Blurring Representation: the Writings of Thomas King and Mudrooroo

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Abstract

This thesis explores the issues of representation and identity through an examination of the writings of Thomas King and Mudrooroo. The particular focus of the dissertation is on the similar yet distinctive ways these authors explore past and present possibilities for representing Indigenous peoples in fiction. This discussion has a largely Canadian-Australian cross-cultural comparison because of the national milieux in which each author writes. The research question, then, addresses the authors’ common approaches to Indigenous, colonial and postcolonial themes and the similar textual attitudes to the act of representation of identity in writing.

In order to explore these ideas the chapters in the thesis do not each focus on a particular author or even on a specific text. Each chapter examines the writings of both authors comparatively, and reads the novels of both Thomas King and Mudrooroo thematically. The themes unifying each chapter occur in four major movements. Firstly, the Preface and Chapter One are primarily concerned with the methodology of the thesis. This methodology can be summarised as a combination of general postcolonial assumptions about the impact of colonial texts on representations of Indigenous peoples; ideas of reading practice coming from North American and Australian Indigenous writing communities and cultural studies theories on race. A movement in argument then occurs in Chapters Two and Three, which focus upon how the authors interact with colonising narratives from the past. Chapter Four shifts from this focus on past images and explores how the authors commonly re-imagine the present. In Chapters Five and Six the dissertation progresses from charting the authors’ common responses to colonising narratives — past and present — and
engages in the writings in terms of the authors’ explications of Indigenous themes and their celebrations of Indigenous presence. These chapters analyse the ways in which King and Mudrooroo similarly re-envisage narrative process, time and space. Overall, the thesis is not interested in authorisations of Thomas King and Mudrooroo as ‘Indigenous writers’. Rather, it argues that these authors on either side of the world use very similar techniques to reject previous representations of Indigenous people, and, importantly, attempt to change the meaning of and approach to representation.

In so doing this thesis finds that the novels of both authors respond to colonising semiotic fields, as well as reducing the importance of such fields by incorporating them within a larger framework of repeated and multiple evocations of Indigenous identity. The writings of both Thomas King and Mudrooroo share a self-conscious textuality. The same tales and emblems are repeated within each author’s entire oeuvre in order to reinforce their thematic trope of re-presentation as a constantly evolving process. Finally, the thesis concludes that a significant common effect of this similar approach to re-presentation is an emphasis on the community over the individual, and a community that can be best described as pan-Indigenous rather than specific.
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Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted for a degree or diploma at any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief the thesis contains no material published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signed: ..............................................

Date: ...............................................
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Preface

Representations and Re-presentations.

This thesis examines ways of presenting identity through the cross-cultural comparison of specific Canadian and Australian writings. Terry Goldie has drawn attention to similarities in the representation of Indigenous people by non-Indigenous authors in Australia and Canada, but a lengthy cross-cultural comparison of some of the literary responses to this image of the indigene remains largely undeveloped. This thesis explores the literature of Thomas King and Mudrooroo, authors writing in the Canadian and Australian context respectively, who do respond to the traditional representations Goldie discusses. These authors have been selected, in part, due to a common ambiguous speaking position in terms of their strictly locatable geographical and cultural identity. More importantly, they have been selected because of the similarly complex ways in which both authors use fiction to focus on stories told and past images created about culture and identity.

Questions of how to discuss and focus upon representation and images elicit tangled webs of both politics and semantics. This thesis begins by introducing some of the methodological options available for discussing the writing of Thomas King and Mudrooroo in terms of theories of identity and postcoloniality and, importantly, notions of ‘Indigenous’ based theoretical reading practice. The dissertation then explores some of King’s and Mudrooroo’s postcolonial responses to colonial imaging of the indigene. The final sections of this work explicate a movement in both authors’ writing, beyond simple response. These latter three chapters, covering such areas as

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contemporary identity, written form, and time and place, focus on Thomas King’s and Mudrooroo’s common reinterpretations of some crucial terms and, consequently, their common diffuse ways of talking about identity, and of expanding methods of responding to, and telling, stories.

(i) Some Definitions and Limitations

It is important to define and differentiate some of the terms in frequent use in this dissertation. A number of terms have been artificially differentiated in order to clarify meaning in this thesis. The words ‘imaginary’ and ‘Indian’ are frequently combined to signify the stereotyped past and coeval representations of Indigenous people in both Canada and Australia. The terms ‘image’ and ‘indigene’ are juxtaposed to indicate the same phenomenon. The word ‘indigene’ is capitalised and transformed into an adjective — ‘Indigenous’ — to clarify the denotation of ‘actual’ peoples as opposed to constructions of those peoples.2 Additionally the hyphenating of the word representation has been introduced in this thesis. This hyphenation is used to highlight the authors’ attempts to move from stable, fixed representations; ‘indigenes’, to more fluid suggestions of the many possible re-presentations of Indigenous peoples.3 Such hyphenation also indicates the ways in which the writing can react to readers’ desires for the author to act as a ‘representative’ Indigenous person. Margery Fee has discussed the problems surrounding this desire in relation to C.K. Stead’s reservations about the ‘authenticity’ of Keri Hulme’s The Bone People. Fee notes that such desire can reflect a ‘demand to hear … ‘authentic’ accounts that

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2 This thesis does not, of course, argue that it is possible to escape the fact that all representations are constructs.

3 This hyphenation is slightly different to Spivak hyphenation of the word to indicate the two elements involved in the one representational act; representation as speaking for and re-presentation as comprehending through interpretation. See SPIVAK, Chakravorty, 1988 in MORETON-ROBINSON, Alleen. Talkin’ Up to the White Woman: Aboriginal Women and Feminism. St Lucia, QLD: University of Queensland Press, 2000, xxii.
reflect … those written by White anthropologists and those Pakeha writers who borrow this material’. 4

It must be made clear that the use of the term ‘Re-presentation’ in this thesis is not intended to indicate ‘authenticity’ on the part of either author, but rather is used to indicate their fluid and repeated textual enunciations. 5 In fact, throughout the dissertation there is an engagement in the subversive and emancipating potential notions of ‘liminality’ can offer re-presentations of identity. The narrators of both authors’ writings, for example, are always in between positions, never fixed as the authentic ‘speaker’. Perhaps the same could be said of the authors themselves. 6 Emphasis on the text as liminal space means that the thesis studies both authors’ works as emphasising process over arrival in the figuring and constructing of identity. The study draws on widely disparate theoretical terms to support this textual analysis from Paula Gunn Allen’s ‘boundary busting’ and Gerald Vizenor’s ‘trickster discourse’ to postcolonial notions of ‘rehearsal’ and ‘negotiation’. 7 The terminological differences can, then, be described as follows. The construct ‘imaginary Indian’ and ‘image of the indigene’ are contrasted with ‘Indigenous’ peoples and even ‘re-presentations of Indigenous peoples’, terms that denote social relations and beings and (more importantly for this thesis) an avoidance or rejection of the construct. More generally, these terms can be distinguished as ‘image/ing’, ‘imagining’, ‘representation’ and ‘representative’ versus ‘re-presentations’. Use of

5 Jace Weaver has coined the similar phrase “(re)presentation” to evoke a style of writing that refutes colonial and White American figuring of Native Americans.  WEAVER, Jace.  That the People Might Live: Native American Literatures and Native American Community.  New York: Oxford University Press.  1997, 163.
6 The personal identities of the authors is discussed below is section (iv) of this preface.
7 See section (ii) of this preface for detailed definiton of these terms.
these terms is underpinned by various literary and cultural studies theories, all of which share an emphasis on the dismantling and destabilising of hierarchies and binary oppositions in favour of more repetitive and organic textual expressions.

At this point, it is also important to clarify my own speaking position in the construction of this dissertation. I am a non-Indigenous Anglo-Australian female, a potentially problematic position for interpreting and reading ‘Indigenous Literature’ because of the politics and history of dominance in Australia and Canada. As Helen Hoy has emphasised, the position of the non-Native scholar studying Native literature is ‘replete with opportunities for romanticizing, cultural ignorance, colonisation — and, ironically, simultaneous professional advancement’.

Such readings essentially effect a recolonisation of text by the academy. Beyond romanticising and ignorance the critic can also risk the ‘creating of simple Native/non-Native binaries, [and the] reducing [of] these texts to cultural documentation’. Arnold Krupat, editor of *New Voices in Native American Literature* (1993) also emphasises the destructive potential of the critic, adding that it is not simply the binarising of Native and non-Native that is oppressive but the antithetical positioning of Native and the academy that politically skews research. In addition he points to the damaging propensity of researchers to participate in ‘the use of totalising biological categories; deployment of imperialising and excluding jargon [and] the naturalising of speaking positions’.

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8 Arnold Krupat has stressed how important it is for non-Indigenous researchers to acknowledge this history and continuing sociological experience when embarking on study of Indigenous cultural productions. See KRUPAT, Arnold. (ed.) Introduction. *New Voices in Native Literary Criticism*. Washington: Smithsonian Institute Press. 1993, xxii.


The struggle to avoid these colonising readings is inherent in the thesis statement of this dissertation. The reading is concerned with analysing the ways in which the texts themselves free re-presentations of Indigenous people rather than seeking to excavate how the texts embody potentially ‘romantic or ignorant’ representations of the indigene. In fact, in many ways the dissertation is responding to King’s and Mudrooroo’s textual and creative treatment of precisely these tendencies involved in the dominant cultures’ readings of Indigenous culture. Following key Native critic Greg Sarris’ suggestions for interpretative strategy, I have sought to discuss the subversive dialogue King’s and Mudrooroo’s texts hold with the novels, histories and assumptions of my own Anglo-European culture rather than to uncover or obtain a ‘complete knowledge of the text or the self as reader’.  

The thesis continually recognises and emphasises the contestedness of ‘truth’ and in so doing has abandoned any pretence of ‘pure’ research while actively seeking to ‘prioritize Native voice’ in terms of its methodological framework. Therefore, the thesis is often responding to interpretative cues from within the novels, such as textual symbols which suggest reading strategies. Interviews discussing the topic of approach to text have been carried out with both Thomas King and Mudrooroo. This consultative process has been extended through interviews with key members of the Indigenous writing community in Canada and Australia. As will be discussed below the methodology is also informed by postcolonial theories and, most importantly, by a

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12 See below on p xl.
14 WOMACK. 1999, 4.
16 Personal Interviews were conducted with Melissa Lucashenko, Archie Weller, Sam Watson, Jackie Huggins, Sandra Phillips, Jeannette Armstrong, Greg Young-Ing as well as various university teachers and curators of Indigenous literature and art.
wide selection of the productions of Indigenous theorists in Canada and Australia.

This dissertation is a meaningful textual engagement that first and foremost aims to open up discussions on the writings of Thomas King and Mudrooroo rather than to provide a definitively final analysis of the works.

Thomas King and Mudrooroo are prolific writers creating work in most genres, and it has not been possible to analyse every text of each author. Poetry is the most significant omission from the primary sources. In addition, while King has written film, television and radio drama scripts and Mudrooroo has written a play, these genres are investigated only as they provide examples to support the *oeuvre*-based connections in each author’s work, rather than as key textual sites for exploration.

Both authors’ short prose writings are dealt with in a similar fashion. The dominant genre for exploration in this dissertation is the novel form, as used by Thomas King and Mudrooroo. Prose is a genre that does not readily offer itself as a performed form, and yet it is the argument of this thesis that these writings suggest performative

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17 A comprehensive list of King’s poems can be found in: Jane FLICK. *Reading Notes for Green Grass, Running Water* (including list of works by Thomas King). *Canadian Literature*. 161/162, Summer/Autumn 1999, 140-172.

Mudrooroo has also had poetry published in a variety of journals and has written four collections of poetry including:


18 Most notably King has written and performed in the popular radio series *Dead Dog Café Comedy Hour*. Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Radio One, Toronto, 1996 - 1999, and *Medicine River*. Directed by Stuart MARGOLIN. Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and Medicine River Productions, 1993. King has also written many radio and television drama scripts.


19 See King’s collection *One Good Story, That One* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 1993) for example. Also, variously published other pieces of short fiction as well as the authors’ children’s stories: *A Coyote Columbus Story* (Toronto: Groundwood Books, 1992) and *Coyote sings to the Moon* (Toronto: Key Porter, 1998).

Mudrooroo is not such a prolific short prose writer but has several published pieces including the story *Struggling*. In: Jack DAVIS, ed. *Paperbark: A Collection of Black Australian Writings*. St Lucia, QLD: University of Queensland Press, 1990, 199-290.
qualities. The dissertation explores writing that re-presents; in texts that evoke rehearsal and performance within the confines of prose. Both Mudrooroo and Thomas King are arguably most well known for their novels. And it is, ironically, in this genre (that was so long believed to be an exclusively European or western producer of meaning and art)\textsuperscript{20} that language, sign and identity play are most evocatively sustained in each author’s collected body of work.

An important element in suggesting a comparative analysis between these very different authors lies in the fact that they have both written non-fictional pieces of academic analysis and discussions of reading practice.\textsuperscript{21} These critical writings have been used extensively in this thesis; they inform the methodological framework used to analyse the creative writing pieces rather than being the subjects of textual analysis themselves. Most important to the methodology has been these authors’ similar scepticism about postcolonial theory. Mudrooroo has suggested that postcolonial theory within the academy, and more specifically the bracketing of Indigenous literature within ‘postcolonial literature’, is another colonial strategy. He uses images of consumption creatively to describe this process:

Suddenly on the literary horizon has appeared a beast of somewhat dubious appearance […] called postcolonial literature, and like all predators it will eat your


\textsuperscript{21} Mudrooroo has written \textit{Writing from the Fringe: A Study of Modern Aboriginal Literature}. South Yarra, VIC: Hyland House, 1990. This was recently revised as \textit{The Indigenous Literature of Australia: Milli Milli Wangka}. South Yarra, VIC: Hyland House, 1997. He has also written many articles published in journals over the last twenty years.


King has also co-edited \textit{The Native in Literature: Canadian and Comparative Perspectives} with Helen HOY and Cheryl CALVER. Toronto: ECW Press, 1987.
writings up, digest them, and shit them out as turds of colonial bullshit. [...] It is one of those postcolonial problems, perhaps inherent in language, and the academic and colonial process, that even if you deny the postcolonial beast, your discourse still continues to feed its voracious appetite.  

King also critiques the assumptions behind the term ‘postcolonial’. The problem King stresses, is implicit in the term itself. The ‘post’ prefix is semantically dependent on acknowledging the existence of precolonial and colonial literature. In the case of ‘Native’ writing the precolonial orature is completely divorced and independent from the ‘colonial’ writing of the colonisers, the two cannot be yoked. Similarly, King argues that the use of the prefix post, is suggestive of ‘progress and improvement’, which threatens to devalue precolonial orature or worse truncate the link between contemporary Native literature and oral traditions. The term postcolonial literature and many theories within postcolonial studies, King warns, focus primarily and often exclusively on the ‘struggle between guardian and ward [a]s the catalyst for contemporary Native literature, providing those of us who write with method and topic’. This dissertation repeatedly returns to the rejection of literature as merely response. And while it deploys postcolonial theories, the thesis seeks to avoid theoretical constructions that delineate text only as counter discourse. The dissertation also extends theoretical readings beyond the purely postcolonial, forming an eclectic theoretical selection from the Indigenous and Black writing communities of Australia and North America.

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The methodological framework of this dissertation, therefore, is textual analysis through the combination and reworking of many theoretical ideas. These ideas will be expanded upon below. Naturally it has not been possible, within the confines of this thesis, to discuss all potentially relevant themes and theories. For example, one of the key differences between these two authors is their representation of women. An area for further study might be the significant contrasts between Mudrooroo’s more arguably misogynist writings and King’s particular evocations of androgyny. While these questions are touched on in Chapter two part (iv) and Chapter four part (vi) of this thesis in depth discussion of these themes is largely absent from the thesis as a whole. Postmodernism is another theoretical framework that elicits fruitful analysis. In some ways, the postmodern celebration of instability epitomises many of the thesis conclusions about re-presentations of identity in King’s and Mudrooro’s fiction. But postmodern theories are not fully explicated in this thesis, and are largely limited to the work of Native North America critic Gerald Vizenor. A significant problem with postmodern theories on the production of text is the tendency of postmodernism to elide or reduce the potency of history and politics. As Creek-Cherokee critic Craig Womack remarks, it is potentially ‘premature for Native scholars to deconstruct history when we haven’t yet constructed it’.

A final disclaimer is necessary. This thesis is not assessing claims of ‘authenticity’ in the image of Indigenous peoples; it is not focused on what is incorrect and what is ‘true’ but rather is a textual analysis comparing two authors’ fictional treatment of representation and re-presentation. In addition, while I am fully

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25 See below on pxxxii-xxxiii.
cognizant of the debates concerning authenticity for the authors as individuals\textsuperscript{27}, this
dissertation is not prescribing authenticity or inauthenticity for Mudrooroo and King,
as people, as writers, or in terms of their textual enunciations.

(ii) Methodology and what has gone before?

(ii) a) ‘Postcolonialism’ and ‘Race’ as reading categories?

Despite the reservations about postcolonialism discussed above, both King and
Mudrooroo have been variously used as ‘representatives’ of postcolonial writing.
King’s novel \textit{Green Grass, Running Water} is used as an example of the genre of
magic realism by the key postcolonial critic collective of Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin
in their work, \textit{Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies}, while Mudrooroo’s work has
been frequently associated with the postcolonial strategy of ‘writing back’.\textsuperscript{28}

This thesis relies upon some important assumptions within the postcolonial
debate. The assumption that text is an important element of the colonising method,
for example.\textsuperscript{29} Postcolonial theory has been marked by vigorous debate. This debate
is too extensive to cover comprehensively in this preface, but it is necessary to
emphasise those parts of this debate that inform the methodological progression of the
dissertation. The postcolonial notion of counter discourse is the initial vantage point
used to explicate King’s and Mudrooroo’s literary re-presentation of the indigene. As
is explored in chapters one, two and three of this dissertation, both authors ‘map’ out
colonising discourses in order to uncover their inherent inaccuracies and semantic

\textsuperscript{27} These debates will expanded upon in section (iv) of this Preface.
\textsuperscript{29} As Leela Gandhi has noted, many post-colonial critics, such as Alan Lawson and Chris Tiffin, assert the centrality of the text in maintaining the colonial process. See: Alan LAWSON and Chris TIFFIN (1994) quoted in GANDHI, Leela. \textit{Postcolonial Theory: A critical introduction}. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1998, 142.
power plays. But as Homi Bhabha has formulated, readings can be limited by interpreting writing as merely a response to or focus on hegemonic discourses and texts. Therefore other exegeses within the postcolonial debate, such as rehearsal, hybridity and concepts of magic realism also form part of the methodological framework of this thesis. Revising Bhabha’s discussion of a ‘hybrid’ or ‘third’ space expands readings beyond an essentialist opposing of colonising and colonised discourses. The third space is not a fixed location; it is created through continual movement and rehearsing of images of identity. The avoidance of interpretative closure is also enabled through the application of postcolonial notions of magic realism. Magic realist theories recognise the possibility for text to extend representation of the ‘real’ through dialectic between fantasy and realism, in which neither genre is hierarchically elevated above the other.

There is one component of the wider bracket ‘postcolonialism’ that is reworked more than any other in the thesis, but, as shall be explained below, not without reservation. The existence of the semiotic field of the indigene in Australia and Canada is an important methodological assumption. The phrase ‘semiotic field of the indigene’ is taken directly from Terry Goldie’s 1989 critical work *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literatures*. Goldie applies the phrase to both Canada and Australia and defines it in this fashion:

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30 TIFFIN, Helen. 1987, 23.
[...] the shape of the signifying process as it applies to indigenous peoples is formed by a certain semiotic field, a field that provides the boundaries within which images of the indigene function. [...] The indigene is a semiotic pawn under the control of the white sign-maker. And yet the individual signmaker [...] the Western [...] writer can move these pawns only within certain prescribed areas.34

As may seem obvious, this image or semiotic field is completely without any ‘real’ context. As with all sign / signifier relationships, the connection between the two is arbitrary, but the constructedness of this particular image is a potent element of its power. Such constructions can be resilient and impervious to change because, as Goldie has stated, ‘the signifier, the image here presented, does not lead back to the implied signified, the racial group usually called Indian [...] and by association Aboriginal [...] but rather to other images’.35 The image and those it leads back to hold particular political currency and are part of the colonial process. The image consisting of components such as overt sexuality, violence, orality, mysticism, and connections with the natural and the past, has not been overtly deviated from since colonisation and holds many of the same resonances in contemporary imaging of Indigenous peoples.36 It is one of the arguments of this dissertation that King and Mudrooroo similarly illustrate the semiotic field of the indigene as unchanging over time in their creative writing. For example, Chapter Two focuses in part on the rejection by both authors of the distinctions between such categories as colony, empire, and nation. The authors commonly reject such distinctions on the basis that representations of Indigenous peoples in history, media and literatures remain

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34 GOLDIE, Terry. 1989, 9-10.
35 GOLDIE, Terry. 1989, 1.
36 GOLDIE, Terry. 1989, 5.
unchanging whether they be promoting colonial, national or imperial visions of Canada and Australia.

