. Gerhard Fischer: 'Twoccing' Der Auftrag to Black Australia. Heiner Müller 'Aboriginalised' by Mudrooroo.
17 Brian Hoad: Tense Tale of Future Past.
18 I am indebted to Victoria Grieves for this apt expression.
19 SLWA: Acc. 7273 A/Box 42.3 (Part 2).

Misogyny

Mudrooroo's correspondence allows a revealing insight into the author's private affairs, his biography, the emotional and psychological make-up of his personality, and his attitude towards his five wives, and to women generally. The keyword here is misogyny, and it is not unexpected. Mudrooroo's condescending and patronizing remarks about Sally Morgan ("young, gifted and not very black")[20] in 'Writing from the Fringe' were widely criticized, even though they seemed more motivated by professional jealousy rather than anti-feminine prejudice: Mudrooroo's novels were selling well, but they were no match against Morgan's international bestseller 'My Place' that sold over half a million copies.

Adam Shoemaker, in his monograph of 1993, extended the criticism by pointing out that a misogynist mindset was clearly in evidence in Mudrooroo's fiction: "[His] depiction of females – both European and Aboriginal – is predominantly negative": "women are generally either absent, are secondary, supporting characters or are one-dimensional (often sexual) objects".[21] Referring to the 'Wildcat' trilogy, Shoemaker states:

> There is not a single fully developed and sympathetically drawn female character […] This overwhelmingly male orientation of the books does more than anything else to mar them as creative achievements which reflect contemporary Aboriginality.[22]

Shoemaker's critique explicitly refers to Mudrooroo's novels, and it is important to be mindful of the distinction between fiction and autobiography in literary criticism. It is clearly not permissible to simply regard invented characters as mouthpieces of the author in the real world. Nor is it legitimate to draw conclusions regarding an author's private opinion, political or otherwise, based on events, characters and discourses related in the fictional world of his books. On the other hand, however, much of Mudrooroo's writing is based on his life experiences, and parts of his novels quite frequently mirror clearly identifiable autobiographical material that is supported by objective archival evidence, particularly in the writer's private letters and the correspondence with his wives, carried out over a substantial period.

Studying the archival evidence of the personal papers of Mudrooroo and his five wives provides ample material to analyse the questionable features in his relation to women. The history of his marital relationships will further serve to fill in the gaps in the chronology of his life story. It thus might be useful to discuss, however sketchily, the sequence of Mudrooroo's marriages (in addition to the one great erotic passion in his life).

20 Mudrooroo: Writing from the Fringe, p. 149. Mudrooroo later revised his criticism. Cf. Mudrooroo: 'Us Mob', p. 27 where he acknowledges Sally Morgan as "one of us mob in Western Australia".
21 Adam Shoemaker: Mudrooroo, pp. 61, 60.
22 Ibid, p. 114.

Five Marriages

Genevieve (Jenny) Katinas

In a letter to Dame Mary dated 8 September 1964, Mudrooroo wrote of his first marriage, to Jenny Katinas, concluded two weeks earlier, without mentioning her name: "The girl is intelligent, appreciative of the arts, and faithful – and I consider myself lucky to have gained such a prize". The Durack family responded by sending a wedding gift – a table lamp for reading at night; however, the promise of a life of domestic bliss in the family home proved to be a fallacy of wishful thinking on the Duracks' part. Six years later, Mudrooroo informed Dame Mary from Calcutta: "My marriage has gone bust and I've had enough of marriage and feel happy to have escaped it".[23]

An initial indication of estrangement occured during the couple's first overland trip to London; in 'Tripping with Jenny', the autobiographical account of that journey, Mudrooroo routinely refered to Jenny as "my wife".[24] Shortly after their stay in a Buddhist monastery in Bangkok where the couple met their first Buddhist mentor, the monk Phra Prasert, Mudrooroo informed Jenny of his desire to become a monk. Her bewildered reaction – "What about me?" – drew no response.[25] On their second trip, two years later, it became clear that he was serious, and Jenny had a nervous breakdown that forces her to return home, deeply depressed and with her health compromised by the couple's excessive drug abuse. While her husband stayed on, eventually living as an itinerant monk for three of the seven years he spent in Asia, on his own, she wrote to him from Melbourne, forwarding his mail, tax forms and royalty cheques, and imploring him to come home. Eventually, she filed for divorce.

Romantic Excursion: Elena Castaneda

After his return to Melbourne in 1974, Mudrooroo experienced the one great passion of his life. He fell head over heels in love with Elaine (or Elena) Castaneda, a flamboyant, quirky American woman with Latin American roots. Emotionally restless, she was an inveterate traveller bubbling with flirtatious energy. Mudrooroo followed her to California where he intended to join her in a primal therapy course. But the peaceful counterculture that he expected to find was no longer there; the hippies had left Haight/Ashbury, the district had turned derelict, a haven for hard drugs and crime, and a myriad of 'new age' cults. After staying with the 'Moonies' for a stint, Mudrooroo applied to join Elaine's primal therapy program, but he could not afford the outrageous fees demanded by the clinic in Marin County. Then, she wrote to him from Canada:

23 SLWA: Acc. 7273 A/Box 42.3 (Part 2).
24 Cf. my afterword 'I'm a nomad, it's in my blood' in Mudrooroo: Tripping with Jenny, pp. 293-303.
25 Mudrooroo: Tripping with Jenny, p. 123.

> What am I doing in Montreal? Well, when I arrived in Berkeley I wanted to see Denis Beauchamp, a man I met in Mexico, now he lives here, and I wanted to sort out my feelings about him and be open to all I receive here.

She goes on to talk about her "good and bad feelings", that she wants "to settle down for a while", perhaps in Hawaii; she wants to become "a stronger self" – "Hawaii can do that for me".[26] Mudrooroo immediately decided to follow her to Canada, but then his trip takes a turn for the worse.

He was arrested at the border crossing into British Columbia as a destitute vagrant and deported. After hitchhiking back to the Bay area, he ended up on the streets of Oakland. He was finally offered accommodation in a Salvation Army dormitory in exchange for work, cleaning and doing odd jobs at the centre. The seven months on the West coast are the low point in his life, second only to the experience of solitary confinement in Fremantle Gaol.

What is most remarkable is that during the whole unfortunate journey Mudrooroo never stopped writing. He had brought Ion Idriess' 'Outlaws of the Leopolds' with him to America, a gift from Mary Durack that became the major source of his second published book, 'Long Live Sandawara'. He finished the novel in San Francisco and took the manuscript back to Melbourne: after experiencing life on skid-row in America, the book became a lifeline to a new beginning on his way to resume his Indigenous Australian identity.