Another important facet of Goldie’s defining of the semiotic field of the indigene is that while the image can have both positive and negative connotations — to be either noble or savage\(^{37}\) for example — ‘the Other is only of interest as it comments on the [white] self’.\(^{38}\) And the image of the indigene is of interest to the white self because it provides a pathway of legitimacy on the occupied landscape, through appropriation of the indigene or conversely de-validating of the indigene.\(^{39}\) The writing of images of Indigenous people eases the anxiety of what Hodge and Mishra have termed the ‘bastard complex’\(^{40}\) or the fear of illegitimacy in a land taken by force.

The specific components of the semiotic field of the indigene are largely demonstrated in the wealth of literary and cultural theory on the inscription of the ‘Other’, and all are mythologies in the Barthesian sense. Goldie’s particular categories include associations with: nature; sex and violence; orality; mysticism; and the pre-historic.\(^{41}\) I would expand upon these to add the well-known postcolonial categories of the myth of the dying race and the myth of the Native / non-Native partnership in colonisation. Goldie’s delineation of the semiotic field of the indigene

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\(^{37}\) Shepard Krech III has noted that stereotypes do in fact shift to continue the work of oppression. The image of the Noble savage in North America has in recent years morphed into the ‘Ecological’ Indian, an image which serves the political agenda of Environmentalists, yet still denies Indigenous people human and cultural valuing because of the inherent conflation of indigene with nature. See KRECH III, Shepard. *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History*. New York: W.W Norton and Company. 1999, 22-24.

\(^{38}\) GOLDIE, Terry. 1989, 11.

\(^{39}\) GOLDIE, Terry. 1989, 12.


\(^{41}\) GOLDIE, Terry. 1989, 15-17.
cannot be accepted uncritically. Some critics have pointed out that Goldie’s prognosis is needlessly depressing and ignores the resistance of Indigenous writers and theorists.⁴² A more fluid term is the ‘imaginary Indian’.⁴³ The term ‘imaginary Indian’ or ‘imaginary Aboriginal’⁴⁴ is sometimes preferred to ‘semiotic field of the indigène’ in this thesis because I do not concur with Terry Goldie’s hypothesis that the specifics of such a field are inescapable.⁴⁵ Colonising mythologies are effectively satirised, rejected or re-framed in the work of both King and Mudrooroo. They are dealt with variously; for example, the writing style of both authors, abounding with repetitions, songs, ceremonies, tricksters and humour is actually reminiscent — as much as any written form really can be — of orality. But the content satirises the notions of many of the white characters. Such satirising assumptions include the idea that Indigenous identity is limited to forms outside contemporary Canadian and Australian epistemologies; in other words, that identity must be limited to ‘Other’ ways of knowing the world. Both authors create a new fictional world in which there are many interacting and swirling parts. Over-riding the response to each individual component of the image of the indigène in both authors’ work is a rejection of the notion that an all-containing and concrete field of ways of knowing Indigenous peoples (and the whole universe) is possible or adequate. This makes their work both stimulating and difficult. The critic’s goal to seal interpretation is continually confounded by both authors’ fiction.

⁴⁴ As Aileen Moreton-Robson has noted Aboriginal identity has similarly been relegated to the White Australian imagination. See MORETON-ROBINSON, Aileen. 2000, xxiv.
The idea of race informs most discussions of identity and its representation. Many theorists have examined the figuration of race. Cultural theories conceptualising race repeatedly assert its illegitimacy as a meaningful framework.

Kwame Anthony Appiah has asserted that ‘[t]he truth is that there are no races: there is nothing in the world that can do all we ask race to do for us’. Appiah, using a critique of the ideas of pan-Africanist, W.E.B. De Bois, deconstructs assumptions about the possibility of race as a unifying category. Appiah finds flaws and gaps in logic in a socio-historical interpretation of race. He argues that while De Bois sees a socio-historical validation of the conception of race as non-biological and productive, such arguments are actually dependent on the biological. Biological distinctions are also discredited because, he argues, genetic differences between racial groups are too statistically unsubstantial. It is culture that is emphasised in Appiah’s conclusions.

The preference for cultural rather than racial affiliation is an important aspect of the reading of the writings of King and Mudrooroo in this dissertation. This being so, race cannot be ignored. As Margery Fee has noted, the knowledge that race is a construct permeates academic theory but there seems to be an inability to abandon it as an invigorating concept. As such, ideas and theories of race that have been explicated in the past are acknowledged in this dissertation, which explores two authors who demonstrate the simultaneous existence of race as a construct and the very real complexities race evokes. Discussions of culture, race and identity, particularly viewpoints from critics such as Stuart Hall and bell hooks, are examined.

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in detail in Chapter One of this thesis. At this point, it is more relevant to discuss how
the work of Rey Chow explicates some of the key textual preoccupations of both
King’s and Mudrooroo’s writings.\textsuperscript{50}

Chow recognises the possibilities of ‘the image’ as ‘site of possible change’
and as ‘the place where battles are fought and strategies of resistance negotiated’.\textsuperscript{51}
But her article systematically unpacks many of the problematic assumptions present
in this treatment of image, particularly the image of the Native. Most importantly, she
demonstrates that often readings of the renegotiation of the image are based on ideas
of the Native as lacking, on a concept that new images are dependent on a subversive
relationship with the original colonising image.\textsuperscript{52} Secondly, she unveils the critical
desire to restore an authentic image of the Native. In so doing, Chow asks a question
which is pertinent to the thematic concerns of both King and Mudrooroo. As she puts
it:

\begin{quote}
[h]ow would we write this space in such a way as to refuse the facile turn of
sanctifying the defiled image with pieties and thus enriching ourselves
precisely with what can be called the surplus value of the oppressed, a surplus
value that results from exchanging the defiled image for something more
noble?\textsuperscript{53}
\end{quote}

Chow’s conclusion is that the image of the Native can only really be seen as the ‘the
non-duped’, and she seeks to free the image from the dialectic ‘deadlock between

\textsuperscript{52} CHOW, Rey. In: Angelika BAMMER, ed.1994, 128.
This thesis draws in part on these vital questions and reconceptions. The novels of both authors are read in terms of the ways in which they re-present colonial and colonising image and images of Indigenous peoples in order to move from a dialectic dependent on the all-pervasive power of the coloniser. It is this gesture away from image as victim that, perhaps more than any other structural or thematic element, aligns the writings of both authors and to this end this thesis has selected postcolonial and race based theories that emphasise a move from conceptualising identity and, indeed, story, as fixed. Additionally, because postcolonial ideas have been well-worked in the Canadian and Australian academic environs, the methodology of the dissertation has been supplemented by some other fruitful approaches which focus on the open-endedness of story, particularly ideas of the function and operation of story coming from Indigenous writing communities in Australia and North America. There can be no idea of the ‘other’ without a notion of who is doing the othering, but story telling can attempt to move beyond combative stances, toying with, and re-framing, past and present images as well as re-acting to or re-versing them. It is also significant to the methodological choices for this thesis that both of the fictional authors chosen write work of theoretical analysis that profess a deep antipathy to the term postcolonial. It is the problematics of response inherent in the term postcolonial that these quite different explorations of terminology share, and this is one of the reasons that the methodological framework of the dissertation has been extended beyond broader postcolonial and race-based theories.

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(ii) b) ‘Indigenous writing’ as a Category?

The attempt to write identity outside a dialectic of oppressed and oppressor is shared by many Indigenous writers in Australia and Canada. Much has been written on ‘Indigenous writing’ as a category in these countries. Key examples of such pieces include the seminal works in Australia and Canada respectively of *Black Words*, *White Page* by Adam Shoemaker, and Penny Petrone’s *Native Literature in Canada*.57 While such texts imply a response or reply to past images, they do seem to be focussing more on the genesis of a Native *oeuvre*. Such works are an important starting point for this thesis, but depart from such studies in order to explore the writings of King and Mudrooroo in terms of goals and technique, as textual practice rather than vital historical and sociological or phenomenon.

An example of writing that seeks to redress this focus on Indigenous writing communities as sites of creative rather than critical production is *New Voices in Native American Literature* (1993) edited by Arnold Krupat. Plurality of approach is fundamental to this collection. Rather than seeking to locate essential, unified qualities to define Native Literature the work has no consistent ‘subject matter, method, perspective, or mode of discourse’.58 The inclusion of work outside the academy and indeed outside North America has been a deliberate attempt to address some of those concerns of the recolonising of text by critic voiced in part (i) of this preface. In fact Krupat is basing his approach to the editing of the work on the advice


58 KRUPAT. 1993, xxviii.
of Hopi Tribal Council Chairman Vernon Masayesva, advice that emphasises the reality of Indigenous experience rather than reality as outlined by the Western empirical tradition.\textsuperscript{59} This collection of articles is ordered according to three broad groupings. These include: ‘Performances and Texts’, acknowledging the intrinsic link between these two elements in much Native cultural production; ‘Authors and Issues’, covering those articles dealing specifically with an individual author or issue within the larger community of Native writing; and finally ‘Ethnocritiques’. This final term is defined by Krupat as work that deliberates on texts that ‘cross the borders between West and non-Western’.\textsuperscript{60} If any one focus links the various articles in this collection it is a valuing and prioritising of Native voice.

Most important to this study are those works which analyse groups of writers from Indigenous communities and how the writing functions in like ways. In Australia, Mudrooroo’s own \textit{Writing from the Fringe}, recently re-released as \textit{Milli Milli Wangka: Indigenous Literature of Australia}, is still the most comprehensive Australian comparative analysis. Mudrooroo’s hypothesis, particularly as it is redeveloped in \textit{Milli Milli Wangka}, is that the literature of black Australians shares some important components and should be situated as central to the larger study of literature and culture in this country. While there are many problems with both versions of Mudrooroo’s theoretical work, primarily his predilection to overtly \textit{prescribe}, and more recently to \textit{imply} categories of authenticity and value in reading Indigenous texts,\textsuperscript{61} many of his observations are significant to this comparative

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{59} MASYESVA, Vernon in Arnold KRUPAT ed. 1993, xix.
\textsuperscript{60} KRUPAT. 1993, xxiv.
\textsuperscript{61} Mudrooroo’s comments on Sally Morgan in both texts are the most obvious instances of this process. See: Mudrooroo NAROGIN. \textit{Writing from the fringe: A Study of Modern Aboriginal Literature}. South Yarra, VIC: Hyland House, 1990, 149; and MUDROOROO. \textit{The Indigenous Literature of Australia: Milli Milli Wangka}. South Yarra, VIC: Hyland House, 1997, 192-3.
\end{footnotesize}
Firstly, in the latest edition he discusses the subversive potential of the use of ‘maban reality’ (a variant on the term magic realism) in some recent writings, including his own. Mudrooroo also identifies the way in which such writing has been marginalised, not just academically but in a very practical sense in terms of its packaging and distribution. He defines the concerns of such work as being primarily to evoke positive communitarian images and politicise the rejection of negative images. In terms of re-presentation, Mudrooroo argues that ‘Indigenous writing’ evinces themes of the community over the individual and of the political function of story in reaffirming and re-presenting that community. These two facets seem to be true of his argument regardless of the definition of community (a specific tribal grouping versus larger pan-Indigenous sense of community, for example).

The link between re-presentation of images and land and community is emphasised in the writings of Aboriginal feminist theorist, Aileen Moreton-Robinson. She defines the themes of Aboriginal women’s perspective as ‘sharing an inalienable connection to land; a legacy of dispossession, racism and sexism; [and] resisting and replacing disparaging images with self-defined images’. Moreton-Robinson is objecting to the prominence within feminist writing of an assumed universal norm of gendered experience and an expectation that Aboriginal experience must exist within the realm of ‘difference’ rather than be centralised as independent discourses. In these sentiments Moreton-Robinson is joined by Aboriginal writer/activist/historian, Jackie Huggins. Huggins expresses her frustration with the notion that it should be
the responsibility of Aboriginal writing to explain Aboriginal oppression. Here she is indicating a need to move from a role of writing as purely response to the oppressor. Instead, Huggins emphasises the communal impetus of writing and states that ‘most Indigenous Australian writing […] is […] a sharing concept’. These authors stress the dual concepts of such politics and community. These notions underpin this study of image and re-presentation and it is part of the justification for the methodological framework of this thesis that these sentiments are echoed in the Canadian analysis of Indigenous Literature.

Looking at the Words of Our People, edited by Jeannette Armstrong (coordinator of the En’Owkin Creative Writing School for First Nations’ students in Penticton, British Columbia), is a vital collection in examining images of Indigenous peoples in writing. It includes an analysis of King’s novel Medicine River. The premise behind the larger collection is that readings should be informed by an understanding of the cultural, tribal specificities and contexts of the piece of writing. But both King and Mudrooroo are potentially writing out of, and for, a community that is non-specific, more pan-Indigenous, as King puts it: ‘I am this Native writer who’s out in the middle — not of nowhere, but I don’t have strong tribal affiliations’. So the value of Armstrong’s collection of articles lies not so much in the identification of specific community as the primary theme of Indigenous writing, but in a method of decoding and appreciating that literature as a piece of a living culture. As Armand

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67 HUGGINS, Jackie. 1998: x.
70 KING, Thomas quoted in Jace WEAVER. 1997, 149.
Ruffo puts it, ‘the culture and the literature itself becomes more than a mere museum piece, dusty pages, something lifeless’. This thesis draws on this concept, and examines instances where both Mudrooroo’s and King’s works evoke, thematically and structurally, living and unrestricted re-presentations.

Most Indigenous theorists agree that essentialisms and fixed images must be avoided. Indigenous theorists who emphasise the mutually complimenting focus on non-ossified image of identity and power of community include Craig Womack’s Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism (1999) and Devon A Mihesuah’s editing of the collection Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing about American Indians (1998). Another key collection that informs the methodological underpinnings of this dissertation is the 1999 text Native North America: Critical and Cultural Perspectives edited by Renée Hulan. Hulan points out that Native theories often enable productive discussion of the way in which Indigenous text can be read within the university setting. At one level this involves a close textual reading of the texts themselves, deriving analysis from within the text rather than assessing it through external theories. This does not foreclose on external and varied theoretical perspectives. In fact all of these works emphasise and promote methodological frameworks that draw on an eclectical array of reading praxis while prioritising Indigenous voice within the critical encounter. The focus areas in these methodological texts are neatly summed up in Armand Ruffo’s article ‘Why Native

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75 See MIHESUAH 1998 and WOMACK 1999.
Literature’ within the Hulan collection. Ruffo plots the concerns that frequently unify ‘Native Literature’ as including: land; community; protest; politics; and an harmonious and integrated relationship between history and the secular and myth and the trickster not usually seen in Western critical discourses.76

The refusal to make the trickster and history mutually exclusive is intrinsic to this reading of the writings of Thomas King and Mudrooroo. The work of Gerald Vizenor is therefore vital to this exegesis. In fact, apart from the notion of the semiotic field of the indigene, a key theoretical notion employed in this thesis is that of Gerald Vizenor’s ‘trickster discourse’. The term 'trickster', itself, has not only been used in relation to the Indigenous oral cultures of Australia and North America. Indeed, it has had cultural inferences from times and locales all over the world. To evoke this term does not, in itself, connote specificity.77 For the purposes of this work, however, a loose definition of the trickster will be employed along with Vizenor’s more specific theoretical implications of this term. Despite huge cross-cultural differences, the trickster figure and the discourse surrounding him/her has been chosen as a unifying principle in this thesis. This is because of the similar structural forms and thematic emblems in the work of King and Mudrooroo, which trickster-like tales also commonly embody.

In terms of methodology it is important to note that while Vizenor is drawing upon tribal knowledges he is also making use of Bakhtin. General interpretations of

Bakhtin’s theories are useful to this thesis. Notions of carnivalesque writing which emphasis collective community, popular culture, the upsetting of hierarchies and the mocking of authority and the sacred are all present in both King’s and Mudrooroo’s fiction. Their writing enacts a kind of Bakhtian escape of character from author, in that they replay colonial stories in such a way that sees the Indigenous characters escape the roles prescribed them by the original authors. Purely Bakhtian readings are enriched by reference to Vizenor’s critical work, and it is Vizenor’s theories that are frequently applied to King’s and Mudrooroo’s writing in this thesis. There are three main concepts from Vizenor’s critical work that are employed in this dissertation. Most important is Vizenor’s assertion that story, or trickster discourse, is open-ended, repetitive and playful, in a constant dialogue with other stories. Secondly, there is an idea of the possibility of images within stories becoming tropes rather than signs. In other words, any one emblem of identity or even reality can be elicited but not defined as representative. Thirdly, there is a concept of ‘trickster discourse’ as an expression of many voices and sentiments, not of one privileged individual. The critic favours a post-modern theoretical perspective, where there is ‘acceptance, even glorification, of play, chance, indeterminacy, and self-conscious performance’. Vizenor’s work, then, is used as a theoretical tool for understanding the common strategies used in the literature of King and Mudrooroo.

Jace Weaver’s work is used to bring such strategies into focus in this thesis.

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80 Vizenor phrases this as ‘communal sign, comic discourse’ in Gerald VIZENOR, ed. 1989, 193.
81 RUSSELL, Charles quoted in Gerald VIZENOR, ed. 1989. 192.
Weaver is engaged in a project to bring to light shared qualities of ‘Native writing’ and discuss several important First Nations’ writers in North America. It is important to clarify and reiterate at this point that I am not seeking to read Mudrooroo and King as Native or Indigenous writers *per se*, but rather I am reading their fiction in terms of re-presentations of colonial interactions and of images of identity. Theories on reading practice for ‘Indigenous writing’ are used alongside other methodologies to expand critical vantage-points, and not to *legitimise* King or Mudrooroo as authors.

Weaver discusses the theoretical and intellectual writings of First Nations’ academics and his overview of this methodological framework provides some of the reading praxis for this dissertation. Firstly, he points out that the diversity in discussions of community are not mutually exclusive and are drawn from the variety of community influences, such as emphasis on chance, ceremony, or exile. These differences can be juxtaposed and are actually productive and allow for a non-prescriptive vision of writing practice. He also points to a writing that emphasises a ‘sense of place’ and, importantly, enacts a rejection of ‘the often nearly irresistible pull to remake Native peoples in the image of White America’. But ultimately, Weaver’s central premise, as a First Nations’ academic, is that ‘Native literatures are, ultimately, quests for community’, rather than for the individual. Identity and re-presentation of identity are intrinsically tied to this notion of community, community as interaction, as responsibility, as living and in process. This dissertation draws on all these principles and examines the results of King’s and Mudrooroo’s like re-presentation of image and identity to suggest a similar evocation of the nature of ‘community’. Weaver’s citing of James Clifford is pertinent to this thesis’ deployment of the notion of community,

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82 WEATHER, Jace. 1997, 163.
83 WEATHER, Jace. 1997, 163.
84 WEATHER, Jace. 1997, 161.
'what if identity is conceived not as boundary to be maintained but as a nexus of relations and transactions actively engaging a subject?'.  

This notion of a fluid boundary is vital to the textual reading of Mudrooroo’s and Thomas King’s works in this dissertation. The writings of Paula Gunn Allen have been an important methodological reference for notions of borders around identity in this thesis. The introduction to Gunn Allen’s latest critical collection of political commentary and literary analysis embodies her directive for reading practice. Its title ‘Don’t fence me in’ refers to Gunn Allen’s argument that Indigenous cultural images and thought do not ‘easily […] fit […] into pre-existing, officially recogni[zed] categories’. Her critique lends useful impetus to this thesis’s reading of the works of King and Mudrooroo in that the discoveries of the textual analysis repeatedly reveal an evocation of fluid, multiple images. Drawing on the writings of Henry Louis Gates, Gunn Allen, like Vizenor, deploys the trickster to explicate the effect of some ‘Indigenous literature’. She asserts that the comprehensibility of the text is possible through a notion of a trickster who embodies both genders and is ‘many-tongued, changeable […] and changing’. There are many, primarily North American, critics who support this idea of story as both multiple and in process who are drawn upon throughout this thesis. Their ideas are explicated more fully in Chapter One, which introduces many of the methodological ideas of this thesis in greater detail.