Julie Ann Whiting

In 1983, Mudrooroo married Julie Ann Whiting, a librarian at Monash University. The second marriage followed a similar pattern as the previous one, except that the couple had two children, a son Kalu and a daughter Malika, born 1985 and 1988, respectively. The husband, absent from the family for extended periods, appeared to have taken little interest in his children. A letter to his wife sent from Calcutta ends with the bureaucratic formula "Thanking you for your consideration"; it left Julie feeling utterly dejected. When Mudrooroo struck out on his own to 'go bush', living near Bungawalbyn (Ruby Langford Ginibi's country in the isolated Northern Rivers district of New South Wales), she nevertheless tried to save the marriage, reminding him of their one-year-old daughter and how often the boy is asking about his father. But there were no return letters, no calls. In a final letter dated 15 October 1989, Julie Ann Johnson wrote: "Dear Colin/Mudrooroo, I understand that you are no longer coming home".[27] The marriage of just over six years' duration was dissolved by Degree Nisi in the Brisbane Family Court on 15 March 1990.[28]

26 SLWA 4619 A/56. Later she writes from Chicago, where she finds herself without money; she has to sell "everything" but there is still not enough, so she marries an Egyptian in need of a visa; the deal involves AUD 1 000 in cash and a one-week holiday in Cairo.

27 SLWA: Acc 4619A/63.

28 NLA: Ms Acc 01.036, item 21. In 1993, after Mudrooroo had taken up his well-paid position as lecturer, and later head, of Aboriginal Studies at Murdoch University, Julie Whiting sued him for child support. In his 'Portrait of the Artist as a Sick Old Villain', p. 15, Mudrooroo

Jaqueline Mendel

By that time, Mudrooroo was already in another relationship. He and Jewish-American artist/dancer Jaqueline Mendel had met in Amsterdam in 1988 when he was travelling through Europe to advocate for Aboriginal resistance to the Bicentennial, as well as to further his individual career as writer/performer.[29] Jacqueline, or Jacqui, or 'Humi', had followed him to Australia, but the native of New York City found it impossible to adjust to living in the "wilderness" of Northern New South Wales, as Mudrooroo laughingly recalled in an interview recorded for the National Library.[30] There are only a few documents relating to the couple's relationship, and there is no record for either marriage or divorce. A photograph with a handwritten note on the back reads: "Me and my then wife Jacqueline Mendl [sic] on Stradbroke Isl".[31] There is also a copy of 'Mutjingabba' in the Perth archive that lists "Mudrooroo and Chumi Narogin" as co-authors on the title page. Another document shows that Mudrooroo sold Jacqui an option to the film rights to 'Dr. Wooreddy's' for AUD 100. It might have been a strategic decision, probably fake, to enable Jacqui to sell the book to an American producer or publisher on her partner's behalf. However, the planned transaction, if there was one, did not materialize. In any case, their relationship was not to last.[32]

Janine Little

In 1996, Mudrooroo married again; he was 58 years old. His fourth wife, Janine Little, a graduate student working on her Ph.D. in English literature, accompanied him on the trip to Weimar. After the scandal regarding his Indigenous identity, the couple took up residence on Macleay Island in Moreton Bay. It appears that Janine was hugely ambitious, aiming to advance her husband's career by assuming the role of sole agent and business representative. She also saw herself as an author; one of her projects was to write an Australian version of 'American Psycho', the notorious novel (and profitable movie) by Bret Easton Ellis about a Wall Street banker and serial killer.

In August 1998, in a mood of deep despondency, Mudrooroo reflected on the loss of his former sense of Self. He wrote 'The Ballad of Mudrooroo' in his diary,[33] composed a plan for an autobiography entitled 'Mongrel', and contemplated the

commented that she had "a well-paying job", but "I paid and felt pride that I was supporting my two kids".

29 At the time, Mudrooroo was at the peak of his career 15, as a performer of his poetry 'A Playbill by TimeOut/Amsterdam' for an organisation called 'The Spoken Word' announced his act at the Theatre Bellevue as "A Night with the Legendary MUDROOROO. The Aboriginal Novelist, Poet and Performer. On Tour in Berlin, Amsterdam, Paris, London".

30 NLA: MS-SAV012163, Cassette-Box 671 (Cassette 5).

31 NLA: MS Acc 01.036, Item 12.

32 NLA: Ms Acc01.036, item 35. According to Victoria Grieves, Jacqueline Mendel is currently living in New York, in possession of her correspondence with Mudrooroo and some of his manuscripts. At the time of writing, she was apparently in bad health and reluctant to share her memories.

33 See p. 19 in the present volume.

acrimonious end of his relationship with Janine. She had moved out of their house without telling him, leaving only two affidavits that attest to the ongoing divorce proceedings. Furiously, Mudrooroo planned to take revenge:

> Janine's idea of her writing the Australian Psycho. Good idea so why not steal it. The character is an Academic: pretty boring but psychotic. His wife leaving drives him over the edge.[34]

The outcome of this is 'An Indecent Obsession', unfortunately not a good effort: there is none of the biting wit of Ellis' social satire. Mudrooroo's book begins as a campus novel with the narrator, a college lecturer, being seduced in his office by a calculating female student who manages to worm herself into his life, and it ends as a piece of 'slasher fiction', with the protagonist stalking, murdering and dissecting his female victims, his wife and her friends, in a series of chapters of increasingly horrific violence described in gruesome detail. While Ellis succeeded in writing a satirical portrait of a section of contemporary American society, the small but influential group of young and ultra-competitive, neo-liberal, ruthless venture capitalists who dominate Wall Street, with their conspicuous consumption (including reckless drug abuse), and their disregard for conservative, bourgeois or 'moral' norms of behaviour, Mudrooroo's narrative is a story about an essential loner, an average middle-class professional with pretentions at intellectual depth that hide his underlying schizoaffective disorder. The distance between provincial, suburban Brisbane and the cut-throat metropolis of Lower Manhattan clearly underlines the essential difference between the two texts.

Sangya Magar

In November 2001, Mudrooroo found himself in Kathmandu. It was not an auspicious beginning to his Asian exile. He noted in his diary:

> Last night I got pissed, got into a fight […] was pretty stupid for an old man like me to get into some sort of fight and what is more enjoy it. […] is such a wanker and such things are bound to happen to him.

On the same page, he wrote down a poem, entitled 'Nasty':

> Sitting in a bar in Kathmandu with my fingers stinking
> of another woman
> While I promise eternal faithfulness to a whore […]
> Who cares a fuck, I live, I love, I die
> With the smell of a woman lingering to ensure my rebirth.[35]

Six months later, he married again. Mudrooroo's fifth wife was a much younger woman, Sangya Magar, a 'janajati', of Indigenous Nepalese ancestry. The couple have a son, Saman Nyoongah Magar, born in the same year. Unlike the previous relationships which had revealed a somewhat misogynistic husband, aloof, sometimes arrogant, emotionally distant and proprietary, exhibiting little warmth and less passion, Mudrooroo, in his sixties, presented a gentler, caring personality,

34 NLA: Ms Acc01.036, Box #4, items 21 and 22.
35 NLA: Ms Acc 13.042, item 3.

even though a lingering air of sexism persists. Age seemed to have mellowed him; his diary entries reveal an apparently genuine affection for his wife.