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(ii) c) Work specifically on King and Mudrooroo

Individually, both authors’ work has been the subject of much study, interpretation and debate. Since Mudrooroo, then Colin Johnson, published his first novel *Wild Cat Falling* in 1965, there has been a wealth of material written on his prolific fictional output.89 Important background articles, for the purposes of this dissertation, include the work of Margery Fee, Lucy Frost, Adam Shoemaker, Debra Adelaide, Suzanne Baker, JJ Healy, David Kerr and Eva Rask Knudsen.90 Very generally, the unification behind these various articles lies in the concept of Mudrooroo’s writing as both addressing postcolonial concerns but also celebrating a kind of *multiplicity* in the textual evocation of identity. Academic writing on Mudrooroo’s fiction has slowed over the last few years, probably due to the controversy over the author’s identity.91 But there is an important yet-to-be-published

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89 For an overview of just a selection of these see: Justin MACGREGOR. An annotated bibliography of Mudrooroo. *World Literature Written in English*, 31 (2), Autumn 1991, 84-99.
book, covering a diverse range of perspectives on the author and his work, which is being edited by Annalisa Oboe at the University of Padova in Italy. Oboe also has written on the importance of Mudrooroo’s writing as suggesting a performed rather than prescribed border of Indigenous story around a pastiche of European narratives, particularly the Gothic, alongside the colonial. The critical conclusion on Mudrooroo’s textual meaning here is that ‘identity’ can be read more productively and subversively if seen as continuous transformation and in unfixed terms. In terms of comprehensive focus on this author one of the most important texts is Adam Shoemaker’s Mudrooroo: A Critical Study. The central premise of Shoemaker’s study is to argue against ‘pinning down’ Mudrooroo’s work in light of its multiple evocations of identity within community.

King, too, has drawn critics into researching his creative output, both in terms of sources and function. One of the most important collections to date is an entire edition of the journal Canadian Literature devoted to King’s novel Green Grass, Running Water. It features such diverse interpretations as analysing both the influences of, and effect of, theory, mapping, borders and cultural groups on the text. Again, these ideas support some of the assumptions of this dissertation. Indeed, since this journal also includes comprehensive notes on Green Grass, Running Water, it has been unnecessary in this thesis to trace the full literary trail that King leaves. Other important articles on Thomas King include pieces by Percy Walton, Dee Horne, Margaret Atwood, Linda Lamont Stewart, Dawn Karima

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93 SHOEMAKER, Adam. 2003 (in press).
95 See: Canadian Literature. 161/162, Summer/Autumn, 1999.
Pettigrew, Kathryn Shanley and Laura Donaldson, all of whom assert his prominence as a unique story teller and ‘trickster’ of the literary world.\textsuperscript{96} The ‘tricky’ nature of the author’s writing elicits similar critical observations to those made on Mudrooroo’s work, predominantly concerning the \textit{multiple} and unfixed representation of identity within the fiction. King’s latest novel, \textit{Truth and Bright Water}, has stimulated discussion; most significantly, Robin Ridington’s article on the importance of context in discursive readings of King.\textsuperscript{97} These ideas are developed in this thesis in terms of the effect of collaging story in the evocation of community and identity.

\textit{(iii) Why choose and compare Thomas King and Mudrooroo?}

Theoretical writing has demonstrated that the existence of a semiotic field of the indigene in Australian and Canadian writing results in limited and politically loaded images of Indigenous peoples, and despite the vast geographical distances between the two locales there are parallels in these images. The background writings also make it clear that such images can be responded to in ways that emphasise place,

\begin{enumerate}
\item DONALDSON, Laura. Noah meets Old Coyote, or singing in the rain: intertextuality in Thomas King’s \textit{Green Grass, Running Water}. \textit{SAIL} 7(2), Summer 1995, 27-43.
\item HORNE, Dee. To know the difference: mimicry, satire, and Thomas King’s \textit{Green Grass, Running Water}. \textit{Essays on Canadian Writing}. 56, Fall 1995, 255-273.
\item SHANLEY, Kathryn. Talking to the animals and taking out the trash. \textit{Wicazo Sa Review: A Journal of Native American Studies}. 14(2), Fall 1999, 32-45.
\end{enumerate}
politics and community through multiple evocations of identity and in ways that refute such defiled or nostalgic semiotic positioning. In examining fictional and textual responses to such colonising emblems, why then specifically select Thomas King and Mudrooroo as the authors for comparison? Choices must be made. Most significantly, given the focus is on ways of representing, and responses to misrepresenting, a vital element of this comparison is that Thomas King and Mudrooroo share an intense focus on the signs and texts of the coloniser, and a move from realism in re-presentation.98 Percy Walton has defined King’s writing style as ‘meta-discursive’, and meta-discursive writing practice applies equally to King and Mudrooroo. In such writing ways of representing are explored within the actual representing act and the text is less concerned with ‘trying to refer to “reality” outside of language, […] instead the text […] refers to a discourse constructed about the native’.99 So, despite stylistic differences100 between these two authors, the focus on semiotic fields and meta-discursive practice mark them out for significant cross-cultural analysis.

An interesting, if minor, point in favour of such a comparative research project lies in some of the similarities in their life trajectories. They were born five years apart, King in 1943 and Mudrooroo in 1938, and the texts discussed in this thesis were mainly written after the late 1980s when both writers were middle-aged, and when Canada and Australia were officially, if not actually, involved in acts of de-

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98 In terms of contemporary writing this is also carried out in Australia by authors such as Sam Watson in The Kadaitcha Sung (1990) and a like example in Canada might be Tomson Highway’s Kiss of the Fur Queen (1998). There are of course other examples such as Alexis Wright’s Plains of Promise (1997) or Archie Weller’s Land of the Golden Clouds (1998) in Australia or Gerry Williams’ (1994) The Black Ship in Canada. (Publication details in bibliography of this thesis).
99 WALTON, Percy. 1990, 77-84, 83.
100 King and Mudrooroo write novels in differing ways. King’s style must be described as more comic than Mudrooroo’s, Mudrooroo’s work having more Gothic or bleak undertones.
colonisation. Both authors have received international recognition for their work and have appeared side by side in postcolonial tertiary courses as ‘representations’ of Indigenous fiction. Both have worked in academia and have produced work that discusses reading practice. Given these commonalities and the theoretical background to the research area, the research questions can be framed thus:

In what ways do the apparently culturally diverse writers, Thomas King and Mudrooroo, similarly undermine past representations of Indigenous and colonial themes and do the authors’ writings display analogous attitudes to the textual act of representation itself?

(iv) Authorial Controversies

Another similarity between Thomas King and Mudrooroo is that debates and definitions surrounding authenticity, writing and identity concern both authors in personal, though very different, ways. This dissertation does not seek to resolve these personal, biographical intricacies, but it is necessary to acknowledge them at this point.

King is often externally defined as Native Canadian. And yet Jeanette Armstrong, an Okanagan academic and author, has said that Thomas King is an

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101 For example, the University of Toronto and University of Windsor in Canada run post-colonial literature or international Indigenous literature courses respectively, featuring Thomas King and Mudrooroo as representatives of their respective countries see: ENG 472Y Representing the Other in Post-Colonial Literature at www.utoronto.ca/caribbean/Pages/course%20descriptions.html (accessed 20/3/02) and course 26-204 English Department: International Indigenous Literature at http://www.cs.uwindsor.ca/units/english/html/26-204.html (accessed 20/3/02).

102 Mudrooroo worked in Western Australia at Murdoch University and at the University of Queensland and wrote Writing for the Fringe, Milli Milli Wangka and Us Mob. MUDROOROO. Personal interview with Clare Archer-Lean, West End, QLD, May 2001. Thomas King has worked at the Universities of Lethbridge and Guelph in Canada as well as working in universities in the United States. See: Barbara HAGAR. Honour Song Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 1996, 42.

excellent writer, but he is not a ‘Native’ writer.\textsuperscript{104} So the way in which such an identity position is allocated or rejected is complex. Additionally, King is usually defined as a Canadian writer by critics and publishing blurbs, because of the subject of his fiction rather than his ‘roots’.\textsuperscript{105} He is also defined as a Native writer, and while he identifies himself as of Cherokee heritage, the label Native is partly something that is externally emphasised, an element of his work’s commodification. He asserts that much of his writing could cover ‘non-Native’ subjects, but that the danger is that no-one will want to publish them […] My non-Native material is hard to get published. When people ask me for a short story they want a Native story.\textsuperscript{106}

He also states that he sees himself as variously a Canadian writer and a Native writer but not a Native Canadian writer.\textsuperscript{107} This suggests that there is a certain ‘textualising’ and even marketing of authorial identity. In publishing blurbs King is variously referred to as being Native Canadian, or of Cherokee, Greek, and German descent or simply Cherokee and Greek descent. He has spoken about the complex position of being inside and outside both the Indigenous and the Western communities, or more specifically the notion of alienation and community.\textsuperscript{108} Many of his characters experience a similar dislocation, so much so that this is largely the topic of Chapter Four of this thesis. Another complexity of his identity is that, despite his claims that he is not a theorist,\textsuperscript{109} King does occupy the dual positions of author and academic.\textsuperscript{110}

\textsuperscript{104} ARMSTRONG, Jeanette. Personal interview with Clare Archer-Lean. En’owkin Creative Writing Centre, Okanagan Reserve, Penticton, BC, October 8 1998.
\textsuperscript{105} KING, Thomas, \textit{In:} Hartmut LUTZ. 1991, 107.
\textsuperscript{106} KING, Thomas. \textit{In:} Barbara HAGAR.1996, 45.
\textsuperscript{107} KING, Thomas, \textit{In:} Hartmut LUTZ. 1991, 107.
\textsuperscript{108} KING, Thomas quoted in Constance ROOKE. Interview with Thomas King. \textit{World Literature Written in English.} 30(2), Autumn 1990, 64-5.
\textsuperscript{110} WITALEC, Janet, ed. Thomas King\textsuperscript{,} \textit{Native North American Literature: Biographical and Critical Information on Writers and Orators from the United States and Canada from Historical Times to the
His academic knowledge and analysis of the image of the indigene, (he has co-edited The Native in Literature, an anthology discussing the use of Indigenous characters in canonical North American fictions) arguably result in the particularly meta-discursive element of his writing. All of these factors mean that as an author King is not easily locatable, nor would he perhaps desire to be. As Margery Fee notes:

King’s varied perspectives as a writer and academic of mixed European and Native ancestry, as American-born Canadian, to mention only the obvious ones, have meant that he himself has had to cross many borders in constructing a place from which to write.111

Herb Wyile agrees, commenting that King’s own multiple and complex identity positions add a dimension to his writing that forces Canadian fiction to reconsider the meaning of the term ‘multicultural’.112

Mudrooroo’s biography also exists inside and outside various locales. He too has been an academic and an author of fiction.113 But his identity is one with far more complex resonances than King’s and indeed with quite tragic repercussions for the author himself in recent years. The controversial identity debate concerning Mudrooroo is by now well known in Australian, and even international literary circles. Mudrooroo was ‘unveiled’ by the publication of the results of a genealogy search done by his older sister, Betty Polglaze. Polglaze’s study found that the Johnson family, of which Mudrooroo is a member, had no Aboriginal heritage, and

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111 FEE, Margery. Introduction. Canadian Literature: Special Issue on Thomas King. 161/162, Summer/Autumn 1999, 9-11, 11.
112 WYLIE, Herb. “Trust Tonto”: Thomas King’s subverversive fictions and the politics of cultural literacy. Canadian Literature: Special Issue on Thomas King. 161/162, Summer/Autumn 1999, 121.
113 See above references.
possibly had some African-American creole migrant ancestry. This debate has not been resolved, but the way in which the Australia media treated the affair provides some fascinating evidence of the continuing existence of the semiotic field of the indigene in Australia. The introductory comment made in the *Australian Magazine* actually demonstrates circumscription and control of the ‘real’ image of the indigene:

> It sounds like the *sadly familiar* Aboriginal story. A young boy [...] suffers racism, rebels and *winds up in jail*. But [...] in time he *becomes* Mudrooroo [...] a leader in estabiling Aboriginal writing, head of Aboriginal studies at Murdoch University, Perth. And then, due to one small detail detail buried in his past, the story gets really interesting. [emphasis mine]

The short passage operates to confirm white expectations of Aboriginality. Such expectations include incarceration, surprise at Aboriginal success and the belief that racism is something to be passively experienced or suffered, rather than a phenomenon that is actively deployed by white Australians. In addition, the topic of real ‘interest’ is whether or not the subject of this passage can prove himself. Quite apart from the controversies surrounding Mudrooroo’s authenticity, the author, like King, has an identity that is in some part ‘textualised’ or constructed for the market. This does not mean that either author is a *fraud*, but it does illustrate the white desire to label and image the indigene, the same desire that is so much the theme of both authors’ fiction. Mary Durack, a self-established patron of Aboriginal youths in 1950s and 1960s, edited Mudrooroo’s first book *Wild Cat Falling* and wrote the preface to it. In fact, Mudrooroo states that her influence was so great that she changed the ending of the novel, to one more socially acceptable to white readership. Her

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introduction to the text is littered with paternalistic racism and tags delineating the then young Colin Johnson’s identity:

It might have been to his advantage had he been more conspicuously of native blood and with more of the endearing Aboriginal trustfulness and obvious will to please.118

As Mudrooroo says, Durack not only situated and defined his identity but defined how authentically close he was to her preconceived idea of it. As he says, ‘I was textualised by Mary Durack and given a race […]’.119 The problem of being ‘given’ a race is a theme enacted repeatedly in the fiction of both authors.

(v) Chapter Outlines

This thesis analyses a series of common re-imaginings of Indigenous themes and similar attitudes to the textual act of representation in Thomas King and Mudrooroo’s writings. The dissertation is ordered by and progresses through thematic and structural phenomena commonly occurring in each author’s oeuvre.

Chapter One is a methodological introduction to some of the possible approaches employed in this thesis. It does this through the application of critical ideas to textual examples from both King’s and Mudrooroo’s fiction.120 Chapter One begins with an assertion that is implied in every other chapter of the dissertation. That is, that while protest and inversion of the colonial image of the indigene is part of both authors’ strategies; they are not limited to this. To explicate how the authors move beyond the category of ‘protest literature’, discussion in this chapter revolves

118 DURAK, Mary. Foreword. MUDROOROO. Wild Cat Falling. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1965, xviii.
120 Focus in this chapter is on some short stories and radio material of King’s as well as Mudrooroo’s drama. This more generalised chapter also refers to the series of novels by both authors.
around the multiple meanings of the term ‘border’. Both authors’ reject the notion of the ‘border’ as a line to be policed. Their fiction undermines the delineation of ways of speaking about and knowing the indigene, subversively playing with the semiotic chess-board squares\textsuperscript{121} to which Goldie refers. In order to do this, borders are continually crossed, borders around time, place, the ‘real’, history, literature, all are continually transgressed in various ways. The line or border between speaker and ‘other’ becomes blurred. ‘Border crossings and boundary busting’ as Paula Gunn Allen terms them\textsuperscript{122}, become key methods of understanding the writing. Multiple forms of re-presenting Indigenous peoples, the rejection of imaginary Indians, the mixing of genres and the crossing of times are common techniques of King and Mudrooroo. The second connotation of the term ‘border’ is the notion of a surround, a frame of reference. In this case the text is framed by a new world, marked by magic realism and, importantly, a form of Gerald Vizenor’s trickster discourse, a world governed by chaos, humour, and repetition, a world not ordered by binaries or hierarchy. The theory is applied to demonstrate that writing in both authors’ work is not specific to any particular Indigenous world-view, but is rather a collage of many views and stories with a common rejection of sequence and stability, binaries and linearity. Thus Chapter One looks at the critical theorists’ contributions to readings of King’s and Mudrooroo’s re-presentation of images of the indigene.

In many ways, Chapter One provides an introduction to some of the ideas discussed throughout the remainder of the thesis, to locate the dissertation’s various

\textsuperscript{121} GOLDIE, Terry. 1989, 10.
\textsuperscript{122} GUNN ALLEN, Paula. 1998, 6.
methodological approaches to two eclectic authors. It provides many of the theoretical contexts for Chapter Two’s discussion of King’s and Mudrooroo’s common excavating and re-framing of sources from colonial literature and history. The main colonial texts selected for discussion are *Robinson Crusoe, The Leather Stocking Sagas, Moby Dick,* and *The Lone Ranger* series, as well as the *Augustus Robinson Chronicles,* and *The Shipwreck of Stirling Castle* in the Australian context. King and Mudrooroo satirise these texts because of the images of the indigene contained within each of these colonial enunciations, but also for the repetition of these images in similar tales and rewrites throughout time. This chapter explores Mudrooroo’s *Master of the Ghost Dreaming Series,* as well as *The Kwinkan* and *Wildcat Screaming* in comparison to King’s *Green Grass, Running Water,* in order to explore the common use of colonial, imperial and nation-forming texts. This chapter demonstrates that both King’s and Mudrooroo’s books reveal that the lines between nation, empire and colony and between what counts as literature and history are all blurred when it comes to the image of the indigene. In fact, the image of the indigene constructs the other side of the frontier on which empire, colony and nation are all built through historical stories and story-telling histories. The chapter looks at several categories of the imaginary Indian commonly subverted by both authors. Overall, Chapter Two explores how Thomas King and Mudrooroo do not allow the west to co-opt Indigenous culture into its own story of European ‘progress’ and blur versions of history, literature, and the representation of ‘reality’ in the process. The discussion explores how both authors re-present the image of the indigene in colonial, national, imperial texts as emblems of white fears, anxieties and desires.
The next chapter — *Gothicism and Christianity: Different Uses of Incorporation* — takes this contestation further, examining the way in which both authors illustrate a far wider consumption of Indigenous peoples than the individual colonising literatures and histories. The chapter explores the way in which the writings of King and Mudrooroo recognise the deployment of grand narrative in the creation of the semiotic field of the indigene. Two different, and in many ways opposite, grand narratives are deployed and played with to similar effect, the grand narratives of Christianity in King’s case and of Gothicism and horror in Mudrooroo’s. Both authors engage in a simultaneous satirical de-construction and strategic use of grand narrative. While this chapter is careful to point out the significant differences between the two narratives of Christianity and Gothicism, it focuses on the common double speak of innocence and guilt, attraction and revulsion evident in both discourses.

Mudrooroo’s treatment of Gothicism is intricate. The world of ‘maban’ reality is juxtaposed with Gothic emblems to demonstrate that colonisation is not simply a matter of one oppressive narrative, but of competing narratives. The dominance of the image of the vampire and of cannibalism in general illustrates also a colonial violence inherent in the system of signifying Indigenous peoples, a consuming of the image. The chapter also illustrates the way in which the author makes use of Gothic imagery, appropriates the genre in a sense, to relocate the motivation of Gothic imaging of the indigene into Euro-angst and to de-stabilise power relations. In such

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123 A term by used by Mudrooroo to evoke a kind of magic realism that resembles the dreamtime. See section (ii) b) of this Preface.
stories the colonial assumptions about who has the authority to narrate identity and truth are undermined. The Gothic style also allows the author to speak the unspeakable facts of colonisation and focus on a European form of reality that is non-rationalist and non-individualist, even as it is cruel and violent. Because Gothicism uses mystery and levels of knowing, levels of power and control are the constant themes of Mudrooroo texts, and disorder and lack of control permeate the novels, especially afflicting the narrators.

Similarly King satirises an obsession with control and order evident in the Christian ethos of good will. King’s writing delineates a strong connection between the use of Christian ideology and imperial text, thus connecting Christianity to the oppression such texts elicit. The linear and grandiose Bible narrative is conflated in his novel Green Grass, Running Water to humorous and political effect. The chapter explores King’s satirical explosion of Christian myths such as Eden, the flood, the Immaculate Conception, the Messiah. He uses his fiction to highlight that understanding Indigenous culture or identity through a Christian frame of reference impedes understanding and reduces the Indigenous entity to metaphor in Christian story, an imaginary Indian.

This chapter explores the instances in which the authors themselves employ some of the same grand narratives: King’s use of Gothicism and Mudrooroo’s use of Christianity. But the drive of the argument is to analyse not only the like satirising of such narratives but also the ways in which the authors incorporate them. The reframing of grand narratives by both authors results in a contesting of the semantic space, a new story bordered, populated and narrated by deliberately uncertain
identities. The chapter argues that re-framing or incorporating grand narratives changes as well as reacts to their effect. They are de-centred, de-authorised and are no longer monoliths inscribing Indigenous peoples as tragic.

One of the most important insinuations of the image of the indigene as tragic figuration is the frequent refusal to acknowledge the existence of contemporary Indigenous peoples in text. Rey Chow has highlighted Levi-Strauss’ angst at the sight of a First Nations’ man in the reading room of the New York Public Library, to argue that the ‘authentic’ image of the indigene exists in pre-history. Robert Berkhofer has also suggested that the past is implicit in constructed images of the indigene. It is for this reason that this thesis’ discussion of Thomas King’s and Mudrooroo’s re-presentation of the image of the indigene examines the way in which they portray contemporary Indigenous characters.