> I spend the days happily with Sangita. We enjoy each other's company, and I don't want to lose her. Sometimes I feel I shouldn't be so happy; after all, the country is in a mess and people are being killed. […] I know that I am at the peak of my powers as a writer and Annalisa's Mongrel Signatures should help me. So typically, I have no reason to be unhappy. I feel that it is because of Australia and my upbringing and all that stupid past.[36]

Elsewhere, he wrote about his new wife: "She is a good little bitch, but stubborn. I love her body and her mind".[37] But theirs was by no means an easy, uncomplicated relationship, and the precarious conditions of life in exile with an uncertain future, in a country amid a Maoist uprising and widespread civil unrest, inevitably took their toll.


Appendix 7(Gha)
(Related to rule 19(1)
Foreigner Registration Certificate
Last Name Middle Name First Name
1. Name: ~~Mr/Ms/Miss~~: NYOUNGAH MUDROOROO
2. Nationality: AUSTRALIAN 3. Date of Birth: 21-08-1938
4. Passport No. L8221301 Date of Expiry: 03-02-2010
5. Category of Nepalese visa: MARRIAGE
6. Validity of visa: 28-09-2009 Visa File No.: M-100/058
7. Affiliated Agency/Office/Company:
8. Number of Family Members:
Page No. of Record Register:: 40/76 865
Immigration Officer

Fig. 1: Residence Permit
(NLA, Ms 7600, Acc. 3.42, Box 1)

Mudrooroo's stay in Nepal was contingent on his tourist visa that could be extended a month at a time. Marriage was the obvious solution to obtaining a semi-permanent residence permit (see Fig. 1), but the Nepalese authorities objected to the age difference (44 years) between the partners. Unperturbed, Mudrooroo set out to forge the application for a marriage licence, photocopying

36 The reference is to Annalisa Oboe's collection of essays, 'Mongrel Signatures'. Mudrooroo apparently hoped it might contribute to his rehabilitation in Australia.
37 NLA Ms Acc/3.042, Journal # 3, entry 27/4.

and scanning his passport on his computer, and changing the birthdate from 1938 to 1958. It was only a minute correction, but a clumsy effort, and the fake was immediately discovered. Fortunately, there was an easy way out: "Nepal is one of the most corrupt countries in the world".[38] A bribe needed to be paid, but was there enough money?

Another complication arose when Sangya found out she is pregnant. This is "a whole new ballgame", Mudrooroo writes in his diary:

> Now I will have a young brown-skinned girl to look after […]. So big changes with me. As long as I can stay here things will be okay. […] I thought that an old man had less sperm to achieve fertilization. It seems not though it might be a false claim. If not, a father with a nice little brown baby. But Sangita and I didn't seem over wrought by the happening. Such is love.[39]

However, only a few days later, Sangya experienced a nervous breakdown in view of the couple's "indefinite future". Mudrooroo again took to his diary:

> Existentialism versus essentialism. How to get married in the midst of a revolution? How to contact a 'corrupt' official in the midst of a blackout? Have the Maoists […] sabotaged the power lines? […] What to do when your woman is pregnant and she wants you to get a tablet to murder the developing fetus, or to give her poison? The problem of Kathmandu. Is the answer to both take poison and check out the afterlife? A welcome scenario.[40]

The marriage finally took place after a royalty cheque arrived that provided some financial breathing space.

It appears that Mudrooroo and his son Saman developed a close relationship. The father regularly told his son good-night stories that featured a boy hero called Sam Titan (who developed over the years into Captain Titan and eventually Universal President Titan); the tales inevitably began with 'Once upon a Time' and ended with 'The End'. At the age of eight, Sam, as his father called him, had become a great fan of science fiction, and the two actually worked together, discussing stories and devising some 'books' involving space travel and exploration.[41] Mudrooroo proudly recalled that he "developed into a true storyteller" and that his son, seemingly much too young for stories that reflected "life in a poor developing country […] undergoing the throes of modernism through revolution, political turmoil and popular global culture,' was a "true child of his times and […] familiar with the sounds and images of curfews, demonstrations, baton charges […] and strikes as well as space missions to Mars and beyond".[42]

At last, the future seemed assured for the new family. The civil war in Nepal eventually came to an end, with the Peace Accord of 2006 foreshadowing the abolition of the monarchy and the establishment of a republic in 2008. A period

38 NLA Ms Acc/3.042, Journal # 3, entry 19/4.
39 NLA Ms Acc/3.042, Journal # 3, entry 17/4.
40 NLA Ms Acc/3.042, Journal # 3, entry 21/4.
41 Three such 'books' (bound computer printouts with illustrations of spaceships, comets, planets, etc.) are in the possession of Tom Thompson: The Invincible Boar King. A Father and Son Story, by Mudrooroo and Sam (2012) that draws on science fiction narratives as well as Hindu popular mythologies; Oh My Gosh, by Sam Magar, edited by Mudrooroo (2012), a global story about a meteor to strike ten years after the beginning of the narrative; and Titan – Planetary Stories (2018), a collection of shorter pieces.
42 Mudrooroo: Bedtime Super Stories. In: id.: The Confessions (1938-2000), p. 6.

of relative stability and security ensued. Then fate intervened: Mudrooroo is diagnosed with prostate cancer, the Nepali idyll comes to an end. The family returned to Australia in 2011, after a decade in exile, to seek medical treatment for a disease that the doctors consider terminal.

Writing in exile

In March 2001, Mudrooroo wrote in his diary:

> Seeing I haven't heard from my publisher for almost a year, I suppose my literary career is over. Tough, who cares. Carry on regardless. One writes because one wants to write, not to get published. One's first book is the most important anyway.[43]

Two weeks later, he noted, laconically: "Booked ticket to India today".[44] Even though there was no certainty that Mudrooroo would publish anything ever again, he soon recommenced writing. He initially concentrated on his diary, but soon conceived a new, major project: an autobiography in six volumes, entitled 'The Confessions' (1938-2000). It was an ambitious undertaking, motivated primarily by a desire to present his side of the story of his claim to Indigenous identity, i.e. to 'set the record straight' as he had been asked to do ever since the public discussion of his alleged imposture in the mid-1990s, as well as by his realisation that the return to Asia marked a decisive caesura in his biography that offered an obvious challenge to take stock of his life and work as he was approaching old age. The title of the project also referenced the importance of St. Augustin's life and work as a model that played a part in the teachings of the Irish Christian Brothers at Clontarf.

In a short prose piece composed in Kapan, Nepal, and dated 3 May 2010, Mudrooroo provided both a list of his published novels and other books as well as of his "Works in Manuscript and planned", the latter most prominently identified as a six-volume autobiography.[45] Writing about himself in the third person, he reports that the first volume was completed in 2004:

> 'Public Enemy is the story of the first eighteen years of my existence in which I tried to handle life,' says Mudrooroo, though with a cheeky grin which recalls some of the 'handling' with relish and then with sorrow. Life has been tough for Mudrooroo.[46]

This volume ends with the narrator's visit to the Durack family following his release from Fremantle jail. The second instalment, 'The Sweet Life' (1957-1964), completed in 2005, covers the author's life in Melbourne until the publication of 'Wild Cat Falling' and his marriage to Genevieve Katinas. The material covered

43 NLA: Ms Acc 13.042, item 1. Mudrooroo's commitment to writing echoes that of Heiner Müller whom he had quoted in the epigraph of The Promised Land (2001), the last of his novels published in Australia before he went into exile: "In memory of Heiner Müller … To keep writing as long as possible, without hope or despair". Cf. Mudrooroo: The Promised Land, p. 5.
44 Ibid.
45 Mudrooroo: The Confessions (1938-2000), p. 4.
46 Ibid.

Fig. 2: Some of the twenty-three diaries.
(NLA Ms 7600, Acc. 3.042, Boxes 1-3)

in these books actually overlaps with that in Mudrooroo's published novel, 'Balga Boy Jackson' (2017), which presents a kind of fictional alternative to the memoirs; the works frequently overlap or match, both in stretches of narrative as well as in significant details.

The third volume, initially titled 'Hi Ho to London', was completed in 2007; it was published posthumously as a stand-alone book under the title 'Tripping with Jenny'.[47] The fourth volume, entitled 'Dharma Bum', was to cover Mudrooroo's seven-year stay in India. It was conceived as a book in two parts, described by the author as an "expanded narrative based on the remembrance of his love and religious pilgrimages where liberation was the goal and life the result". However, only the first book was completed (2009), the second was to follow a year later but it is uncertain whether or how much of it was written.[48] The fate of the remaining sections of the autobiography is also in doubt. According to Mudrooroo 's plan, the fifth book, 'A Kind of Lover', was to deal with his journey to California and his doomed relationship to Elena Castaneda; it was to be the "story of their crazy kind of love affair".[49] The last volume, finally, with the working title 'The Aboriginal, 1977-1996', was to be devoted to document Mudrooro's career as an Aboriginal writer and activist: "This volume will be jam packed with people and incidents and will give a picture of radical Aboriginal affairs in the latter part of

47 Mudrooroo: Tripping with Jenny (2019).
48 Mudrooroo: The Confessions (1938-2000), p. 5.
49 Ibid.

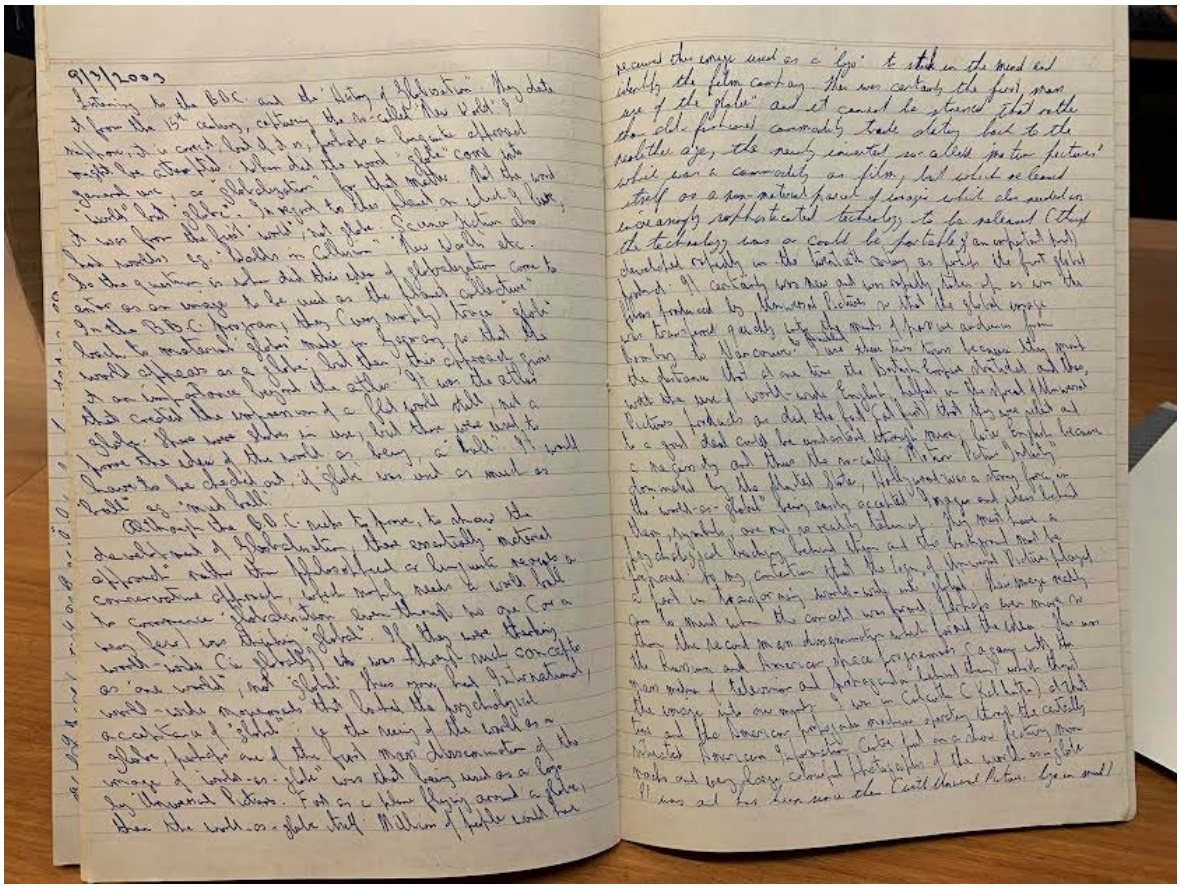


Fig. 3: Handwrittten Diary, dated 9 March 2003
(NLA Ms 7600, Acc. 3.042, Box 1, Journal 4)

the 20th century".[50] According to Tom Thomson, who has the first four volumes in his possession, it is not clear whether the final two volumes were indeed written. There is a possibility that the manuscripts may be held by Mudrooroo's widow and her son in Brisbane, but this remains unconfirmed at the time of writing.