In the fourth chapter — ‘An Indian in the Twentieth Century’: The Re-inscription of Loss — there is an important re-definition of the term ‘loss’. The chapter looks at the way in which both authors’ works are peopled by uncertain and confused male characters, termed here as ‘the lost men’. The term ‘loss’ is redefined in this thesis to denote a form of being that is not permanent but does evoke the suggestion of searching for, rather than fixing of identity. The experience of ‘loss’, primarily cultural for both authors’ central characters, is complex and frequently initially negative. Land and connection to land is an important part of allowing these

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characters to embark on searches, and natural imagery also importantly functions to avoid definite placement of identity. Other common components of both authors’ narrative techniques also work to ensure that fixed emblems of Indigenous identity are not evoked. Such strategies include the destabilisation of counterpoint narrative and unfixed or swinging narrative perspectives. In addition the narrators are often self-consciously text producers. Thus, while their story may be in part an effort to reclaim and define their origins and culture, no definable prognosis arises, because repetitions within the text and the self-conscious textuality of the narrative process result in continual re-imagining of images.

Apart from like evocations of the ‘lost man’, of land, and of self-conscious textuality, another important similarity in the authors’ works is the problematic relationship with fathers and fathering evident in many of King’s and Mudrooroo’s contemporary characters. Chapter Four explores a thematic pattern in which the father is first painfully absent, then tenuously created and constructed, then removed altogether in favour of something more general, more communal. The texts use the figure of the white father to play out anxieties of mixed heritage and inauthenticity in representations of the indigene. Another vital component of this chapter’s discussion of re-presentation is the exploration of the evading of stereotypes in inscriptions of contemporary Indigenous existence. Here the concepts of play and, significantly, role-play come to the fore in the analysis of the authors’ novels. In playing out many identities the characters ensure that the re-presentation cannot become static, because it is always a rehearsal. Finally, this chapter explores representations of women. The divergent ways in which these authors imagine women make it necessary to comment upon gender representation at this point. King’s women are frequently strong and
independent, while Mudrooroo’s women are often highly sexualised and sometimes inscribed as initiators of or subjects of violence. These polar representations do, however, have one similarity in terms of acts of representation. They can be best understood through further application of Chow’s theoretical conceptions. Chow has argued strongly that while culture is always imagined in masculine terms, women are actually the bearers of the gifts of that culture.\(^{126}\) So while both authors centralise the male dilemma, their writing can be seen to be agreeing with Chow’s feminist anthropological observation. For example, female characters, for both authors, are often fixed images around which multiple imaging of the male orbits.

Overall contemporary images are explored alongside some more ‘historical’ or ‘mythical’ images because an important element of the representation of the coeval is the fact that time is a blended phenomenon. All times seem to exist concurrently in order to enliven and politicise many images at the same time. For this reason in Chapter Five: Trickster’s Role tricksters and trickster discourse are explored to demonstrate both authors’ new sense of time in re-presentations of Indigenous images. This chapter defines many of the resonances of the term ‘trickster’ and how they apply to King and Mudrooroo’s similar re-presentation projects. The important thing about the use of Vizenor in this chapter is the assertion of image as being in process. Structural repetitions and concentration on shape shifting mean that viewing the world through set and fixed notions of image and identity are confounded. The prominence of the emblem of water in both authors’ fictions adds to this effect. Water holds strong metaphorical significance in both authors’ construction of text, resulting in fluidity and liminality in the presentation of images of identity. One of

the most specific similarities of these authors is that they both use water journeys, diving and particularly a similar satire of *Moby Dick* to evoke diffuse images. Such imaging has an effect on the supra-textual structure of each authors’ collected body of works. While each author’s works abound with repeated characters and stories, this is not in a linear progress. The notion of sequential textual progress is rejected in both authors’ individual oeuvres. This means that foreclosure on identity is not possible, because the stories are full of unanswered questions, strategic repetitions, resulting in a feeling that the story can never be finished, but must be told and re-imagined in light of what precedes and follows it. This clearly suggests a kind of patterning of the written text with aspects of orality and circular storytelling, but as the following chapter discusses, this orality and trickster discourse is not particular to a specific tribe. Instead, both authors’ fiction discusses a more general condition of Indigeneity with ambiguity to avoid the fixed type of representation developed by non-Indigenous writers in the past. Consequently, the narratives commonly evoke a continuous non-specific Indigenous themed story.

The final chapter of this thesis — ‘Rethinking Tactics’: The Reinterpretation of Place — explores how ‘Indigenous themes’ are developed beyond the dissertation’s analysis of trickster form and structure. Through the previous chapters there has been an assertion that text can suggest intricate, complex and celebratory identity and time, and this chapter emphasises these same characteristics in terms of place. Chapter Six begins by analysing how theories of magic realism can be usefully employed to understand the sort of place both Mudrooroo and King evoke, a place where anything can happen. Gaps between various narratives allow space for a
stretching of the understanding of the real and who exists in it. Another way of usefully exploring the way in which visions of place are extended is by analysing the common collaging of Indigenous themed stories that is carried out by both authors. These stories are varied and include: traditional stories of creation; silenced histories of first contact and contextualised more personal tales. All of these levels of narrative are blended in both authors’ fiction. This section of the chapter locates many, but by no means all, of the referents drawn upon in order to perceive place as unrepresentative and non-specific yet celebrating communal survival and continuance. Finally this chapter acknowledges that the eclectic pastiche of Indigenous referents that constructs a new sense of place is underpinned by an evocation of connection to land and the vitality of such connections. Therefore, while the authors do not usually describe specific land sites, they also do not attempt to assert a creative/ed amorphous place as a replacement for ‘real’ land. Both Mudrooroo and Thomas King are extending, rather than supplanting, the available discourses on land.

The chapters in this thesis read the novels of Thomas King and Mudrooroo thematically. The themes unifying each chapter include both authors’ treatment of narratives of imperialism, of Gothicism and Christianity, of the contemporary or realism, of time and of place. Methodologically the thesis draws on a wide range of theoretical sources. Most important are general postcolonial assumptions about the impact of colonial text on imaging of Indigenous peoples. More recent ideas on reading praxis developed in North American and Australian ‘Indigenous writing’ communities are also used. These can, very generally, be summarised as including emphases on the open-ended, performative and multiple imaged nature of story as
well as a focus on the search for community over the individual. Notions of the complexities of race and questions concerning the possibilities of escape from the dialectic of coloniser and colonised are also pertinent to this dissertation’s theoretical framework. The dissertation is a textual analysis of the common re-presentations of Indigenous and colonial themes. It uses theory in terms of its specific applicability rather than being a larger scale application of a single theory on the writings. This piece is not a validation or authorisation of Thomas King and Mudrooroo as ‘Indigenous writers’. It also explores similar attitudes to the textual act of representation in the writings of Thomas King and Mudrooroo. The results of this textual analysis lead to conclusions about the nature of identity and image in both Australia and Canada in the twenty first century.
Chapter One

Reading Thomas King and Mudrooroo.

The works of Thomas King and Mudrooroo exist in a comparable and parallel space of re-presentation. The parallel creative space exists because two authors, on opposite sides of the globe, have reacted to similar historical and contemporary moments. These include the historical and textual imaging of the indigene and political campaigns for Indigenous rights and their expression through literary works. Having said that, this is not what could be termed a fully extended comparison, where the parallels move beyond meaningful similarities into a greater synthesised state of same-ness. Importantly, desire for this type of comparison would miss a central trope of both authors’ literary productions: which is the need to open up the universe and, consequently, notions of re-presentation.¹

Understanding this 'opening up' process involves a collection of evolving strategies. The formulation of a categorical approach to literary works is necessarily limiting with authors such as King and Mudrooroo. However, some frameworks are required. This chapter will discuss a number of theoretical ‘vantage points’² from which to view the oeuvres of Thomas King and Mudrooroo, in an attempt to demonstrate my conceptualisation of their treatment of identity. This includes various analyses: those of political resistance and subversion; of the blurring of boundaries and their meanings; of the legitimating of a multiple and continuous Indigenous identity; and finally of the

¹ As has been stressed in my preface, this concept of opening up is not a call to allow appropriation and fraud (simply a reaction to the personal genealogical controversies, for Mudrooroo particularly). It is a particular literary strategy to counter hegemonic oppression and create extra space for Indigenous peoples.

complex evocations of trickster figures and trickster discourse. The result is a literature that exists beyond the west's neatly-defined genres and purposes. The techniques which Mudrooroo and Thomas King share illustrate the point that comparisons of this type do not construct a falsely reductive homogeneity; they do have real uses. Mudrooroo's and King's shared multiplicity and fluidity of meanings and genre-production enjoin the critic to adopt similar approaches to the reading act and endorse an eclectic methodological approach. Thus, engaging in a comparative methodology is liberating for the reader rather than being restrictive for the texts themselves.

The notion of 'opening up' necessarily involves the revealing of other realities. These may not be 'other' in the sense of being unknown. But they are often formulations that have been silenced by the literary and academic community in the past. Terry Goldie has demonstrated that the signifier 'Indian' or 'Aboriginal' is often one that serves political purposes outside of the lived reality of Indigenous peoples. In like fashion, the Native American author and critic, Louis Owens sees the profoundly political nature of the 'American Indian Novel' as being a reaction to such restrictive and oppressive constructions:

Indian in today's world consciousness is a product of literature, history, and art [...]. It is at this disjuncture between myth and reality that American Indian novelists most often take aim.

Literature as correction, didacticism, as resistance has been an important concept in Indigenous fiction in both Canada and Australia. It is clear that Mudrooroo perceived literature as resistance to be, at least in part, a motivating influence for writers,

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including himself. The very first line of his 1990 critical text *Writing From the Fringe: A Study of Modern Aboriginal Literature* indicates the resistance process in literature:

Aboriginal literature begins as a cry from the heart directed at the white man. It is a cry for justice and for a better deal, a cry for understanding and an asking to be understood.5

As has been discussed in the preface, both King’s and Mudrooroo's literatures subvert the concept of the ‘imaginary Indian’. While this term has a North American resonance, it is a concept that equally applies to the Australian situation, the ‘imaginary Aborigine’. To reiterate, this thesis concurs with Terry Goldie’s discussion of representations of Indigenous people in Australia and Canada which demonstrates that these two images share like traits.6 ‘Imaginary Indian’ is a term that indicates the construction of semiotic fields to contain, restrain and oppress Indigenous peoples and was first defined in the Canadian context by Daniel Francis.7

Mudrooroo and Thomas King respond in highly specific ways to textual appropriation — subverting the narrow and derogatory textual representations of the indigene present in documents such as missionary journals or 'First Contact' stories. The engagement of both authors moves beyond straight falsification or inversion, embodying a wider re-presentation and centralisation of Indigenous themes. This is a concept that will be developed more fully in Chapter Two. But salient examples include the positioning of a white, racist politician as the narrator in Mudrooroo's *The Kwinkan* or King’s short story, “A Seat in the Garden”, which focuses upon a white

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man's disturbed reaction to an ‘Indian’s’ appearance in his back-yard.8

Both of these works position whiteness as being alienated and confused. They also highlight huge gaps in white understanding of Indigenous peoples despite, or even because of, white narrator-positioning or perspective. As a result, the narratives by King and Mudrooroo embrace fluidity: stereotypes are, therefore, dissolved rather than exploded. At the same time the sense in which colonialisms need to be substituted with something else is limited in these two stories. Replacement would suggest that there is an absence that needed to be filled within the colonial situation; instead the resistance in these texts is often the result of an inherent Indigenous occupancy. As will be expanded upon below, this presence is not prescriptive or singular in the textual formulations of King and Mudrooroo.

There are frequent moments of satirical inversion within the oeuvres of both King and Mudrooroo. These can be expanded beyond limited definitions of protest literature. An ‘Indigenous’ presence or re-presentation constructs the resistance, and, as such, the issue of combat with non-Indigenous emblems, and particularly resolution beyond combat, becomes less central. In both authors' work this absence of resolution and direct conflict is reflected in textual form as well as content. Endings and beginnings are fluid and texts interrelate with one other, moving in spirals instead of self-contained linearities.9 The Native Canadian dramatist Drew Hayden Taylor has traced a similar textual pattern in contemporary Native Canadian theatre back to trends in traditional oral story-telling:

[T]here’s no conflict really. They're given an objective, they achieve it, and they go

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9 This concept is developed further in Chapter Five.
on. This is the structure of a lot of traditional Native legends which, to reiterate, conflicts with the European dramatic process.\textsuperscript{10}

King and Mudrooroo definitely draw upon concepts of traditional oral story telling in their written works. This textual structure is part of King’s and Mudrooroo's 'opening up' process. It means that no text can ever be fixed in time, completely resolved. In many cases the text may have no dramatic climax, or single protagonist.\textsuperscript{11} Texts introduce one another or end where they began rather than with resolution of some centrally imagined conflict.

The process of this fluid occupancy is best demonstrated in the texts themselves, so I will return to my discussion of “A Seat in the Garden” and \textit{The Kwinkan}. In King's short story, Joe Hovaugh (a pun on 'Jehovah') engages in a battle with an Indian who is the creation of western stereotypes. The Indian is dressed in the style of a Hollywood noble Indian, befeathered, braided and stoic. His chant of "If you build it, they will come" also marks the figure as a media construction. King subtly allows this one line to interact with several complex realities.

The importance of this line of dialogue is that it comes from the Kevin Costner film \textit{Field of Dreams}. This film was based on a novel by W.P. Kinsella, a Canadian author notorious for his negative, comic depictions of First Nations' peoples. And the actor who produced and starred in \textit{Field of Dreams} was also responsible for one of the most famous filmic representations of Indigenous North Americans: \textit{Dances with Wolves}. The latter movie contributed to the common filmic narrative of the righteous 'other'

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Mudrooroo's first novel \textit{Wild Cat Falling} (1965) may be an exception to this pattern, although this text ends in an unexpected way, and the notion of the possibilities of this ending are revisited in \textit{Doin Wildcat} (1988).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
assisted, led, or set free by the liberal white man — a form which satisfies the white film-goers’ voyeuristic desire to view oppression and struggle without being implicated in that oppression.\textsuperscript{12} The inclusion of the Kinsella/Costner line in King’s text comments upon the invention of the 'white man's Indian' as a completely self-serving concept. Costner has become wealthy from the proceeds of both \textit{Field of Dreams} and \textit{Dances with Wolves}, while the Sioux — the people upon whom the latter film was based (and who acted as extras in the production) — continue to live in abject poverty. Worse still, Costner has built an ‘Indian’ themed resort on land the Sioux are still fighting to reclaim under treaty rights.\textsuperscript{13} King’s allusion to both Kevin Costner and Kinsella speaks to a misrepresentation and exploitation of First Nations’ peoples. In addition, King’s understated style implies subversive satire rather than the primacy of resistance. This is less polemical than it is allusive and is, in many ways, more telling as a result.

Mudrooroo's text, \textit{The Kwinkan} also subtly intersects with a number of realities (for example, the former Queensland Premier, Sir Joh Bjelke Petersen, is satirised in the language and is one of cameo characters in this novel). This text begins with an unnamed narrator's attempts to manipulate an Aboriginal community, utilising assumptions based upon his own failed misperceptions. He misunderstands everything that occurs around him and continually underestimates the power of those he has situated as 'others': women, Islanders and Jackamara, the central Aboriginal character. Subtle but suggestive links to realities pervade the novel. The name of the exploitative Carla's cosmetic company, "Smooth as Satin" (SS), implies the link between capitalistic


imperialism and genocide.\textsuperscript{14} This constructs a non-combative protest. In each of the narrator's relationships the power-play refuses to embrace simple hierarchal binaries. The unnamed narrator is undermined at every level, even at his most fundamental position as narrator, in that he is an interviewee and is framed by another; the discourse is that of an Indigenous interviewer. Ultimately, his story is only of interest to the controlling framework as far as it pertains to information about Jackamara. As Mudrooroo writes:

\begin{quote}
none of this is my concern. I wish to thank you for giving me your time […] It will certainly be an aid to me in illuminating the career of one of Australia's greatest native sons.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

Both stories feature white spectral visions of the indigene. In King’s text they include: the Hollywood stereotype of times past and the media stereotype of times present; or in other words the stoical chief and the drunken vagrant, while in Mudrooroo’s novel they include assumptions of a ‘Jackie Jackie’ figure.\textsuperscript{16} But in both cases these suppositions are inaccurate. The stoical Indian is not visible to the Indigenous men on the street and they are drinking water, not alcohol. The un-named narrator’s ‘Jackie Jackie’ in Mudrooroo’s novel progressively becomes Jackamara, master of subterfuge. In these narratives the Indigenous entities in question refuse to engage in a straight-forward oppositional construction.

King’s and Mudrooroo’s Indigenous characters do not see themselves through white Canadians or Australians stereotypes nor are their identities formed in reaction to them.

\textsuperscript{15} MUDROOROO. 1993c, 130.
\textsuperscript{16} The term ‘Jackie Jackie’ referred to an Aboriginal helper/tracker in Australian bush slang from the moment of first contact. In Australian mythology, the connotations of the word are definitely of a subservient assistant.
This is demonstrated graphically by the illusive appearance of the ‘big Indian’
stereotype in “A Seat in the Garden”. The ‘big Indian’ is someone whom the Indian
characters cannot see, and the white characters attempt to battle:

"If you build it, they will come," shouted the Indian.

"Build it yourself," shouted Joe, and he swung the shovel at the big Indian's legs […]
Red […] saw Joe and his shovel run right through the Indian and crash into the
compost mound […]

"Just like he wasn't there”.17

This ‘Hollywood’ Indian is an expected image for the white character, Joe and Red (the
names are also a satirical repositioning of Christian imagery versus savagery: Jehovah
and Redskins). But when they attempt to engage physically with this image its
‘imaginary-ness’ is indicated by the failure of their tools’ impact on the Indian. This
Indian is a spectre of their own imaginations and beliefs rather than an actual
Indigenous ‘ghost’. The same effect is true of some of the re-presentations of the
Gothic evident in Mudrooroo’s work.18

These passages indicate that the literatures of Thomas King and Mudrooroo are sites
of transformative resistance for re-presentations of Indigenous peoples. They do
respond to past signifiers of the indigene produced for, and by, white oppressive forces.
But the relation with, and to, the coloniser does not necessarily define the texts. In light
of this interaction, colonial history is an important re-negotiated site for both King and
Mudrooroo. It is not a documentation of a historical past, but, instead, is
simultaneously separate from, and in causal relationship, with the present and future.
The interplay between history and the present is tied up with notions of time and reality

17 KING, Thomas. 1993b, 93.
18 These ideas will be discussed further in Chapter Three.
for King and Mudrooroo. In other words, their work creates realities that both contest western conceptions and operate irrespective of them.\textsuperscript{19} This allows for a creative enactment that does not view the past as horror requiring catharsis or as a golden age of nostalgic reflection. Rather, the past becomes part of the present, part of identity, with binary polarities partitioned firmly outside Indigenous experience. Such linearities and oppositions are often satirised in both authors’ writings. bell hooks' notion of re-membering the past is pertinent to this approach. hooks discusses this process in the African-American context, but it is equally resonant for the literary creations of King and Mudrooroo. As hooks puts it:

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\text{[\ldots] there is an effort to create spaces where one is able to redeem and reclaim the past, legacies of pain, suffering, and triumph in ways that transform present reality [\ldots] constructed to move us into a different mode of articulation.20}
\]

These very questions of difference, particularly in the realm of how it is articulated, position the writings of King and Mudrooroo within the theoretical field of postcoloniality. Indeed, the literature of King and Mudrooroo is most commonly situated in postcolonial literature courses in both Canada and Australia. The multiplicity of critical perspectives which construct the field of postcolonial theory makes possible a number of productive reading tools in relation to the writings of the authors in question. Notions pertinent to postcolonial discussion such as counter-discourse; allegory; rehearsal; appropriation and abrogation all are relevant to this analysis.

\textsuperscript{19} For example King's integration of creation story and contemporary reality and Mudrooroo's privileging of 'maban reality'. These alternative realities will be examined further in this chapter and in greater depth in Chapter Six.