The Asian Journals

The 'Asian Journals of Mudrooroo, Nepal', as they are titled in the National Library's inventory, are the heart of Mudrooroo's literary estate. They comprise 17 notebooks in the A4 format; some are in the form of calendars, others are exercise books or ledgers used for accounting purposes, of different volume but mostly well over a hundred pages. The last diary is nearly triple the size; it comprises 285 hand-written pages (see Fig. 2).[51]

What the journals have in common is that they are all very densely written, with hardly a square centimetre left uncovered on any page, except for an occasional paragraph break. There are very few headings in the writing, except for the dates mentioned at the start of a new entry. Mudrooroo begins writing in the top left corner of the back of the book's front cover, and he does not stop until he

50 Ibid.
51 It is in the possession of Tom Thompson, the executor of Mudrooroo's literary estate.

reaches the bottom right-hand corner of the back cover. The next volume then starts where the previous one left off; sometimes, there is a gap of a day or two.

The illustration (see Fig. 3) may give an idea of the difficulties involved in reading the diaries. Mudrooroo's handwriting is challenging, to say the least, and the sheer volume of the hundreds of pages of material is daunting. During my research, I got very frustrated; I spent hours trying to decipher the entries but could really only scratch the surface.[52]

Without a comprehensive reading and analysis of the diaries in Mudrooroo's estate, it seems unwise to speculate about its potential significance. However, two observations might be made with some degree of certitude. The diaries constitute a unique, nearly complete and seamless collection of biographical source material that cover, almost day-to-day, the last twenty years of Mudrooroo's life. Given the veracity in his life writing, it can be assumed that they also contain an unflinching account of the medical history of himself as a cancer patient, from diagnosis to within a few days of death. The anamnesis contained in the journals will likely provide the story of a professional writer fearlessly documenting his terminal illness. Furthermore, it is the final chapter in the unbelievably picaresque account of an author and public intellectual whose life story, in all its highs and lows, from prison to the academy, from mendicant monk on the back roads of India and Thailand to award-winning Black Australian author with a world-wide reputation, is simply without equal.

Mudrooroo's achievements as a pioneer of Aboriginal literature are peerless. As Indigenous Australia's first novelist and its original literary and cultural theorist whose work was, indeed, devoted to exploring and giving substance to the very idea of Aboriginality, he was an undisputed intellectual leader who straddled the colour line in his native country with ease. Even after the public scandal that led to his fall from grace, with the dubious reliance of his enemies on genetic markers as alleged proof of identity, his most strident critic had to confirm that "his was the voice of Indigenous Australia".[53] Today, Mudrooroo's works are widely available, in print and as e-books, due to digital technology and the efforts of his present publisher, Tom Thompson of ETT Imprint. The actual, physical remains of Mudrooroo's work, the manuscripts and letters, and all the written documents relating to his life and work collected in the archives in Perth and Canberra, are available to researchers. Mudrooroo's literary estate is part of Australia's cultural heritage. As the legacy of one of the country's most important and famous writers, it is of national significance. However, it remains largely unnoticed as of today, overlooked by all but a handful of scholars, most of them from overseas, in danger of falling wholly into oblivion in his own country.

52 I spent a total of 12 days on two different visits at the National Library in Canberra and one week at the State Library in Perth. I regret that I am not very good at deciphering other people's handwriting, but colleagues who I consulted had similar experiences. Clearly, what is needed is funding for a professional reader who could transcribe and/or digitize the diaries.

53 Maureen Clark: Mudrooroo, p. 19.

References

Clark, Maureen: Mudrooroo. A Likely Story. Brussels: Peter Lang 2007.
Fischer, Gerhard: Genesis of a Theatre Project. In: Gerhard Fischer (ed), The Mudrooroo/Müller Project. A Theatrical Casebook, Kensington: UNSW Press 1993, pp. 3-17.
——: 'Twoccing' Der Auftrag to Black Australia. Heiner Müller 'Aboriginalised' by Mudrooroo. In: Gerhard Fischer (ed), Heiner Müller. ConTEXTS and HISTORY, Tübingen: Stauffenburg 1995, pp. 141-164.
James Griffin, 'Cash, Deirdre (1924-1963)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/cash-deirdre-9707/text17137, published first in hardcopy 1993, accessed online 15 May 2024.
Hoad, Brian: Tense Tale of Future Past. In: The Bulletin, 16 February 1996, p. 73.
Kisch, Egon Erwin. Australian Landfall. Melbourne: Macmillan 1969.
Lehmann, Hans-Thies: Heiner Müller's Spectres. In: Gerhard Fischer (ed), Heiner Müller. ConTEXTS and HISTORY, Tübingen: Stauffenburg 1995, pp. 87-102.
Mudrooroo: The Confessions (1938-2000), Kapan, Nepal, 3 May 2010 (6 pages; Computer Printout, Private Collection Tom Thompson).
——: The Confessions of Mudrooroo, Book 2: The Sweet Life. Melbourne 1958-1965, 2005 (Computer Printout, Private Collection Tom Thompson).
——: The House with the Yellow Door. In Southerly: 74, 2014, 3, pp. 62-132.
——: The Promised Land. Sydney: Angus & Robertson 2000.
——: Tripping with Jenny. Exile Bay: ETT Imprint 2019.
——: Us Mob. Sydney: Angus & Robertson 1993.
Narogin, Mudrooroo: Writing from the Fringe. A Study of Modern Aboriginal Literature. Melbourne: Hyland House 1990.
Rohan, Criena: The Delinquents. London: Gollancz 1962.

DOI: 10.35515/zfa/asj.41/2024.11

Australian Studies Journal
Zeitschrift für Australienstudien
41 — 2024

Timeline

Colin Johnson/Mudrooroo

21 Aug 1938	Colin Johnson born in East Cuballing, WA, two months after death of his father
1947	Separated from destitute mother, sent to Clontarf Boys' Home, Perth, WA
1955	Release from Clontarf, care of Catholic Welfare Office
1956	Perth Children's Court, convicted of breaking and entering, assault; sentenced to 12 months prison in Fremantle Jail
1957	Second conviction, car theft; sentence increased to 18 months
1958	Meets Mary Durack, after release from prison short stay in her house, moves to Melbourne, care of Aboriginal Advancement League
1960	First publication: short story 'Finish' (Westerly, 3, 1960)
1960-64	Various jobs as public servant, including State Library of Victoria; studies for Matriculation Certificate
1965	Publication of 'Wild Cat Falling' (Sydney: Angus & Robertson); 'first novel by part-Aborigine' (Mary Durack)
	Marries Jenny Katinas, a refugee from Lithuania; first trip with Jenny to London (overland, via Thailand, Cambodia, India, Nepal), return to Melbourne January 1966
1967	Constitutional referendum passed: Aborigines to be included in census, Federal Parliament given power to legislate Aboriginal affairs
1967	Second trip to Asia; Jenny returns to Australia (1968) while Colin spends next six years in India as travelling Buddhist monk
1972	Aboriginal Tent Embassy, Canberra, ACT
1974	Return to Melbourne
1975	Travels to San Francisco, meets Ferlinghetti, ends up living on the streets and in Salvation Army asylum; work on second novel, 'Long Live Sandawara'
	Return to Melbourne, meets Indigenous activist Harry Penrith (Burnum Burnum), beginning of long history of involvement in Aboriginal politics and protest movement
1976	Works with Colin Bourke at Aboriginal Research Centre, Monash University
	Travels to Tasmania to research work-in-progress, 'Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World'
	Contact with Tasmanian activists (Mansell family)