\textsuperscript{20} HOOKS, Bell. \textit{Yearning, Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics}. Boston: South End Press, 1990, 147.
Postcoloniality's most obvious usefulness in reading King and Mudrooroo's works is in terms of the concept of political resistance and the theory's concentration upon the 'opening up' of literature's socio-political engagement. Theoretical formulations, such as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's seminal work, *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) recognise the deconstructive relationship which the fiction of oppressed peoples has had with imperial and canonised literatures. Interestingly, both King and Mudrooroo draw upon a vast body of oppressive media forms, from the North American and Pacific contexts. Mudrooroo engages with colonial discourses such as the Eliza Fraser story or the diaries of Augustus Robinson; while King interacts with colonising literatures such as *Moby Dick* and *The Last of the Mohicans*. As well, both authors are continually disrupting Christian narratives; which of course, suggests the notion of counter-discourse that is such a central trope of postcolonial formulations. Helen Tiffin emphasises the subversive position that such literature can occupy. She describes the operation of counter-discourse as a:

- mapping out of the dominant discourse, a reading and exposing of its underlying assumptions, and the dis/mantling of these assumptions from the cross-cultural standpoint of the imperially subjectified 'local'.

King and Mudrooroo are engaged in this process. The key point is that the ‘mapping’ out of other forms is *blended* with the suggestion of Indigenous themes and forms. In fact, the most important element of postcolonial theory’s engagement with

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23 TIFFIN, Helen. 1987, 23.
the writings of King and Mudrooroo is the emphasis on process. Tiffin describes the postcolonial moment within literature as one defined by ‘process’ not ‘arrival’; there can be no return to purity or essential pre-colonial identity. This is a vital element for any reader who is approaching Mudrooroo’s and King's literary formations. As noted above, my analysis is premised upon the recognition that meaning in these authors' works is not fixed, thus analysis must follow the evolving movement of authors who continue to redefine existing work with their ongoing production.

This emphasis on continual process is important because neither King nor Mudrooroo now position Indigenous identity in a peripheral way. In fact, the point is that Indigenous re-presentation is always in process and changing and, at the same time, central to the textual utterance. Mudrooroo's 1997 critical text situates Indigenous cultural identity at the very centre of Australian consciousness itself, stating that ideally we should:

set out to build an Australian culture and literature which is based on and in Australia, that is, on the land and on the songlines which make known the land.24

In discussing a Native North American context, Louis Owens concurs with this position. He states that Indigenous literature demands a knowledge of traditional forms at the heart of the landscape in the same way that T.S. Eliot's poetry demands a knowledge of the Greek and Roman classical literature at the heart of the western canon.25 To position Indigenous themes as being central to our consciousness, does not, however, produce a singular depiction of those themes. If fact, this is necessarily an exercise in multiple construction for it frees re-presentations of Indigenous identity from both the stereotypical extremes of a pure pre-colonial past and from a negative

colonised present. Hence its centrality is many-faceted.

Furthermore, King’s and Mudrooroo's expansive process of ‘opening up’ meaning erases the restrictions of essentialisms, while it simultaneously rejects the primacy of conflict. Occasionally, the authors invest in essentialist or seemingly pure tropes of meaning (for example, the 'full-blood' versus the so-called 'half-breed'). Essentialisms are occasionally used as an empowering strategy, but these are never embraced permanently. Again, Mudrooroo’s and King's visions of Indigenous re-presentations are defined by their multiplicity. Ultimately, both writers’ fiction satirises or complicates notions of essential identity. For example, King has pointed out that while there are important and diverse world-views and spiritualities to be respected in relation to Indigenous people, the assumption that ‘the matter of race imparts to the Native writer a tribal understanding of the universe’ is ‘romantic, mystical, and in many instances, a self-serving notion’.26

There are crucial boundaries of identity being invoked here. The 'borders' under evaluation are simultaneously imagined and real, and the reader must willingly cross various borders in order to decipher meaning. The borders pertain to disjunctions between white or Indigenous expectations of identity, to a multitude of experiences of the real, to borders between disciplines such as history, literature and anthropology. They include also the recognition of the impact upon identities of even geographical borders, such as those between Canada and the USA.27 Margery Fee and Jane Flick have said that King’s writing suggests that ‘[B]orders make us stupid and allow us to

27 As is noted in the preface to this dissertation, the notion of complex border identities applies to the authors themselves.
remain so if we let them’. 28 Both Thomas King and Mudrooroo incorporate the complexities of border existence into their writing, while underlining the inappropriateness of syncreticism.

Indeed, the definition of boundary locations is the subject of much Indigenous-based theoretical and anecdotal discussion. 29 The notion that a clearly defined boundary exists around identity is one which some Indigenous authors find highly problematic. 30 For example, Wendy Rose highlights the importance of understanding the intricacies involved in identity. She writes about the problem of ‘white shamanism’, of the misappropriation of Indigenous identities by white authors in order to legitimate a greater spirituality. Rose points to the implications this has for her own identity:

I am that most schizophrenic of creatures, an American Indian who is both poet and anthropologist. I have, in fact, a little row of buttons up and down my ribs that I can press for the appropriate response: click, I'm an Indian; click, I'm an anthropologist; click, I'll just forget the whole thing and write a poem. 31 Mudrooroo has also used the 'schizophrenic' analogy, utilising the Janus figure in his discussions of Aboriginal struggle for 'cultural space'. 32 King too, has commented on the frustrations caused by publishers’ unwillingness to publish any of his work that is

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28 FEE, Margery and Jane FLICK. Coyote pedagogy: Knowing where the borders are in Thomas King’s Green Grass, Running Water. Canadian Literature. 161/162, Summer/Autumn 1999, 132.
29 These are more to do with the issues concerning appearance (physical or professional) and the complications of belonging to a bi- or multi-cultural plane. These can be seen as related to, but distinct from, some of the controversies contesting identity prevalent in the contemporary Australian context. These are referred to in greater detail in the preface to this dissertation, particularly as Mudrooroo has so much personally invested in these debates.
30 Of course there are Indigenous spokespeople who assert such definitions and boundaries around identity. For example Robert Eggington has placed Mudrooroo upon the ‘Wall of Shame’ at the Dumbartung Aboriginal Corporation, under the premise that the author is guilty of an identity hoax and exploitation. See: In Search Of Archie. Directed by Sally RILEY. Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Indigenous Television Programs Unit, 16 July 2000.
32 MUDROOROO. 1990b, 24.
not focused on a Native community.33 All these statements refer to the expectation that ‘Indigenous’ necessarily excludes knowledge of a variety of existences.34 These authors reject an unspoken Anglo supposition of Indigenous and career as mutually exclusive.35 For example, contemporary editorial and publishing expectations can be oppressive. Aboriginal editor and arts worker, Sandra Phillips, has used the phrase 'trainee mentality' in relation to a general attitude towards Aboriginal people employed in this field in Australia.36

This is part of the long-standing colonising stereotype about the locations of identity. Canadian First Nations author, Emma La Rocque cites the common problem of editorial definitions of Native literature and has expressed her frustration with the western media which sees the concepts of ‘the Intellectual’ and ‘the Native’ as being contradictions in terms.37 Similarly, in her discussions of identity expectation, Barbara Cameron has pointed to the assumption that Third and Fourth world peoples should be primarily responsible for fighting racism; that racism is primarily the ‘other's’ concern.38 Drew Hayden Taylor takes this even further when he satirises the notion of identity reflected by physical appearance. In his collection of critical opinions: *Funny, You Don't Look Like One: Observations From a Blue Eyed Indian* he writes:

35 The evidence for this racial discourse can be found in Australia’s celebration of ‘the first’ Indigenous entity to achieve success, whether it be in political, sporting or arts arenas. The celebration thinly veils surprise (for many white Australians). This surprise and celebration is intensely ironic for it ignores the reality that the success is related to overcoming white oppression rather than overcoming some imagined intrinsic inferiority. See: Adam SHOEMAKER. Selling Yothu Yindi. *In: George PAPAELLINAS, ed. Republica: All Same as Family in a Big 'Ouse*. Pymble, NSW: Angus and Robertson, 1994, 27.
37 LA ROCQUE, Emma.  Here are our voices — who will hear? *In: Jeanne PERRAULT and Sylvia VANCE, eds. 1990, xxiii.*
I plan to start my own separate nation. Because I am half Ojibway, and half Caucasian, we will be called Occasions. And, of course, since I am founding the new Nation, I will be a Special Occasion.39

Hayden Taylor uses irony and ridiculous word-play to demonstrate that border crossings between the so-called Native and non-Native do not take place in an exclusive 'either/or' fashion. Instead the process is frequently one in which sites of identity which are apparently inconsistent with one another are abdicated. The transgression itself can be the political act on the part of the author; the identifying locales are part of the movement involved in this transgression. As textual examples of this transgression follow, it is enough to say here that while there is danger in this transgressive movement, it is part of a formation of resistance and assertion; as Jeannette Armstrong puts it: ‘I think the hard work of a non-racist sensibility is the boundary crossing […]. The transgression is dizzyingly intense, a reminder of what it is to be alive.’40 King and Mudrooroo respond to these complexities and intensities around 'borders'. Both authors hijack the notion of the border as the periphery or the margin. Thus, the border comes to re-present both the framing structure for the narrative and its central position. Importantly the border, when crossed, also forms the continuous movement that surmounts any concretisation.

Mudrooroo has engaged in many such acts of border transgression. The Mudrooroo/Müller Project (1991) is one of the most glaring examples. Here textual borders are obliterated. Mudrooroo revisits Heiner Müller's play The Commission —

Memory of a Revolution, under the dramaturgy of Gerhard Fischer (a German Studies Professor at the University of Sydney). The published format of this theatrical experiment is in the form of a casebook, which includes personal and professional comments, by Fischer and Mudrooroo, about the play's genesis and conception, as well as observations from the director, Bryon Syron and extra textual commentaries on, and by, Müller. The book incorporates prose and poetry pieces by Mudrooroo; photography of the entire process; and political commentary on contemporary Aboriginal movements and situations. These multiple vantage points and various genres illustrate in-process movement as well as interaction across textual borders. Notions of the function of the author (there is no singular author in this text), the director, the actor, the reader and when and how they appear, are confounded.

At the centre of this multiple text is the play itself: Mudrooroo's play about playing Müller. There are several points of simultaneous fusion and bifurcation at the boundary moments in The Mudrooroo/Müller Project. Apart from the obvious textual complexities, there are important transgressions within the play itself. A number of distinctive historical moments are occupied simultaneously: the present, the French Revolution and its aftermath in Jamaica within Müller's text, and what was at the time a propositionary future: the year 2001, on the eve of the ‘Australian republic’. Integrated into all of these is the spiritualistic, timeless location of the Djangara spirits. The oscillation between France, Jamaica, and Australia works to create a global stage.

At one level, this blurring of the lines between German post-modernity and contemporary Aboriginal politics is a postcolonial hybridisation that rejects

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41 The interplay of time and the refutation of fixed time is an important element in both King and Mudrooroo's evocation of Indigeneity and will be referred to in greater detail in Chapters Five and Six.
oppressively segregated nationalisms. In this context, postcoloniality can be understood to be a resolution of, and resistance to, the competing nationalisms of imperialism and counter-imperialistic ‘essentialisms’. The apparent boundaries between ‘the civilised’ and ‘the other’ are crossed via various paradoxes, including the contrasts between the violence of colonialism versus its humanistic, civilising mission. These competing ideologies create ruptures in notions of absolute western power. Müller's play highlights the hypocrisies which arose in the wake of the ideologies of freedom which emanated from the French Revolution. Set against these are the facts of the oppression, slavery and dispossession that migrated around the world under the guise of the speed of liberal democracy, as Müller saw it. These disjunctures are repeated in the comments by the Aboriginal "Activist" character in Mudrooroo's framing drama. But this character’s growing realisation that the Müller play has an empowering and ironic relationship to the Aboriginal struggle ensures that the gap between liberal ideology and oppressive reality is taken further, rather than simply replicating the Müller play in a new context. As the character states:

Brothers and Sisters, Uncles and Aunts, mothers and fathers, elders, we are now between the old monarchy and the new republic. Today, we are more than ever a nation within a nation, A NATION WITHOUT A NATION.

A discourse simultaneously inhabiting the two complex narratives of both ‘within’ and ‘without’ is a cross-boundary liminal communication. I would argue that this ‘protest’ speech also evokes, in its very utterance, an alternative locale. Such communication

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produces transformative ‘hybridity’, a third text.45

Movement is inherent in this transformative process. One can imagine an actively spinning spiral or helix that provides form, and often content, when one reads the fiction of Mudrooroo and Thomas King. This continually moving and elevating motion is particularly apparent within their multi-voiced and fundamentally rehearsive texts, especially one such as the Mudrooroo/Müller Project. So, too, textual meaning is evolving and revolving. This is precisely because of the continuous movement in both authors' oeuvres. Again, I have to emphasise that this movement signifies much more than an oscillation between two fixed points. It forms a supra-textual motion which spins between many sites (be they historical, political or ethnic) and techniques (be they transgressive, experimental or synthetic).

In The Mudrooroo/Müller Project there are precise moments of hybridity. However, at the same time, the locales on either side of the textual borders are juxtaposed in a disharmonious way. As said above, it is clear that the Müller play is not simply an analogy for the Indigenous Australian situation. Within Mudrooroo’s play, the validity of choosing Müller’s play becomes confused in the rehearsal. In fact Müller’s drama, called The Commission, is continually criticised by the Aboriginal actor-characters in Mudrooroo's play for its depiction of Native peoples, as well as for its inapplicability, its treatment of women, and its length. However, there is also a sense in which an Aboriginal locale within the text is being privileged, and centralised. This identity is not pure, essential, nostalgic; instead, it is multiple, contradictory. But it is from this multiple site that the rest of the text is controlled; as Mudrooroo puts it, ‘Post-

modernism was to be *framed by* Aboriginality’ [emphasis mine].⁴⁶ It is this concept of framing which is vital in understanding the nature of the border-crossing. It is a microcosm for understanding the larger theme of the border as absence, as a gap, as transformation, as contestation, as multiple — yet always within a complex assertion of identity.

In the North American context, Thomas King has responded in highly specific ways to this concept of borders. Like many Native North Americans, he problematises the assumed neutrality and natural-ness of the borders between Canada and the United States. His own life (he was born and raised in California, but writes about Canada and identifies himself as a Canadian⁴⁷) highlights the artificiality of this boundary. King utilises this real geographical border, and the transgression of it, to re-present larger questions about the borders around identity and nations. As Margery Fee and Jane Flick have pointed out in relation to *Green Grass, Running Water*, King’s writing forces the reader to:

- cross the political border between the two countries [the United States and Canada],
- the disciplinary borders between English literature, Native Studies, and Anthropology, the literary border between Canadian and American literature.⁴⁸

This is demonstrated in his short story, aptly entitled “Borders”.

The story is narrated from the perspective of a child whose mother takes him/her

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⁴⁶ MUDROOROO. World bilong tok-tok. *In:* Gerhard FISCHER, ed. 1993b, 137.
⁴⁷ As is discussed in the preface, Thomas King is seen as and often positions himself as Canadian, but he also identifies with his German, Greek and, obviously, his Native ancestry.
⁴⁸ Margery FEE and Jane FLICK. Coyote pedagogy: knowing where the borders are in Thomas King’s *Green Grass, Running Water. Canadian Literature.* 161/162, Summer/Autumn 1999, 132.
(gender is often not made clear in King's fiction\textsuperscript{49}) on a trip to visit an older sister who has moved over the border to Salt Lake City, Utah. The mother refuses to declare her citizenship as either American or Canadian, instead asserting it as Blackfoot. Mother and child are then stuck between both borders until media attention forces the border guards to stop insisting the mother describe her citizenship as Canadian. In King’s conception, the re-presentation of Indigenous identity becomes a space that exists simultaneously beyond and within geographical place. It exists beyond the physical and artificial segmentations of land as ownable, differentiated tracts. However, land rights and identification highlight Indigeneity as being intrinsically connected to geographical space. This is demonstrated in the mother's continued defence of local icons in reaction to her daughter's glorification of Salt Lake City. People belong to land, not to the abstract politicalised ‘Nation’. So one of the fascinating dimensions of the work of both King and Mudrooroo is the way in which they harness the notion of a borderless, fluid space to the articulation of many fixed, significant, local places and make both not only intelligible but highly important.

In King’s short story, the white media misunderstands the transcendence of artificial borders into one of the spaces where identity can be meaningfully articulated. The highlighting of the chasm between one's understanding of the border locale and another's is, itself, yet another border transgression. In King's short story there is no direct conflict or confrontation over definitions of reality, rather a juxtaposition of unrelated assumptions and responses:

Every so often one of the reporters would come over and ask me questions about how it felt to be an Indian without a country. I told them we had a nice house on the

\textsuperscript{49} This is, in itself, a border-crossing technique.
reserve and that my cousins had a couple of horses we rode when we went fishing.\textsuperscript{50}

This subtle juxtaposition highlights the bizarre disjunctures that occur when Ango-centric prescriptions of identity are posited as universal. Kateri Damm has discussed how important the refutation of such prescriptions can be. She concentrates on the issue of 'mixed-blooded-ness' in her conceptualisation of a border crossing, or bridging, and cites examples from Indigenous authors of mixed heritage from around the English-speaking world. In this way, she formulates a concept of dual vision:

Having more than one set of ears and eyes, having the ability to see and understand and speak of what lies on both sides of the fence is one of the benefits espoused by writers and characters of mixed ancestry.\textsuperscript{51}

This position is not merely observatory, nor reactive. Damm uses the example of Tayo from Leslie Marmon Silko's novel \textit{Ceremony} to discuss the creative formulation of acts that inspire healing. As Damm says, such works are ‘resisting the falsely rigid bounds of culture’.\textsuperscript{52}

King's character, Will Horse Capture, in his novel \textit{Medicine River} occupies this dual, merged position. Will Horse Capture is removed from the reserve because his mother lost her status by marrying a non-status individual, his white father.\textsuperscript{53} The narrative shifts between past experiences out of the reserve, contemporary experiences on the reserve, firm memories of his Blackfoot mother and fragmentary glimpsed memories of

\textsuperscript{50} KING, Thomas. 1993b, 142-3.
\textsuperscript{52} DAMM, Kateri. \textit{In: Jeannette ARMSTRONG, ed. 1993, 22.}
\textsuperscript{53} Status men who married non-status women did not lose their status. This practice continued until 1985, when Bill C-31 restored status to Native women marrying non-status men. The complication became that status could only be maintained if at least of the each of the next two generation married status individual, married ‘in’. See HOY, Helen. \textit{How Should I Read These? Native Women Writers in Canada.} Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 2001, 21.
his white father. Mudrooroo also writes about a bridging position. For example, his 1998 novel, *The Undying* dramatises multiple perception in a most surreal way. In *The Undying* the young Aboriginal character, George, is learning both the ‘new’ evolving, colonially responsive and transformative rituals and old traditions of his father, Jangamuttuk. He must balance these with the lessons of an African sailor while at the same time being haunted by the visions and experiences of the white she-vampire, whose blood (in the vampiric, rather than genetic, sense) he shares. Later in the series it is revealed that this character is of mixed ancestry. The Aboriginal woman, Ludjee, is affirmed as the boy’s mother but his paternity lies not with Jangamuttuk but with George Augustus Robinson, an English missionary. Both Will and George operate as emblems of a multiple identity positions, that find stability (but not ossification) through a moving towards an understanding of the complexities of Indigenous self-hood.

Such books are significant in a further sense, which is that simplistic assertions of Indigenous peoples as being victims, in the colonial sense, or as being no more than reserve/mission dwellers in the contemporary world, are obfuscated by these fluid, 'midway' constructions. These examples demonstrate that there is no moment of identity fusion in King’s and Mudrooroo’s texts, nor is there a sense in which whiteness and Indigeneity occupy neat halves to a stable whole. Damm concurs:

Standing midstream, the minglings can bridge the gap, open the borders, tear down the walls of colony. [...] Our different voices will create a new harmony.  

Thus we return to the point that border positioning is not a peripheral site, but a central

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55 MUDROOROO. *The Undying*. Pymble, NSW: Angus and Robertson, 1998b.
one. The locales it broaches when engaged in the moment of transgression must be understood outside pure polarities, (such as those of Native and Coloniser, the Indigenous and the white). There may be white oppression and white stereotypes of Indigeneity, multiple Indigenous expressions, or any number of other locations and points of view. We can return to the analogy of the spiral or even spinning top, in relation to both authors’ fiction. The spinning top touches at a number of points with all of these but is never fixed upon a single entity. The depiction of identity is not able to become generalised, finite or fixed through inaction, because it is spinning all the while.

Mudrooroo has noted with reference to The Mudrooroo/Müller Project that 'a Koori's work, A Nyoongah's work, evades the stereotype'. The Mudrooroo/Muller Project features characters who both negate and parody the notion of singular definitions. They are labelled by their professional occupations, but the complications and tensions within such labels are a thematic concern throughout the play. King, too, has emphasised the fact that a singular definition for Indigenous literary production has never been agreed upon:

[...] when we talk about contemporary Native literature, we talk as though we already have a definition for this body of literature, when, in fact, we do not. And when we talk about Native writers, we talk as though we have a process for determining who is a Native writer and who is not, when, in fact we don't. This position is reflected in the texts. King’s often confused, male characters occupy many different personal and professional identities. For example, in Green Grass, Running Water Lionel's unease in his life is never fully resolved, but the search for that

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resolution is continually replayed. From one angle, this is a resistance to restrictive stereotypes, but the formation of this variety is not only a response. The pluralities are both borne out of, and construct, the movement and border crossings discussed above. First Nations’ authors often emphasise the importance of extending the available definitions of identity. Métis writer, Marilyn Dumont, has emphasised the importance of constructing experiential realities, and the pluralities within these. She points to a strong link between available cultural descriptions and the articulation of dominance. Dumont highlights the issue of internalised racism, as constructed by ‘a tenacious Nineteenth Century myth and an image-making machine which misrepresents’.59

Of course, on a larger scale, the importance of plurality has been emphasised by many theorists. In discussing the formation of a politically active black diaspora, particularly in the United Kingdom, Stuart Hall validates such multiple constructions. While he perceives black identity as being marginal he envisages a wide interpretation of that margin. This is an enlarged marginal space produced by once-dominated groups, through their expression of, and struggles around, difference and new identities.60 As Hall asserts, while there are positive moments of cultural essentialism, ultimately the assertion of singular 'black' identity involves a negation of different positions within that identity. Hall develops this notion by noting that:

[t]he moment the signifier 'black' is torn from its historical, cultural, and political embodiment and lodged in a biologically constituted racial category, we valorise, by inversion, the very ground of the racism we are trying to deconstruct.61

This position is similar to Fanon's rejection of the activist and poet, Aime Cesaire.

Cesaire developed ideas of the cultural superiority of blacks in the middle of the last century, but Fanon saw these conceptions of ‘négritude’ as a fall into oppressive binary oppositions. Cesaire's poetry and writings were therefore, to Fanon, nostaligically confining.62

To return to Australia, in her discussions of the wide acceptance of *My Place* as being representative of Aboriginality, Jackie Huggins agrees that Aboriginality is not only formed and evoked through blood.63 Nevertheless, this multiplicity does not validate misappropriations of Aboriginal identity, such as Leon Carmen's cultural theft in using the pseudonym, Wanda Koolmatrie in his 1995 book, *My Own Sweet Time*.64 In his literature, Mudrooroo positions a multiple re-presentation so that identity does not become ‘torn from its historical, political, and cultural embodiment’65. There is an emphasis on the evolving experience of identity rather than the biological, blood epitome of it. Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra have identified singular representations of Aboriginal peoples as actually being part of the oppressive response of the coloniser to his own illegitimate occupancy: ‘the bastard complex’.66

bell hooks' notion of home can be used to accent King’s and Mudrooroo's multiple 'opening up' of identity and place. It is part of an amorphous decolonisation:

At times, home is nowhere, [...] alienation [...] Then home is no longer just one place. It is locations. Home is that place that enables and promotes varied and everchanging perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality,

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63 HUGGINS, Jackie. *Always was, always will be*. *Australian Historical Studies*. 25(100), April 1993, 462.
64 See: Anita HEISS. *Appropriating our Black voice*. *Network News* (South Brisbane), 1, 1988, 30-33.
65 See above Hall quotation.
frontiers of difference.  

This fluid re-presentation of 'home' allows for continual redefinition. Meanings (including humour) are formed in the repetition of stories. Thus, the Mudrooroo/Müller Project was formed in the rehearsal of the script, in negotiations between director, actors, scriptwriter, and so on. So too, Mudrooroo's Wildcat trilogy is constructed out of repetitions, as is the Master of the Ghost Dreaming series and its connections with Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World. Thomas King's Green Grass, Running Water revolves around the repetition of the story of creation, as well as other external repetitions. King's radio series The Dead Dog Cafe Comedy Hour incorporates textual repetitions from his novels and is structured by the weekly repetition of ‘segments’. The Métis rebel, Louis Riel is always the special guest and the 'surprise' bingo number called is always 'B8'.

Postcolonial theorisations respond to the need to legitimate a multiplicity of identities through rehearsal. Bhabha, for example, privileges the term 'différance' over 'diversity', as he sees diversity as being a fixed rather than a fluid interpretation. An embracing of fluidity and movement are vital concepts in any analysis of King’s and Mudrooroo's texts. Bhabha's formulation of this movement is in the negotiation between positions rather than of the construction of a fixed position out of the negation of another. The literary formations of Thomas King and Mudrooroo are, internally, in continual negotiation between textual sites. They are also, extra-textually, in ongoing rehearsal, reimagined in the light of new works and readings/readers, repetitious.

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67 HOOKS, Bell. 1990, 148.
68 Both of these inscriptions refer to important moments in Native North American political history. Such historical references will be discussed further in Chapter Six. See: The Dead Dog Cafe Comedy Hour. Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Radio One, Toronto, 1998.
Bhabha's formulation is significant because it allows for expression outside an 'oppression dichotomy'. He sees the ‘suggestion that colonial power and discourse is possessed entirely by the coloniser’ as ‘an historical and theoretical simplification’.71 His theoretical vision of 'disavowal' expresses the negotiated space as a destabilising repetition ‘as something different’.72 The spirals that construct the oeuvres of King and Mudrooroo can be read through Bhabha's notions of undulating, variable disavowal.

Multiple expressions of themes are paralleled in the multiple theoretical tools that can be used to understand the texts. In this way the text is able to exist on a multi-expressive plane, and can cohabit multiple sites simultaneously. This does not result in anarchic confusion or fusion, as each site is tenable. The sites are viewed when a particular reader perceives a particular point in an oeuvre through the perspective of a particular framework. An analogy of a spiral can be seen as a practical re-imagining of Bhabha's formation, which incorporates the importance of ambivalent, unossified perception. It also emphasises what can be termed 'enaction' without being dependent on explanatory fixed 'ingredients' or divisions.

The spinning format is powerful in a further sense, for it deconstructs single genre embodiments as well. Emma La Rocque discusses Native writers' blurring of genre-boundaries. This has resulted in the more general definition of ‘Native Literature’ to cope with the blurring of genre boundaries involved in these literary formations.73 There is no easy distinction between the critical works and those of fiction; between the historical and the story. In this way, while both King and Mudrooroo are primarily

71 BHABHA, Homi. 1983 quoted in Margery FEE 1995b, 244.
73 LA ROCQUE, Emma. In: Jeanne PERRAULT and Sylvia VANCE, eds. 1990, xviii.
novelists, they have produced work in a wide variety of genres. Within these individual texts there is a fluid definition of the textual act. This may be in part because of the way in which both King and Mudrooroo have existed in the academy. Mudrooroo has produced a number of self-consciously academic analytical articles and texts: Writing From the Fringe; Milli Milli Wangka, and Us Mob for example. Thomas King has made a point of not identifying himself as a theorist, but has engaged with critical perspectives in a number of articles, and within his PhD dissertation. Beyond these obvious critical encounters there are moments within texts that confuse the division between literature and its analysis.

First Nations critic Kimberly Blaeser has suggested an analytical reading strategy that begins with the actual text. This is in addition to borrowing concepts from various theoretical discourses. For example, like Louis Owens, she refers to the dialogic constructions of Mikhail Bakhtin. However, the emphasis is on re-imagining genre distinctions. Blaeser, like Lee Maracle, envisages Indigenous literatures as being implicitly theoretical, never simply 'literature'. This involves recognition of cultural background and interaction between authors, which Blaeser defines as a 'literary self-consciousness and inter-textuality, the multiple connections with oral tradition and the theorising within the literary works themselves.' A commencement from inside the creative text is an equally significant component of this thesis as well.

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78 To do this the thesis draws on ideas on the relationship between Native fiction and theory. See CHESTER, Blanca. Green Grass, Running Water: Theorizing the world of the novel. Canadian Literature. 161/162, Summer/Autumn 1999, 43.
King’s *Green Grass, Running Water* begins where it ends, with the repetition of the line, ‘And here's how it happened’. There are voices that simultaneously interact with, and comment upon, the action of the many stories within the text. There are also analyses and deconstructions of other texts within the novel. Mudrooroo uses similarly confusing techniques; for example, the script writer's external/internal position in both the *Mudrooroo/Müller Project* and *Doin’ Wildcat*. An analytical key is suggested to the reader by the multiple endings in *Doin’ Wildcat* and the revisiting of literary territory embodied in the 'Wildcat' and *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* series. Like Thomas King's re-tellings and circular structures, the concept of meaning in the reading, in the rehearsal, is suggested by the structure of literary text. The reader is forced to accept the concept of story in process because of the presence of the many stories repeated within the individual written text, and this in turn affects the reading and perception of the text as a whole unit. This is because repetition is present internally and intertextually. A self-conscious revisiting of themes, characters, textual moments, is played out in both authors' texts. Therefore, meaning is construed in the developing body of work, not in any individual work *sui generis*. This, in turn, promotes a vision of identity that is evolving and non-static.

Interestingly, a vision of the varied function of the story has a function outside its use as a political tool. Lee Maracle has reformulated the notion of theory as story, as a part of the Indigenous oral tradition. She is critical of a separation of the two within ‘European academic discourse’:

> We believe the proof of a thing is in the doing. Doing requires some form of social interaction, and thus story is the most persuasive and sensible way to present the

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80 These ideas are developed further in Chapter Five.
accomulated thoughts and values of a people.  

Obviously, Maracle is conflating theory and story in a limited context, but Thomas King’s and Mudrooroo's implicit suggestion of reading technique within the repeated textual enunciation can be read in a similar vein, as it is an important part of their rejection of fixity. Theory within story, and politics within story, both constitute a multifaceted literary formation.

In his introduction to *Narrative Chance*, the Native American author and critic Gerald Vizenor discusses the notion of trickster discourse, a form that is characteristic of North American Indigenous writing. This is a discourse that operates on both a fictional and analytical level, and transcends the notion of the 'trickster' as an individual character within the text. Vizenor rejects the concept of ‘correct’ or ‘objective’ reading. He also refutes more anthropological and social science-based readings, which emphasise a tragic, or psychologically-fixed interpretation. He contrasts these with notions of comic, holistic meaning, formed in the living narrative. This post-modern transformative analysis is useful for reading King and Mudrooroo. It must be said, however, that in terms of specific applicability, elements of Vizenor’s critical discourse make his conceptualisations an odd methodological choice for this dissertation on the political writings of Thomas King and Mudrooroo. Vizenor's emphasis on post-modernity's open-endedness is primarily a response to the positioning of oral literatures within the confines of social science and outside the realm of literary criticism, and therefore leads him in a direction away from the written productions of artists such as King and Mudrooroo. The other problem with the deployment of

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Vizenor’s theories lies in the fact that his efforts to remove the tragic imaging of traditional narratives as evidence of an inferior race lead him to reject totally the notion of the tragic and, with it, the political.83 While it is important to envisage Indigeneity beyond the cliché of tragic victim, this postmodern rejection of the political function of Indigenous stories is problematic in any study of Thomas King and Mudrooroo because of the essentially subversive nature of their work. In fact, Vizenor’s rejection of the political encapsulates an inherent contradiction, as the rejection of the tragic is a political act, it is refuting limiting and disempowering imaging of Indigenous peoples and their cultural productions. That said, his exploration of so-called ‘trickster discourse’ produces some of the most stimulating observations available on the methodology of both King and Mudrooroo; so much so that this becomes a major focus of this dissertation in Chapter Five.

Vizenor's formulations are important to our understanding of the discontinuity of western notions of time and reality. In like fashion, there are textual moments within the fictions and analyses of King and Mudrooroo which extend beyond traditional western literary forms. This points to the existence of what Mudrooroo terms, ‘a maban reality’.84 These creative moments limit understanding of the texts as being merely responsive. King and Mudrooroo's texts are subversive and counter-hegemonic, but this is not the full extent of their possible constructions. As Vizenor puts it, the ‘oral and written narratives are language games, comic discourse rather than mere responses to colonialist demands’.85

84 MUDROOROO. 1997, 89.
These intense literary moments correlate at points with notions of magic realism. However, this is not to say that they are synonymous with those notions. Stephen Slemon has focused upon the place of magic realism within postcolonial narratives. A fusion between Vizenor's anti-responsive ideology and Slemon's development of magic realism is a useful point from which to examine the textual oeuvres of King and Mudrooroo. Slemon places magic realism in the dialectical space between realism and fantasy. There is continual disruption, and gaps are produced in a space in which neither form is subordinated. This results in an absence of 'interpretative closure'. Such a lack of closure is fundamental to an understanding of the continually evolving and transformative textual locations of King and Mudrooroo. Vizenor's emphasis on the self-perpetuating construction of the language game is indicative of a move towards a 'reality' un-contained by the colonial context. The 'language games', and naturalised integration of the 'real' with the 'fantastic', which are present in King and Mudrooroo's fiction can be read as both trickster discourse and magic realism, because they confound the idea of a singularly identifiable reality in confrontational opposition to fantasy. As King writes:

Talking to animals again, shouts Noah. That's almost bestiality, and it's against the rules.

What rules?

Christian rules.

"What's bestiality?" says Coyote.

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87 This concept is developed at length in Chapter Six.
"Sleeping with animals," I says.

"What's wrong with that?" says Coyote. 88

Mudrooroo’s writings, too, demonstrate characteristics of 'magic realism'. This will be expanded upon in Chapter Six of this dissertation. This aspect of his fictional writing is reflected in his own critical discourse. His latest critical piece is a rewriting of Writing from the Fringe, entitled Milli Milli Wangka: The Indigenous Literature of Australia. One of the most obvious adaptations here is the addition of a chapter entitled, ‘Maban Reality and the Indigenous Novel’. Mudrooroo sees ‘Maban Reality’ as allowing a questioning of earlier (European) 'truths'. It exists, also, as fluid site moving beyond deconstruction into assertion; it:

[…] presents a world which is different from what natural scientific reality once presented as the only reality. I would say that this world, this reality, may be familiar as well as strange and it allows for the opening up of the doors of perception through language and reality. 89

Thomas King agrees, describing the technique as a description of the whole reality, rather than a correction of imperial reality. 90

As indicated above, the method by which worlds are opened up and created through fiction can be seen to be a part of a trickster discourse. Vizenor’s holistic and complex interpretations of trickster discourse open up a theoretical discussion of the work of Mudrooroo and Thomas King even further. This involves a subversive dialogue, interwoven with threads of independent language play, both of which attempt to create an

88 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 160.
89 MUDROOROO. 1997, 98.
empowered vision of identity. Naturally, the trickster is often a character within the text itself. The trickster is a figure admired by Mudrooroo and employed in most of his books, from Wild Cat's amorphous embodiments to the shamanistic (Maban) figures of Watson Holmes Jackamara; Sandawara; Alan; Jangamuttuk; and Waai. Thomas King's texts are littered with trickster figures: Harlen Big Bear; Coyote; The Four Indians; Monroe Swimmer and Jasper Hungry Bear. The trickster-like quality of all these characters includes the move away from the hero/villain dichotomy into a more fluid representation of the position of good and evil. This once again reinforces the inappropriateness of conflict-based analysis, of these texts, and the world. All of these characters attempt to 'fix' things, but do not always succeed in the purest sense. There is continual movement, and no singular answer or solution is possible.

The signifier ‘trickster’ also denotes a general literary structure, which refers to individuals and to form. Here comic language play is understood outside western notions of the function of humour. According to King and Mudrooroo, Indigenous humour is about survival. It is subversive, fluid, and undefinable. In The Undying the repositioning of Eliza Fraser as blood-thirsty vampire, or Noah as breast-mad lunatic in Green Grass, Running Water, is not straight satirical inversion. Instead, this is reminiscent of Vizenor, who embraces post-modernity as a method that frees ‘tribal literatures’ from ossification as ‘consumable cultural artefacts’. Post-modernity, then, allows space for the comic worldview, which cannot be pinned down. Comedic narrative is, always, in one sense, disruptive and confounding of expectations. Inversion, even subversion, is frequently the result. Thus the tropes within King's and

91 SHOEAMAKER, Adam. 1993, 3.
92 MUDROOROO. 1998b; KING, Thomas. 1993a, 162.
93 VIZENOR, Gerald. 1989, 6.
Mudrooroo's writings exist in a space of movement concurrently within, and beyond, inversion.

Methodologically, the textual formations of Thomas King and Mudrooroo exist in a comparable space. An approach to their writings involves an understanding of a politically resistive and aware perspective. In their works, one finds postcolonial counter-discourse paradoxically coupled with a non-combative approach, post-modern creativity and alternative realities. Complex, multiple, moving re-presentation is inherent to both. Finally, re-presentation of Indigenous identity and themes, as constructed in the writing of Mudrooroo and Thomas King, exists as an empowering polytrope. The concept of meaning being produced between different, yet blurred, locales is essential to the readings of Thomas King and Mudrooroo carried out in this dissertation. The terminological association of the 'border' itself is also transgressed. It is reinterpreted as being a limitless frame; not simply as the periphery. Thus the concept of an Indigenous space is neither fixed, nor is it paralysed by its own dependence on earlier homogeneous positions stuck in eternal interaction with each other. Put another way, it is a moving landscape with meaning being formed in relation to different texts within the two growing oeuvres; there are different histories, times and worldviews being articulated, all at the same time. These works create spirals of meaning with clear new paths of literary construction.
Chapter Two

‘Getting it straight’\(^1\): Deconstructing Colonial Texts.

In the last chapter I explored some of the very different methodologies and theoretical frameworks through which to view King and Mudrooroo. One of these positions is that diverse and complex theoretical positioning, postcolonial theory. Much of this chapter draws on over-arching concepts from postcolonial theory to explore the ways in which the works of both Thomas King and Mudrooroo relate to specific colonial, imperial and national texts, or ‘mythologies’\(^2\). The forming of the ‘nation’ entails a movement away from ‘colony’-status for non-Indigenous Australians and Canadians, and this expression of ‘nation’ establishes locally-specific distinctions within ‘empire’. Discourses of ‘empire’, ‘colony’, and ‘nation’, then, are not totally interchangeable, but King and Mudrooroo seem to suggest that these three discourses become largely undifferentiated within particular projections of Indigenous people. A significant similarity in both authors’ fiction is the demonstrations of the 'constructedness' of representations of the indigene by non-Indigenous people throughout historical eras. At a discursive level these representations are all made intelligible through, and are inherent in, the three discourses of ‘empire’, ‘colony’ and ‘nation’. The three discourses blend into a common mythology, which results in a problematic incorporation of Indigeneity into non-Indigenous perceptions of the self.

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\(^1\) KING, Thomas. Personal interview with Clare Archer-Lean. University of Guelph, Ontario, 29 Sep 1998. (Also see footnote 124 of this chapter.)

Both authors demonstrate that foundational narratives of Australia and North America are dependent upon imagined constructs of Indigenous peoples. As will be discussed below, these constructions within the underpinning narratives or mythologies of North America and Australia are remarkably similar. King and Mudrooroo make steps towards a postcolonial re-inscription and inversion of these narratives. Both authors draw on topics which include: Indigenous affinities with other colonised peoples; narratives concerning captivity and shipwrecks; myths of a ‘dying race’; as well as the establishment (in fictional terms) of Indigenous and non-Indigenous partnerships. King and Mudrooroo incorporate intertextualities from a wide range of historical and literary examples to illustrate that the images from ‘colonisation’ and discourses of ‘empire’ are present in ‘national’ myths today — and potentially into the future. And while the specific satire of imperial mythologies involves a ‘writing back’ to the empire, the writers’ avoidance of closure is an attempt to transgress history as both past and binarised, and in this sense, the writing operates to reinscribe the postcolonial condition.

Although the works of King and Mudrooroo commonly rely upon intertextual sequences, this chapter will be limited to an examination of the six specific texts which most appropriately illustrate this phenomenon. In his writing, King frequently delves into what might be termed national mythologies as well as the imperial and colonial narratives that inform them. The four texts I will discuss in this context are typical of his selective methodology. These are the works of James Fenimore Cooper, Herman Melville, Daniel Defoe, and, finally, the contemporary productions of the Lone Ranger.

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3 Expansion of the intertextual theme will be carried out in the next chapter.
series. For his part, Mudrooroo’s intertextual choices have focused on the many embodiments of the Eliza Fraser narrative, but also enlist Tasmanian history, particularly the journals of George Augustus Robinson.