1977	Begins study towards B.A. (Hons.) at University of Melbourne; teaches course for Aboriginal students at Koorie College (Victoria Aboriginal Health Service)
1979	Publication of 'Long Live Sandawara' (Melbourne: Quartet Books; ETT Imprint 2020)
1980	Marriage to Julie Whiting, university librarian; son (Kalu) born 1985, daughter (Malika) born 1988
	Publication of 'Before the Invasion: Aboriginal Life to 1788' (Melbourne: OUP), co-authored with Colin Bourke and Isobel White
	Co-founder, with Jack Davis, of National Aboriginal and Islander Writers, Oral Literature, and Dramatists Association (AWOLDA)
1981	South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature, Christchurch, NZ
1982	Writer in Residence: Murdoch University, Organiser First Aboriginal Writers' Conference
1983	Conference on Commonwealth Literature, Bayreuth, Germany
	Publication of 'Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World' (Melbourne: Hyland House; ETT Imprint 2019)
	Tutor, Koori College, Melbourne
1986	Association for Commonwealth Literature Conference, Singapore
	Commonwealth Literature Conference, Edinburgh
1987	Completion of B.A. (Hons.), Murdoch University, Perth
	Lecturer, University of Northern Territory
	Co-convenor, with Jack Davis, AWOLDA conference, Perth, 'Telling our stories … our way'
	First National Black Playwrights Conference, Canberra, workshop 'Wild Cat Falling'
1988	Widespread protests against bi-centenary celebrations
	Divorce from Julie Whiting
	Lecturer, University of Queensland
	Colin Johnson moves to Bungawalbyn, Northern NSW; adopts pen/trade name Mudrooroo (legally registered as Mudrooroo Narogin, later Mudrooroo Nyoongah)
	Visit to remote Aboriginal communities
	Publication of poetry collection, 'The Song Circle of Jacky and Selected Poems' (Melbourne: Hyland House)
	Publication of 'Doin' Wildcat: A Novel Koori Script as Constructed By Mudrooroo' (Melbourne: Hyland House; ETT Imprint 2016), and 'Dalwurra: the Black Bittern' (Perth: UWA Press), ed. Veronica Brady and Susan Miller (cycle of poems)
	XIth Conference on Commonwealth Literature, Aachen-Liege
	Antipodes Conference, Amsterdam

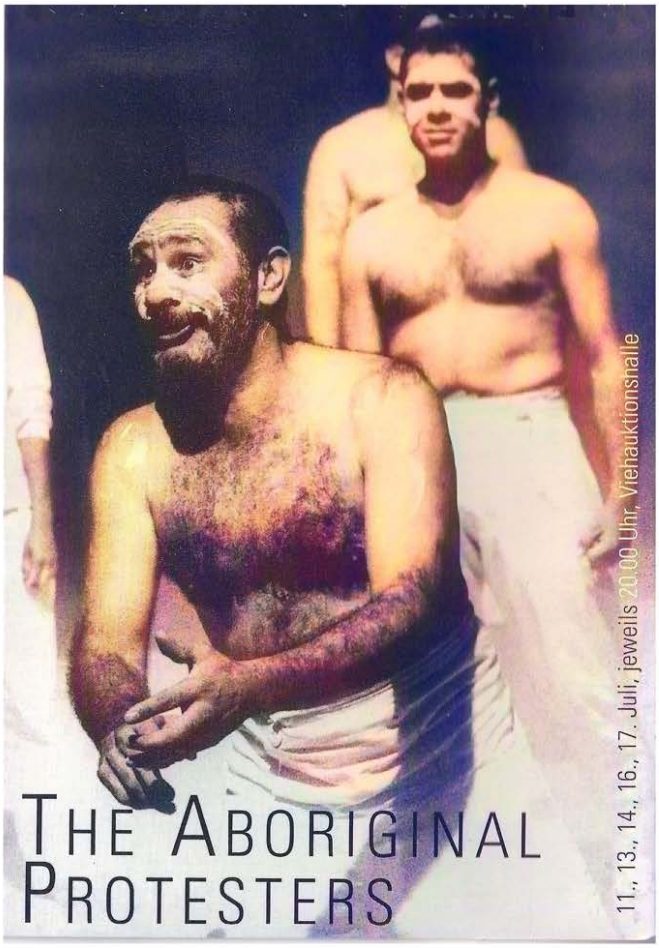
1989	Death of mother (aged 91)
	Western Australia Literature Award for 'Dalwurra'
	Senior Writers Fellowship, Australia Council (July 1989 - July 1991)
	Lecturer, University of Queensland (1988/89), Introduction of Indigenous Literature Course
1990	Publication of 'Writing from the Fringe: A Study of Modern Aboriginal Literature in Australia' (South Yarra, Vic.: Hyland House), and 'Paperbark. A Collection of Black Australian Writings' (St. Lucia, Qld.: UQP), ed. by J. Davis, S. Muecke, Mudrooroo and A. Shoemaker), contains Mudrooroo, 'Struggling. A Novella' (pp. 199-290)
	Participates in 'Belles Étrangères' (Australian Writers Program in Paris, May 1990)
	Member, Aboriginal Arts Board, Australia Council (until 1992)
1991	Appointment as Head of Aboriginal Studies, Murdoch University, Perth (5-year contract)
	Stanner Award, for 'Writing from the Fringe'
	Publication of 'Master of the Ghost Dreaming: A Novel' (Sydney: Angus & Robertson; ETT Imprint 2020), and 'The Garden of Gethsemane: Poems from the Lost Decade' (South Yarra, Vic.: Hyland House)
	July-September, Writer-in-Residence, Centre for Performance Studies, University of Sydney; work on the 'Mudrooroo/Müller Project'; including two-week workshop with Brian Syron and Aboriginal actors, followed by public reading of 'The Aboriginal Protesters' at Belvoir Theatre, Surry Hills
	Human Rights Commission Award (Media), for 'Master of the Ghosts Dreaming'
1992	Publication of 'Wildcat Screaming' (Pymble, NSW: Angus & Robertson)
	Publication of 'Wild Cat Falling', Imprint Classics Edition, introd. by Stephen Muecke (Pymble, NSW: Angus & Robertson)
	Double Winner of WA Premier's Award (Best Entry and Best Poetry Collection)
	Reunion with siblings, Perth
1993	Publication of 'The Mudrooroo/Müller Project. A Theatrical Casebook', ed. Gerhard Fischer (Sydney: UNSW Press); 'The Kwinkan' (Pymble, NSW: Angus & Robertson)
	Special Prize, NSW State Premier's Award, with special reference to 'The Aboriginal Protesters'
1994	Publication of 'Aboriginal Mythology: An A-Z Spanning the History of Australian Aboriginal Peoples from the Earliest Legends to the Present Day' (London: Aquarian; ETT Imprint 2020)