(i) Shifting genres

There are significant differences in the choices of material made by King and Mudrooroo. Most obviously, King draws primarily from a literary tradition while Mudrooroo takes from what might be termed traditional historical sources. Nevertheless, while King’s major intertextual choices are literary ones, there are hundreds of ‘historical’ references in his work. For example, the figure of Christopher Columbus is a repeated intratextual reference throughout King’s entire oeuvre. His children’s book, *A Coyote Columbus Story*, specifically redresses the historical first contact narrative. King also interweaves allusions to more recent historical events in *Green Grass, Running Water*, *Medicine River* and *Truth and Bright Water*. These include the politically significant 1972 take-over of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington DC and the ensuing occupation of ‘Wounded Knee’ at Pine Ridge, South Dakota. In fact, the title *Green Grass, Running Water* refers to the historical documentation of treaty discourse, in that the term ‘as long as the grass is green and the waters run’ was commonly used by government officials to lend a sense of sincerity to their promises to Native leaders.

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4 This includes Biblical stories. The presence and purpose of Christian-based intertextuality in these two authors’ works will be discussed in the next chapter.


In similar fashion, Mudrooroo’s selection of material blends ‘historical’ and ‘literary’ distinctions because he chooses historical referents that have already been fictionalised. As has been discussed in Chapter One of this thesis, the notion of eliding genre boundaries is pertinent to some Indigenous concepts of the function of story.⁷ Many films, documentaries, plays and visual artworks have revised the Eliza Fraser narrative, none more important than the canonical Australian novel *A Fringe of Leaves* by Patrick White. The Robinson journals have also been reconstructed in visual art and in documentary and in creative works like in Robert Drewe’s 1976 novel, *The Savage Crows*. All of these other authors’ and artists’ textual enactments elide the genre distinctions between the discourses of history and literature. King and Mudrooroo both erase the distinctions even more fully and persuasively, and so demonstrate a rejection of genre definitions.

Genre boundaries are not the only borders that are crossed in these novels. King has included a wide range of sources external to his texts’ narrative settings; that is, the locale of the Alberta prairies. This operates, in part, to displace Canadian assumptions about the distinctiveness of nationality and its borders. This is significant since the Canadian-United States border is an important theme for many Native artists in North America because it cuts through identifiable tribal groups. King’s novel, *Truth and Bright Water*, is structured by the tension between a Canadian Reserve and an American town, with a broken bridge and a roaring river in between. King’s text metaphorically underlines a belief held by nations such as the Blackfoot, Huron or

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Mohawk, that geopolitical boundaries are meaningless. As Greg Young-Ing, managing editor of the Native publishing company Theytus Books, says:

[...] they are not our boundaries, we have our own boundaries, some of them are superimposed across the forty ninth parallel, but we don’t recognise [...] the division between the States and Canada.8

So there is always a simultaneous delving into a created ‘real’ with a reference to a political ‘actuality’. For Thomas King this renunciation of imposed boundary results in a refusal to acknowledge non-Native geographical boundaries and also a more general distrust of the formation of nations themselves — in effect, of nationalism. King owes his theoretical rejection of the terminology of ‘postcolonialism’ in part to his rejection of nationalism.9

King’s rejection of a postcolonial theoretical perspective can best be understood, within the context of this chapter, in terms of the imagining of Native people by non-Natives throughout North American history and present. As will be argued throughout this chapter, the narratives of empire, nation, and colony (and for King elements of postcolonialism by implication) all invoke a particular imagining of the indigene. Each discourse has common roots. As Benedict Anderson has pointed out, ‘the colonial state [...] dialectically engendered the grammar of the nationalism that arose to combat it’.10

In an analysis of King’s and Mudrooroo’s writing, then, imperialism can be seen as a

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form of overt European nationalism which was then replicated, in form if not
completely in content, in the emerging nations from the colonial locales.11 This is
despite the fact that the former is so obviously acquisitive and the latter is inward-
looking.

Six of King’s and Mudrooroo’s intertextual sites are discussed in this chapter.
These textual choices all reflect upon what is meant or what it means to be part of
Empire, and differentially to be part of a distinct nation, either in North America or
Australasia. The central point is that in both cases it is a formation of national identity
upon a frontier. The significant space beyond this frontier is always occupied by white
conceptions of Indigenous people. As Daniel Francis has termed it, ‘the imaginary
Indian’, a construct of the white mind12, is interpellated in the discursive regimes of past
and present Australian and Canadian identities. By implication these identities are
constructed, imaginary, while being powerfully significant in discourses of power. In
many ways, part of King’s and Mudrooroo’s projects to unlock representations of
Indigenous peoples involves an undermining of national myths and of the concept of
the nation itself.

Mudrooroo has highlighted some of the problematics of nationalism and imperialism
in his critical material.13 Despite the widely divergent contexts of Australia and

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12 FRANCIS, Daniel. *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*. Vancouver:
House, 1997, 1-2. King’s position differs from Mudrooroo’s in that Canadian cultural politics is, in many
ways, more concerned with the cultural neo-imperialism of the United States than the contemporary
politics of anti-monarchy suggested by Australia’s recent republican referendum. This referendum, held
Canada, Mudrooroo expresses a similar distrust of nationalistic discourse, because of the potential such discourses have to hijack the indigene. Mudrooroo identifies the loaded position of ‘Indigenous’ in Australian national discourse. He asserts the importance of a distinct republic in Australia, and the significance of Indigenous pre-eminence in such a new nation. He refuses to allow republicanism to provide a legitimising or ‘indigenising’ for White Australians. The author conveys some suspicion concerning the motives of those that use the dialectics of ‘reconciliation’ necessary for attaining a republic:

It may be said that the political agenda behind Indigenous reconciliation is tied to the increasing push for a Republic of Australia, a new beginning to commence in 2001. Old crimes are to be forgotten and a new future forged.14

Mudrooroo’s particular choices of the Eliza Fraser narratives and the Augustus Robinson sagas are pertinent to this questioning of nationalism. He argues, through his fiction, that both of these ‘histories’, fundamental to Australian identity formation, are dependent upon particular dis-empowering constructions of Indigenous people. In order to separate the different ‘fictions’ of the frontier, and indeed of contemporary nationalistic discourse, the chapter will now evaluate five separate myths of empire/colony/nation common to Canada and Australia. These myths are selected because of the particular ways in which Mudrooroo and King engage with them. The nature and deconstruction of these five 'constructions': ‘others’ affinities; shipwrecks and captivity; fear and desire; the ‘dying’ race and Indigenous non-Indigenous partnerships will be the topics of the rest of this chapter.

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14 MUDROOROO. 1997, 1.
(ii) Empire’s ‘others’

Both King and Mudrooroo construct larger imperial referents out of a gallery of characters from an international catalogue of imperial encounters. Those in Mudrooroo’s oeuvre include characters from the Indian subcontinent — Robbi Singh from *Wild Cat Falling* and Gary in *Long Live Sandawara* — and also the Islander Carla and the Japanese woman Riyoko Tamada in *The Kwinkan*.

More graphically, in relation to the books in the *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* series, Mudrooroo’s use of the African convict Wadawaka mirrors King’s examination of non-Canadian imperial referents such as *Robinson Crusoe*. In *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* Wadawaka is initiated into Jangamuttuk’s cultural practices, affirmed in Jangamuttuk’s exclamation; ‘You belong us mob now’.15 Wadawaka then travels through the spiritual plane with Jangamuttuk and Ludjee, an ally in the healing process of battling the spiritual embodiments of the colonisers and the physical destruction of the Christian church. The surrealist moments of Wadawaka’s recollection of his mother’s slave boat experience merges with this Indigenous initiation to construct a communal memory of the varied experience of colonisation:

> Only in calm weather did they remove the tarpaulin from the grating. Light smouldering through to touch the lucky ones lying, or huddled near the opened hatch. In the overweening foulness, his mother crouched in a far corner, surrounded by the other woman, who erected a wall of warm flesh around the mother to be.16

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Wadawaka is recalling events from before his birth, thereby inciting images of a slave ancestry in the same way in which Toni Morrison's surreal novel *Beloved* evokes a shared past of suffering. It is not just a matter of an individual’s recollections, or even those memories of a tribe or nation, but instead a reclaiming of an entire past; one which includes all of the ills of colonisation as well as the pride and togetherness of an Indigenous people. Such a passage, therefore, suggests that the healing process that emerges in the wake of colonisation is necessarily one of collective re-memory. The significance of the collective memory for the individual is clear later in this text.

Wadawaka is still able to ride and then embody his own ‘dreaming’ companion — the leopard. He can re-member, despite the fact that he has been removed, alienated and dispossessed.

‘Dispossession’ is an interesting term in Mudrooroo’s formulation of this character. Wadawaka enacts a revision of traditional colonial narrative because his character evades one of this narrative’s central tropes, that of the master/slave dichotomy. In *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* he angers Fada by refuting the missionary’s assumptions of inherent slavery. Then, in *The Undying*, Wadawaka refuses to accept Amelia’s submission to him with these telling words: ‘I am no master nor will I have a master over me’. This passage illustrates how an author can figuratively refute colonial narratives (both historical and literary) and their inherent metaphors of possession. It is not just that Wadawaka refuses to be possessed by another, he also refuses to possess another, thereby stepping out of the options offered.

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18 MUDROOROO. 1991, 75.
19 MUDROOROO. *The Undying*. Pymble, NSW: Angus and Robertson, 1998b, 189.
by colonial narratives. One can only possess ‘maban reality’, or spirituality, and not the inherently tangible and concrete possessions desired in the colonial framework.

Similarly, King deconstructs discourses surrounding North American slavery through his inclusion of the character Babo in Green Grass, Running Water. As King creates her, Babo highlights the affinities between colonised peoples. The character is in fact taken from the Herman Melville novel Benito Cerano, the eponymous story of a Spanish slave-trader whose charges revolt against him. Babo is portrayed by Melville as the malicious black slave who uses the facade of subservience to conceal his command of the mutiny until the hero, Amasa Delano, sees through Babo and defeats him.

In Melville’s text Babo symbolises Benito’s dark other half — his evil side — who literally shadows Benito throughout the novel. However, according to King, Babo and Cerano have a fascinatingly different and non-binarised relationship.

In Green Grass, Running Water Babo Jones is the female janitor in the mental hospital, itself a symbol of institutionalised imperialism from which the four Indians escape, and Sergeant Ben Cerano is the detective investigating their disappearance. The ruptured nature of the dialogue between the two characters arguably destabilises the traditional imperial positioning of the slave and blackness. In King’s telling of the tale, Babo does not respond with subservience. Instead, she continually redirects discussions by producing non-sequiturs, as in the following example:

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“How old do you think I am?”

“Tell me about the Indians.”

“No, go ahead. You won’t hurt my feelings.”

“You’re forty-six, Ms Jones.”

“Well I’ll be!”

“It’s in your personnel file.” […]

“I’ll bet you’re...forty two,” she said, smiling at Sergeant Cerano.

Sergeant Cerano put his fingers back under his nose.

“About the Indians.”

“You got their files there, too?”

“Yes I do.”

“Was I close?”

“I’m thirty-six, Ms. Jones.” […] “Ms. Jones, we need to let me ask the questions.”

“Thirty-six! Police work must be hard.”

But Babo does not let the white officer ‘ask the questions’, nor does she provide him with any responses to affirm his own vision of the world. She is not responsive at all. This character’s modus operandi and vision of the world act as foils to the white police and their hospital ‘files’. She jovially and confusingly contradicts the ‘official’ age, gender and occupation — storytellers not clinically insane — of the four Indians. In so doing, she injects symbolic ambiguity into ‘nationally’ verified legal and medical institutions.

In addition, Babo’s refusal to enter into the discourse of traditional black/white relations and its history of slavery is demonstrated through the gentle humour which is characteristic of King’s writing. When confronted with Dr Hovaugh’s expectations of her history, Babo confounds a superior sense of the white self. Upon arriving at the motel Hovaugh tells her to get the bags. Her response involves more than simply resistance; it is a refusal to engage in the discursive regimes which construct oppression:

“Your ancestors were slaves, were they not?” said Dr. Hovaugh.

“Nope,” said Babo. “But some of my folks were enslaved.”

Here Babo resists the depiction of her people as reliant, dependent and subservient, all the while re-casting them as resistant. Slavery is re-positioned as a condition externally enforced, not an inherent state of being: one can be enslaved but not a slave, in the same way that Wadawaka can be ‘dispossessed’ but not ‘possessed’. All of these textual resistances align Babo and Wadawaka (as well as other ‘colonised’ characters in both authors’ collected works) with the Indigenous characters who are the focus and the framework of the works. This empathetic connection not only serves to deconstruct the discursive regimes of power and control implicit in colonialism, it also serves to deconstruct the notion of nation. The separateness of nations in the West: African colonies, Australia, North America is elided in the shared treatment of those they oppress. Thus the national pride lying in national distinctiveness is abrogated.

This shared treatment results in a shared understanding, which excludes many of
the ‘white’ characters in these novels. Babo, like Wadawaka, is the closest to
understanding the activities of the four Indians of all the non-Native characters. There
are three key episodes in *Green Grass, Running Water* in which the four Indians disrupt
non-Indigenous assumptions of ‘the real’ and of narrative structure. They are the re-
making of the western, the appearance of Coyote in the realist narrative, and the
bursting of the dam. The non-Native, Babo, views each of these with the comment,
‘Isn’t that just the trick.’ Babo does not react to these disruptions of assumptions;
instead she interacts, amused and accepting. This contrasts starkly with other non-
Natives’ reactions of angry disbelief. Apart from the four Indians, Babo is also the only
character who attempts to tell and understand the embedded ‘creation’ story in this
novel. Her respect for this ‘In the beginning’ story signifies a respect for Native
experience which is similar to Wadawaka’s initiation into Jangamuttuk’s dreaming in
*Master of the Ghost Dreaming*. King and Mudrooroo suggest that the common
experience of colonisation allows these characters, Babo and Wadawaka, to empathise
with the worldview of Indigenous peoples.

As said above, the broadening of the deconstructive referent to include a larger
experience of colonisation necessarily evokes a contamination of the limits of
nationalism. But it is not by any means a binarised simplification; that is, an
implication that all colonised people are the same. It is the burden of white will and

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25 Henceforth abbreviated to *Master*. 
desire to construct others’ identities that colonised peoples share. These are the affinities which King and Mudrooroo evoke. The point is more one that concerns the fallacy of the construction of nationhood itself, or rather the fallacies upon which nations are built. King and Mudrooroo are able to demonstrate that nationalistic ideas of difference are false because similar oppressive colonising attitudes and practices lie at the foundations of nations within the colonies. Paradoxically, they also express the importance of empathy overriding sameness in the different colonised groups. This has the effect of creating a textual enaction, which allows for many non-prescriptive possibilities outside the ‘truths’ of traditional colonial and imperial ‘histories’ and ‘literatures’.

As has been stated above, such narratives are often situated upon an actual or figurative frontier and representations of Indigenous peoples always lie in the critical space beyond this frontier. The texts Mudrooroo and King select for de-construction are the boundary-keepers of identity, and the ‘imaginary Indian’\(^{26}\) within each text is the alterior, defining space outside the boundary. Identity is framed by the liminal spaces between belonging and not belonging. One of the most important processes by which Europeans imagined themselves as belonging to the new and alien landscape, and consequently, bound by a specific identity was, ironically, the motif of being lost.

(iii) Shipwrecks and captivity narratives

The notion of ‘loss’ is implicit in captivity narratives and in tales of being shipwrecked. The initial response to first contact in such fictional and historical tales was often depicted as one of fear. But, through ‘being lost’, non-Indigenous characters were frequently portrayed as being able to convert first contact into ‘being found’. By making the new environment a place of loss in terms of both civilisation and of bearings, imperial narratives predicated the act of claiming and knowing the landscape.

Perhaps the most famous shipwreck story is that of Robinson Crusoe. The story has had numerous iterations throughout history, all of which have contributed to its fame. Amongst many others, Rousseau has given the text its canonical status. His rewriting of Defoe’s text elevated it from being perceived as a lowbrow travel narrative. From that point it has been continually revisited, from eighteenth-century educational treatises for children on the virtues of Christian industriousness and the importance of families, to adventure stories with patriarchal and imperial connotations. More recently, it has been revised in postcolonial texts such as J.M. Coetzee’s Foe. Many of these tales link in with themes of exotic alien space or peoples as opposed to the western sense of order.

27 It must be said that the term ‘loss’ is vital to my argument and will be discussed at length and quite differently in Chapter Four of this thesis.
29 For more on these rewritings covering over two hundred years see above reference: 38-51.
It is no accident that the stories selected by King and Mudrooroo are repeated tales with fictional bridges between them. The concept of the repeated narrative is echoed in the style of both authors, that is, the patchworking of a multiplicity of referents. But in so doing both authors also speak to and debunk the centralising of these particular narratives. By this it is meant that King selects the Robinson Crusoe narrative and Mudrooroo selects the Eliza Fraser narrative, both of which have been repeatedly revisited by authors for colonial, national and postcolonial purposes. The difference is that King and Mudrooroo make these narratives one of many other colonial/national narratives and frame them within a collage of narratives which are Indigenous in origin.31 It is only within this larger framework that both authors unpack the mythologies inherent in the texts they retell.

One of the most important myth creators in Defoe’s original version of Robinson Crusoe is the necessity of control and order in the moment of being lost. Postcolonial readings have identified the fact that once Crusoe is shipwrecked upon the island he becomes obsessed with the fear of his space being violated. Most of his activities are those which position enclosure, demarcating the boundaries of his own existence, in this new and alien landscape.32 He makes fences, fortresses, ladders, cellars and livestock pens. By the end of the novel he has regulated all the ‘disorder’ of newness he has encountered. He responds to the Captain’s admiration of his fortification with the boast, ‘this was my castle and my residence, but that I had a seat

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31 This idea of a many storied textual space will be pursued in more detail in all of the chapters of this thesis, particularly Chapter Six.
in the country, as most princes have’. Crusoe establishes the ‘proper’ western order and hierarchy in response to the ‘void’ the new space presents, positioning himself at the centre of the new order as ‘prince’. It is vital that the ‘other’ or ‘Native’ in this story — Friday — willingly complies with his position as servant in the hierarchy of the new order. The savagery of Friday’s native culture is viewed as chaotic; indeed, as part of being ‘lost’. It is the antithesis of Crusoe’s established order. *Robinson Crusoe* validates the imperial project: when lost (faced with difference, that is) conquer, control and define that space in which one is lost.

As a number of critics have observed, this validation of imperialism marks *Robinson Crusoe* as a target for many postcolonial writers. The French writer, Michel Tournier, playfully disrupts this obsession with order to expose the faults of that imperial social system. The South African writer, J M Coetzee, is also involved in the act of exposure, though with much less frivolity. In his novel, *Foe*, Coetzee constructs the narrative in such a way that it redresses the white implication in, and control of, ‘Native’ voicelessness. The Friday in this text had his tongue removed in an unnamed incident and understands only orders and commands. Friday’s voice and story is suppressed by Cruso, then emboldened by the female character, Barton’s emphatic

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34 VAREY, Simon. 1990, 155.
36 In Tournier’s version, Crusoe stays on the island to avoid the ‘chaos’ of England, and it is Friday who departs on the ship. Tournier’s Friday is not such a willing servant. He laughs at the Bible, and accidentally destroys, through an explosion, the central symbols of Crusoe’s order: his fortress, temple, court of justice and conservatory of weights and measures. See: Didier BERTRAND. 1995, 39-43.
37 Crusoe — now represented as ‘Cruso’ — dies during the text, after being rescued from the island by Susan Barton. The act of rescue incorporates Friday once again into white control: after he has lived in servitude under Cruso he is now contained by Barton’s benevolence. Barton and the ‘author’ Foe are
feminist reinterpretation, and finally commercialised by the ‘author’ Foe. Coetzee's text demonstrates the multi-layered exploitation of colonised peoples, in actuality and through textuality. His novel is a reflection of the fact that it was oppression that began ‘settler’ colonies and still continues to construct their formation. But he does not speak for those oppressed; and rightly so, as Helen Tiffin argues in her article 'Post-colonial literatures and counter-discourse'.

As a ‘Native’ author, Thomas King can arguably take the position of ‘Friday’ and re-speak this story from the perspective which Coetzee unveils as the ‘oppressed’ silence. But I would propose here that King takes a different approach to this exposure and re-telling strategy which is evident in other postcolonial deconstructions. It is vital to King’s textual analysis that he, like Coetzee, exposes the imperial forms of control. But while Coetzee is able to demonstrate effectively the white construction of the ‘other’ as being silent, King demonstrates that the white construction of that ‘silent other’ also constructs a non-Native identity, even a national identity. It is necessary for King to project a Native existence not simply at odds with, or oppressed by whiteness, but humorously outside of it in order to free Native representation from this oppressive and dependent dichotomy. In rejecting binaries, and therefore rejecting current national discourse, it is arguable that both authors imply Indigenous sovereignty, or at least a textualising of the Indigene which is ‘independent’ of the dominant discourses in Canada and Australia today.