1995	Publication of 'Us Mob: History, Culture, Struggle. An Introduction to Indigenous Australia' (Sydney & London: Angus & Robertson), and 'Pacific Highway Boo-Blooz: Country Poems' (St. Lucia, Qld.: UQP)
1996	Marries Janine Little; moves to Macleay Island (Moreton Bay, Qld.)
	Premiere of 'The Aboriginal Protesters' at The Performance Space, Redfern, Festival of Sydney (10 January)
	June-July, tour with cast of 'The Aboriginal Protesters' in Germany, performances in Weimar and Munich (July 1996).
	Begins work on verse drama 'Iphigeneia in Buchenwald' (based on Goethe's 'Iphigenie in Tauris')
	Publication of 'Identity Crisis' by Victoria Laurie, 'The Australian Magazine' (20-21 July)
	Dumbartung Aboriginal Association, Perth, releases public statement denying Mudrooroo's claim to Nyoongah identity and Aboriginal descent (27 July)
	Kate Challis RAKA Award for 'Us Mob'
1997	Publication of 'The Indigenous Literature of Australia: Milli Milli Wangka' (Melbourne, Vic.: Hyland House)
1998	Publication of 'The Undying' (Pymble, NSW: Angus & Robertson; ETT Imprint 2021)
1999	Publication of 'Underground' (Pymble, NSW: Angus & Robertson; ETT Imprint 2021)
	Referendum to establish Australian Republic fails
2000	Publication of 'The Promised Land' (Pymble, NSW: Angus & Robertson; ETT Imprint 2021)
2001	Leaves Australia to begin self-imposed exile in India and Nepal
	Lecture tour to Italy, following G-8 Summit at Genoa
2002	Marriage to Sangya Magar, native of Kapan, Nepal; son (Saman) born 2002
2011	Return to Australia for medical treatment, resides at Brisbane
2013	Mudrooroo reads 'Wild Cat Falling' for Bolinda Audio
	Publication of 'Old Fellow Poems' in India and recording for ETT Audio
2015	Publication of 'An Indecent Obsession' (ETT Imprint; ebook)
2017	Publication of 'Old Fellow Poems' (Sydney, ETT Imprint)
	Publication of 'Balga Boy Jackson' (Sydney, ETT Imprint)
2018	Publication of 'Tripping with Jenny' (Sydney, ETT Imprint)
20 Jan 2019	Death of Mudrooroo, Brisbane

Australian Studies Journal
Zeitschrift für Australienstudien
41 — 2024

New Publication

22 October 2024



A PLAY BY MUDROOROO

Edited by Gerhard Fischer

IMPRINT CLASSICS

Mudrooroo's play, 'The Aboriginal Protesters Confront the Proclamation of the Australian Republic on 26 January 2001 with the Production of "The Commission" by Heiner Müller', was first performed by an all-Aboriginal cast at the Festival of Sydney, on 11 January 1996. The show, described by one critic as 'a landmark in Australian theatre', was a huge popular and critical success. It was subsequently invited to festivals in Germany (Weimar and Munich) where it was equally successful. Today, it is largely forgotten, in the wake of the campaign against its author following the public questioning of Mudrooroo's professed Indigenous identity.

More than a quarter of a century later, with the proclamation of an Australian Republic seemingly as remote as ever, the play remains one of the most topical, and demanding, challenges to Australian theatre practitioners.

Available worldwide in October 2024.

Details from ettimprint@hotmail.com or write to PO Box R1906, Royal Exchange NSW 1225 Australia.

The Editors

Managing Editors

Stefanie Affeldt is an independent researcher who investigates the history of colonialism, racism, and whiteness in Australia. She holds a B.A. in Sociology from Macquarie University, an M.A. in Cultural and Social History from the University of Essex, and a Dr. rer. pol. from the Universität Hamburg. Stefanie's research focuses on analyzing the history of racism and whiteness in Australia. Her publications include 'Consuming Whiteness. Australian Racism and the 'White Sugar' Campaign' (Lit 2014), 'Buy White – Stay Fair' (Oxford Handbook of Political Consumerism 2019), 'Conflicts in Racism' (Race & Class 2019), 'Racism Down Under' (ASJ|ZfA 2019/20), 'Kein Mensch setzt meinem Sammeleifer Schranken' (Tor zur kolonialen Welt 2021), 'A Peculiar Odor is Perceptible' (ASJ|ZfA 2023), and 'Zenit des Weißseins (WerkstattGeschichte, 2024). Stefanie's DFG-funded post-doctoral project 'Exception or Exemption?' (2018-2022, University of Heidelberg) analyzed multiculturality and racist conflict in the Broome pearling industry. After this, she was a fellow at the Trierer Kolleg für Mittelalter und Neuzeit, where she researched the German contribution to colonization in Australia – the project is ongoing.

Stefanie is also a member of the executive board of the Gesellschaft für Australienstudien | German Association for Australian Studies (GASt) and the academic advisory board of the Specialised Information Service Anglo-American Culture (FID AAC).

She serves as the *Lead Managing Editor* of the 'Australian Studies Journal | Zeitschrift für Australienstudien'.

Christina Ringel completed her Ph.D. at the University of Cologne with a thesis on possession in the endangered Aboriginal language Miriwoong. She has held a post-doctoral position at the University of Cologne, a position as Subject Librarian at the Technical University of Dortmund, and is currently pursuing a post-doctoral project at the Technical University of Dortmund. Christina's recent publications were concerned with app development for endangered languages, the role of Country and self-determination in revitalisation, and contributions of linguistics to Native Title Claims.

Christina is a research affiliate at Centre of Excellence for the Dynamics of Language and a member of Australian Linguistic Society, the Foundation for Endangered Languages, and the Society for Endangered Languages, and the German Association for Australian Studies. She serves as Affiliate Team Member at the Centre for Australian Studies, on the Board of Directors of Cologne Centre of Language Science and on the Advisory Board of the Specialised Information Service Anglo-American Culture.

In the editorial team of the 'Australian Studies Journal | Zeitschrift für Australienstudien', Christina acts as *Reviews Editor*.

General Editors

Dany Adone is Professor and Chair of Applied English Linguistics at the University of Cologne and Co-Director of the Centre for Australian Studies. She is also an Adjunct Professor at the College of Indigenous Futures, Arts & Society at CDU, a Visiting Professor at AIATSIS, a Visiting Scholar at the Language and Culture Centre in Kununurra, and Associate Professor at the University of Sydney. She has lived in Arnhem Land / NT, Australia for many years. Her current research projects focus on Environmental (In)justice, and Indigenous Sign Languages of Australia. ORCID: 0000-0001-9707-5444.

Eva Bischoff is Assistant Professor at the University of Trier. Her second thesis reconstructs the ambiguous role Quakers played in the process of settler colonialism in 19th-century Australia: 'Benevolent Colonizers in Nineteenth-Century Australia. Quaker Lives and Ideals' (Palgrave MacMillan 2020). She has taught at the Universities of Cologne, Bonn, and Münster in North American History and Postcolonial Studies and worked as a Lecturer at the Department of North American History of the John-F.-Kennedy Institute and as a Postdoc Researcher at the DFG Research Center on 'Governance in Areas of Limited Statehood'. At the University of Trier she teaches classes on Global History, British as well as German Imperial History and Gender History.

Carsten Wergin is Associate Professor of Anthropology at the Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies, Ruprecht-Karls-University Heidelberg. He is co-chairperson of the GASt and founding member of the Environmental Anthropology working group of the German Association for Social and Cultural Anthropology (DGSKA). His research is located at the intersections of heritage, culture and ecology and has resulted in diverse journal articles and books that include 'Materialities of Tourism' (Tourist Studies 2014, co-edited with Stephen Muecke) and 'The Call of the Trumpet Shell' (HeiBOOKS 2018, with Corinna Erckenbrecht), a monograph on German anatomist and explorer Hermann Klaatsch and his work in the Kimberley region of Northwest Australia.

The Contributors

Guest Editor

Gerhard Fischer is Honorary Associate Professor in the School of Humanities and Languages at UNSW, Sydney, and Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. A historian and a literary scholar, he has written on World War I ('Enemy Aliens', 1989) and Australian migration history, on modern German literature (numerous articles on Brecht, Heiner Müller, Enzensberger, W.G. Sebald, and others), and on contemporary theatre ('GRIPS. Geschichte eines populären Theaters', 2002). His collaboration with Mudrooroo ('The Mudrooroo/Müller Project', 1993) on Müller's 'The Mission' resulted in Mudrooroo's original play 'The Aboriginal Protesters', first performed at the Festival of Sydney (1996) to great public and critical acclaim ("landmark in Australian theatre") and subsequently invited to tour in Germany.

Text Contributors

Stephen Muecke is a Senior Research Fellow at the Nulungu Research Institute, Notre Dame University, Broome, Emeritus Professor of Ethnography at the University of New South Wales, and a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. A recent book is 'The Children's Country. Creation of a Goolarabooloo Future in North-West Australia', co-authored with Paddy Roe, 2020. His translation of Bernadette Bensaude-Vincent and Sacha Loeve's 'Carbon. A Biography', was published in 2024.

Lorenzo Perrona is a critic, teacher, and translator, with research interests in literary theory and postcolonial criticism. He graduated from the University of Genoa and holds a Ph.D. from the University of Lausanne. During 1994–1995, he was awarded a scholarship by the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee to conduct research at La Trobe University. He translated into Italian Mudrooroo's 'Wild Cat Falling' ('Gatto selvaggio cade', Le Lettere, Firenze 2003), as well as stories and poetry by Mudrooroo, Archie Weller, Brian Castro, Jack Davies, Lionel Fogarty. His work on Indigenous Australian literature includes essays in A. Oboe [ed.]: Mongrel Signatures. Reflections on the work of Mudrooroo' 2003, and Sheila Whittick [ed.]: 'The Pain of Unbelonging. Alienation and Identity in Australasian Literature', 2007.

Laura Singeot is Associate Professor in Cultural and Visual Studies at Reims University. She is interested in the representations of Indigeneity in contemporary Indigenous literatures and visual arts from Australia and Aotearoa-New Zealand. Her methodology rests on a comparative transdisciplinary approach, drawing from concepts theorized in decolonial thought. Recent publications focus on Indigenous self-representations (of cultures, bodies and environments), as in her articles 'Māori Cultural and Bodily Rebirth in Alan Duff's Once Were Warriors Trilogy' (Commonwealth, Essays and Studies, 44, 2022, 1), and 'The Desert and Swamp Tropes in Post-Apocalyptic Australian

Indigenous Fiction: "Terra Nullius" by Claire Coleman and "The Swan Book" by Alexis Wright' (Commonwealth, Essays and Studies, 43, 2021, 2).

Paul Spickard is Distinguished Professor of History and Affiliate Professor of Asian American Studies, Black Studies, Chicana/o Studies, East Asian Studies, Middle Eastern Studies, and Religious Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He has held positions at 19 universities and institutes around the world. He has written or edited 24 books and over 100 articles on race, migration, identity, and related topics, including: 'Shape Shifters. Journeys Across Terrains of Race and Identity' (2019); 'Race in Mind' (2015); 'Global Mixed Race' (2014); 'Race and Nation. Ethnic Systems in the Modern World' (2005); 'Racial Thinking in the United States' (2004); and 'Mixed Blood. Intermarriage and Ethnic Identity in 20th-Century America' (1989). His current project is 'Race Changes. Shifting Identities in World History'.

Tom Thompson was publisher for the Australian Bicentennial Authority, and publisher of Literature at Angus & Robertson before acquiring a major part of the A & R backlist in 1995. As principal of ETT Imprint, he has represented Mudrooroo from his time in Nepal, commissioning his last novels and re-publishing his complete works. ETT Imprint specialises in Australian classics, including the works of Ion Idriess and Arthur Upfield (29 'Bony' mysteries published in English, French and German). Thompson is currently co-producing a new Film/TV series featuring Upfield's Aboriginal detective 'Bony'. His own works include the memoir, 'Growing Up in the 60s', and histories of Kings Cross, Parkes and Hurstville Oval (all with Elizabeth Butel). As producer of Sydney Writers Week (1985–88), he commissioned many of Australia's major poets, authors and artists. Garry Shead's portrait of Thompson won the 1993 Archibald Prize.