In specific terms, King’s characterisations further these aims. To cite one instance, Thought Woman refuses to engage in any of the constructions of Nativeness which are created by imperial mythologies. King’s Crusoe, who orders his world into humorously simplistic good and bad points, signifies the binaries implicit in these mythologies. Thought Woman totally evades his construction of order. In addition, she does not allow Crusoe to occupy the circumscribed authorial space of construction itself. Here Crusoe is a writer, not of novels, but of lists. When Thought Woman — Crusoe’s assumed Native ‘other’ — appears, Crusoe exclaims ‘Thank God! [...] It’s Friday’. While this sort of line is a pun in itself, operating on all sorts of levels, Thought Woman corrects his assumption by shifting the evocative significance of the pronoun with another playful pun, ‘It’s Wednesday’.39

Inscriptions of parody and word play take on deeper significance when King makes obvious Crusoe’s imperial desire. He wishes to organise and segment, to be — ‘a civilised white man’ with ‘someone of color around whom [he] could educate and protect’.40 Thought Woman’s response to this desire is inversion and then evasion. She initially suggests that Crusoe can be Friday, and then she floats off.41 She is not contained by Crusoe’s story and does not at any point delineate her own oppression; only his prejudices. In fact, Thought Woman is foiled by Coyote’s disruption. Coyote re-enters the story at this point, repeating Crusoe’s oscillating discourse with parody and trickery:

39 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 325.
40 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 326.
41 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 326.
Under the good points, says Thought Woman, there are no Coyotes. “Whoa,” says Coyote. “That’s not a nice thing to say. That hurt my feelings [...] Under the bad points,” says Coyote, “there are soldiers waiting on shore to capture Thought Woman [...]. The good point is the soldiers have flowers in their hair.”

The 'story' is propelled by Thought Woman’s own frame of reference, particularly by the vengeful and foolish Coyote, not by anything Crusoe and the imperial myths he represents can effect or affect.

In his case, Mudrooroo displaces the position of savagery and aggression that often act as a premise for the imperial desire for control. The author responds to many of the concepts inherent in the moment of ‘loss’ or being shipwrecked. Mudrooroo explores one of the earliest, and most important, ‘historical’ accounts of the Eliza Fraser story: *The Shipwreck of the Stirling Castle* published by John Curtis in 1838. Kay Schaffer has identified Curtis’s account as constructing borders of meaning for a young Australian society. Early Australian ideas about women, class, and race in the colonial context come to the fore in Curtis' ‘historical’ analysis. Mudrooroo reflects this position in his relocation of the Eliza Fraser story from Thoorgine (Fraser Island) to the Australian mainland. With this shift Mudrooroo demonstrates the way in which this narrative came to serve as an all-encompassing colonial mythology. In Curtis’

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42 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 360-1.
44 SCHAUER, Kay. *In the Wake of First Contact: The Eliza Fraser Stories*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 81.
‘history’, as in the Crusoe narrative, spaces of empowerment and control — spaces of being ‘found’ and ‘belonging’ — were delineated against the space of the ‘other’. The notion that there is an Indigenous chaos which needs to be ordered, present in the Crusoe myth, is evident in Curtis’ imaging of Indigenous peoples. The term ‘savage’, used extensively by both Curtis and Crusoe, is part of a larger colonial discourse, which suggests that the practices of Indigenous peoples are primitive and inferior. The most obvious and frightening emblem of this savagery is that of cannibalism; it is the major symbol of alienation and chaos. The attribution of cannibalism to colonised peoples was a fundamental justification for empire. The Shipwreck of the Stirling Castle continually gestures towards cannibalism; ‘[w]hether the body was only partially or entirely consumed, the fair narrator will not undertake to say, as she never afterwards beheld the dreadful spot.’ The interviews Curtis conducted to form part of his ‘history’ reveal more about the irrational phobias of the crew, particularly Captain Fraser, than any real cultural practice of the Badtjala people. The captain told his crew to escape when their captors would be ‘dancing in a circle around a favourite friend...[or] a miserable captive, whose flesh they would presently greedily devour’. The fears of the captain are echoed by Crusoe’s observations in

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45 SCHAFFER, Kay. 1995, 81.
46 Mudrooroo is not the first to point to oppressive representation implicit in the Eliza Fraser narrative. Fiona Foley is a descendant of the Badtjala people, of Thoorgine. Her abstract art addresses the Eliza Fraser theme. See: Kay SCHAFFER. Fiona Foley’s Art: New Perspectives, New Departures. In: Kay SCHAFFER. 1995, 245-257.
47 CURTIS, John. 1838, 156.
48 CURTIS, John. 1838, 41.
which he justifies his right to kill the inhabitants of the island because ‘these men were enemies to my life, and would devour me, if they could’.  

These ‘western’ constructs are simultaneously exposed and satirised by both King and Mudrooroo.  Like Crusoe’s invocation of good points and bad points in *Green Grass, Running Water*, Mudrooroo’s *The Undying* highlights the fictional nature of European images of the indigene.  For example, the local settlement commander and some of his troops find the shipwrecked vessel, full of the remains of a vampire’s victims:

Captain Torrens was a veteran of the European wars and had seen and survived death, but when he came across the first bodies his hardened heart gave way to a fright verging on panic.  Now, along with the contempt he felt for this land, came fear of the inhabitants.  He tried to dismiss them with a curse, but stared down at what would be his fate if they attacked.  The male corpses had been badly mutilated at the groin […]

“It’s evil, sir, evil, but it must have been the women.  They did the same to Frenchies on the peninsula.”  

This passage embodies the way in which Mudrooroo’s analysis of colonial myth operates.  Like many ‘documentations’ of the cannibal activity of the ‘other’, the scene is of the ‘aftermath rather than [the] performance’ of cannibalism.  

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49 DEFOE, Daniel. 1965, 203.  
50 MUDROOROO. 1998b, 86.  
that this is the work of Indigenous people is made without real evidence to support such a conclusion, in the same way that King’s characters Thought Woman, First Woman, Old Woman, and Changing Woman are re-named arbitrarily by the Biblical and literary characters in *Green Grass, Running Water*. In *The Undying* the ‘savagery’ is actually the act of a ‘vampire’, a European character existing outside Indigenous cultural traditions. Mudrooroo re-situates the psychological origin of myths of savagery, within colonial narratives of being lost, in the dark misogynist fantasies and Gothic fables of Europeans themselves.52

In *The Undying*, ‘Eliza’ is the vampire, the cannibal, and is joined in her ‘savagery’ by a werebear. The graphic and bloody consumption pervading the text enacts an analogy for, and a repositioning of, the motives of colonisation. Yet it is not a straight transferral. These creatures consume and violate their own European kin as readily as they do the Aboriginal inhabitants of the landscape. Like Thought Woman’s ‘floating off’, the history of colonisation is not simply reworked via a reversal of roles. In the case of *The Undying*, Jangamuttuk’s and Amelia’s engagement on the spiritual Maban cum Gothic plane serves to disrupt bipolar visions within a singular reality. The rewriting of the ‘lost’ or captured woman as a predatory Gothic monster reworks Imperial senses of order and savagery. It is not that women are being held responsible for colonisation at some metaphorical level. The colonial emblem of the feminine is satirised in order to play with the binaries contrasting black savagery and white female vulnerability and purity.

52 Pierce has argued loss, and the ‘lost child’ in particular, was a prevalent theme in Australian colonial narratives and folklore. These themes ‘focused anxieties not only over legitimacy of land tenure, but of
(iv) Sexual ‘frontiers’

The figure of the western woman was vital to the representation of the shipwrecked/captivity narrative of being lost. The reason western women had to be so protected at the moment of contact and loss in the new world had to do with their metaphoric significance as being all that was precious and vulnerable within their own ethnic group. It is also linked to very important imperial codes that grew out of the racial encounter concerning the purity of the west. If the west was to find itself on the new landscape, it must also retain itself and the fear of miscegenation brought about discursive regimes concerning the possibility of the mixing of races.

King’s selection of particular colonial works is, in part, explained by the symbolic treatment of women in colonial discourse. The fear of what might happen to lost or captured women is satirised by interweaving the story of The Mysterious Warrior into Green Grass, Running Water. In King’s novel, The Mysterious Warrior is the tale of the captured white woman, Annabelle, and the Indian chief, Iron Eyes. It finds form in the trashy 'Western' that King’s character Eli reads and in the film that the author intersperses throughout Green Grass, Running Water. King’s ‘Mysterious Warrior’ has a sister, Hist, which links King’s internal tale to The Leatherstocking Sagas of James Fenimore Cooper, an intertextual reference King re-makes with his references to Natty Bumppo and Hawkeye. The theme of the captured woman is


implicit in *The Leatherstocking Sagas* in that *The Last of the Mohicans*, a book of this series, is a captivity narrative. Michael Mann’s 1992 film version of this text graphically repeats and visualises the urgency, inherent to captivity narratives, of protecting the white woman from the barbarism of ‘savages’.

As has been noted by many critics, one of the underlying themes in *The Leatherstocking Sagas* is the defining of the boundaries around race. The white woman becomes a symbol of the righteousness of colonisation and a boundary that can be neither literally nor metaphorically penetrated. The impossibility of mixed race relations is encoded in Cooper’s texts and their subsequent canonisation.\(^{54}\) King’s character, Eli, has thoughts on the ending of *The Mysterious Warrior* which are a blatant comment on racist ideologies surrounding miscegenation:

> In the end, he [Iron Eyes from Eli’s western] would choose his people, because it was the noble thing to do and because Western writers seldom let Indians sleep with whites.\(^{55}\)

This ideology is still present in contemporary inscriptions of race.\(^{56}\) The concentration on colonial ideologies by these authors is not simply a re-evaluation of a mythology of the past, but also a connection between this and an ideology of the present. To emphasise the continuing existence of such ideology King juxtaposes the captivity

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\(^{54}\) It must be noted that the colonial prohibition of mixed relations was not just inscribed with fear and protection of the white woman, but also in terms of the desire and appropriation of the Indigenous woman by the white man. Colonialism is interpellated with patriarchy. For more on colonisation as desire see: Robert YOUNG. *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*. London: Routledge, 1990.

\(^{55}\) KING, Thomas. 1993a, 222.

\(^{56}\) It must be noted that fear of miscegenation did not pervade all areas of the colonial encounter in North America. For example racial purity was not an obsession in Western Canada under the Hudson Bay company with many official marrying Native women. But this trend did shift as colonisation continued,
narrative of Annabelle and the Mysterious Warrior with the recent memory sequences of Eli.

Eli’s reflections on his long term relationship with Karen represent an examination of the period of his life in which he rejected his own sense of his identity, defining it through an ‘other’s’ — Karen’s — vision. Karen’s attempts to perceive Indigeneity through Eli are blinded by her own belief in the ‘Imaginary Indian’. This is a concept referred to throughout this chapter.\(^{57}\) For the character, Karen, this identity carries subconscious connotations of uncivilised passion and even notions of inferior intellect in her constant assumptions of greater knowledge and reading recommendations. Karen begins her relationship with Eli by encouraging him to read books ‘about’ Indians. She calls him ‘Mysterious Warrior’ when they make love, an allusion to the western of the same name within the text. The paradoxes implicit in Karen’s desire are evidenced by the fact that although she ‘liked the idea that Eli was an Indian’\(^ {58}\) she is concerned about making love to him in her parents’ house, despite repeated assertions of her parent’s ‘progressiveness’.\(^ {59}\) It is as if Karen desires a false idea of Eli, yet feels shame about her connection to him. Both responses to Eli are interpellated by Karen’s imagined sense of his Indigeneity. These acts represent the complex mix of exoticism, eroticism and fear that has created the image of the Native in North America. The external and alienating position of Karen’s projections are juxtaposed with the *Mysterious Warrior* narrative to reveal the origins of her

58 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 181.
59 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 179, 182 and 185.
assumptions. Additionally, the twin internal tales in the novel, of Eli’s past and Eli’s pulp reading, merge to compile a sense of the destructive white imagining of his self through oppressive contrast.

Cooper’s novel, *The Last of the Mohicans*, itself symbolises these complexities of fear and desire threaded through binarised colonial discourses. Magua is the ‘bad’ Indian and his savagery, combined with his desire for Cora, helps to demarcate the distinctions between the races. On the other hand, Uncas is the personification of the ‘good’ Indian, but even he is not able to consummate his relationship with Cora. So, one is left with the polarities which Gary Edgerton has termed the ‘savage reactionary’ and the ‘noble anachronism’. Both types section the ‘Native’ off from any meaningful interaction with ‘whiteness’. King’s selection of this narrative is particularly significant in that this ethos has been repeated in film versions of this text from the 1930s through to the 1990s.

The characterisation of Uncas and Chingachgook in such films as *The Last of the Mohicans* stand as symbols for white North America’s sense of itself. They demonstrate the crisis and silences present in the racial discourses at the base of

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61 Typically, the Native characters, in films throughout the twentieth century, are reduced to the level of metaphoric devices. Such an approach is evident in Michael Mann’s 1992 film version of this tale. Unlike Cooper’s Hawkeye, who has no romantic involvement in *The Last of the Mohicans*, Mann’s Hawkeye falls in love with Cora. Also, unlike the original story, Cora is not Mulatto. She is the epitome of whiteness, played by Madeleine Stowe. It is Alice, not Cora who Uncas devotes himself to in the 1992 filmic version, but as in the canonical text their relationship is represented by furtive glances only, and is never consummated. This keeps the boundaries over race tightly drawn. See: Gary EDGERTON. 1994, 4-11; and Scott ELLIS. Phantom Indians: some observations on recent cinema. *Border Crossings*. 11(4), Dec 1992, 42-45.
colonisation. King's selection of this tale reflects his emphasis on the present-day impact of racist mythologies that inform our depictions of the nation. King also deconstructs the crisis over the western self and, with it, the construction of identity in contrast to the 'Imaginary Indian'. In *Green Grass, Running Water* the storyteller (who may be one of the four Indians re-named Hawkeye, since this revision of the story is prefaced with the words, ‘This according to Hawkeye’\(^{62}\)) comments that ‘Hawkeye’ ‘sounds like a name for a white person who wants to be an Indian’.\(^{63}\) Here King expresses the desire implicit in the colonial fear of miscegenation.

Similarly, Mudrooroo has selected the Eliza Fraser narrative because it, like *The Last of the Mohicans*, is involved in demarcating racial boundaries. The Curtis captivity narrative tracing the history of Eliza Fraser exhibits parallel colonial codes of fear and desire. Curtis formulates a polarised depiction of European and Indigenous females which operates to control the codes of behaviour for Victorian women.\(^{64}\) In this way, Curtis continually describes the corporeality of Eliza Fraser in terms that emphasise that she is the Victorian ideal of a woman. She is maternal, a dutiful wife, but also frail and given to the ‘swoon of insensibility’ when confronted by Native ‘savagery’.\(^{65}\) Curtis’s depiction of Eliza Fraser as being the epitome of a proper, western, superior woman is completely deconstructed in the *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* series. The character of Amelia is many things: captor not captive (Galbol is her slave); cannibal not innocent; single, adulterous, sexually miscreant, and

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\(^{62}\) KING, Thomas. 1993a, 365.
\(^{63}\) KING, Thomas. 1993a, 437.
\(^{64}\) SCHAFFER, Kay. 1995, 87-8.
\(^{65}\) CURTIS, John. 1838, 148.
homosexual$^{66}$; violent and powerful, not frail.$^{67}$ Again, significance is not limited to inversion(s). The entire concept of oppressive dichotomies is eroded with the addition of further complications to the text. For example, Amelia’s predatory sexuality implies much more than a clear-cut opposition to moral codes. It is made opaque and ambiguous by the virginal and maternal references she makes to herself in *The Undying* and *Underground* respectively.$^{68}$ Rey Chow’s formulation of women as the bearers of culture$^{69}$ can assist in reading Mudrooroo’s selection of the white woman as representative of the intricacies of colonisation. Amelia embodies the performance of cultural norms and self-imaginings as well as the actuality of cultural brutalities and negativities. She acts as a symbol for the need to ascribe women a sexualised object of exchange value$^{70}$, while at the same time undermining this value through the actuality of her violent presence.

One of the most interesting deconstructions of dualities in Mudrooroo’s text centres on the meeting between Eliza/Amelia and the Aboriginal woman warrior, Ludjее. This meeting also parodies the colonising concept of the indigene as being childlike. Curtis places special emphasis on the accounts, which establish feminine hierarchies, in support of imperialism.$^{71}$ In contrast, Mudrooroo is able to narrate the

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$^{66}$ Amelia is originally on the ship as the lover of her sister’s husband in *The Undying*, then hypnotises an African American convict as her sexual slave in *Underground*, and is in a *ménage à trois* with a young married woman and a dingo in *The Promised Land*.

$^{67}$ The fact that the figure of white woman is inscribed with primarily evil and overtly sexual characteristics elicits strong feminist readings. Unfortunately, such readings extend beyond the constraints of this chapter.

$^{68}$ MUDROOROO. 1998b, 66; and MUDROOROO. *Underground*. Pymble, NSW: Angus and Robertson, 1999, 104.


$^{70}$ CHOW, Rey. 1998, 59

$^{71}$ CURTIS, John. 1838, 239.
scene through the European perspective while simultaneously subverting and satirising that position, in the following way: Amelia’s confrontation with Ludjee occurs because she is about to attack George, Ludjee’s son. Ludjee is inscribed throughout this section with maternal significance. In her description of Ludjee, Amelia makes particular note of her stretch marks, and when Ludjee takes pity on her, Ludjee’s care for her is likened to motherly nurturing:

I even rest my head on her breast, aping a weakened state. This evokes strong feelings within her, maternal feelings [...]. No person, except my mother, had ever seen me naked [...] I leave off all pretence and as my face comes up I sink my fangs into her neck [...] Her blood reeks of the sea and is harsh like fish oil. Visions of my mother giving me cod liver oil come into my mind and I retch again and again.72

The picturing of Amelia as a child is significant because, yet again, it counters the larger colonial mythology concerning the childlike nature of Native peoples and other colonised peoples. This mythology is best captured by Fanon’s deconstruction of European attitudes to language and the Negro:

It is said the Negro loves to jabber; in my own case, when I think of the word *jabber* I see a gay group of children calling and shouting for the sake of calling and shouting [...] The Negro loves to jabber, and from this theory it is not a long road that leads to a new proposition: The Negro is just a child.73

There are many other ways in which Curtis’ history reflects such colonial mythologies.

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72 MUDROOROO. 1998b, 120-1.
Curtis continually situates European indicators of the ‘civilised’ within codes of appearance, rather than behaviour. Thus, he represents Mrs Fraser (complete with her widow’s cap) in contrast to ‘naked’ savagery. In Mudrooroo’s case, he disrupts this juxtaposition of nakedness with savagery. Amelia’s gaze upon Ludjee, accompanied as it is with vampiric desire, is met with the gaze of pity from Ludjee. Amelia is disturbed by the inversion of her gaze, feels shame at her appearance, and feels the need to return to European codes of dress to retain ‘a degree of civilised living’. This moment is thick with irony as Amelia, a vampire, is blatantly outside the codes of civilised living. Her donning of the ‘garb’ of western civilisation and Mudrooroo’s use of Gothicism symbolises the ironies inherent in colonial values. In other words, the inclusion of Gothic savagery in *The Undying* re-arranges these codes with alterity and inexplicability. This has an unsettling effect. Reworked national codes appear ‘foreign’. Finally, then, Mudrooroo’s text shows that the sorts of mythologies in Curtis’ text, which attempted to set up societal conventions, are inapplicable to the Australian continent.

John Curtis’s construction of demure womanliness as a fortress erected around the purity of race is similarly dismantled. Curtis portrayed the Indigenous people as being completely separate and he therefore dismissed the possibility that Eliza could have engaged in sexual relations with (or could even have desired) the men who held her captive. There is just a moment in which Mrs Fraser alludes to the possible threat of her being made the wife of a ‘chief’. But, as Kay Schaffer has pointed out, ‘this is a

74 MUDROOROO. 1998b, 119.
‘fate worse than death’, which cannot be countenanced. The text can flirt with the threat of miscegenation, but the actual act must never occur’. In his 1998 version of the story, The Undying, Mudrooroo replaces this mania for racial purity with the overtly sexualised character of Amelia Fraser. Moreover, Amelia's desire is vampiric rather than being purely sexual, so the mixing of blood is represented in a most dramatic form. As a vampire, Amelia demonstrates the consumptive and controlling desires of empire, which were at play in the original Fraser myth. Interestingly, at one level it is a white character that is conducting the racial contamination, for she mixes her blood with that of her victims as a method of control. In this way, the idea that a white desire for mixed sexual relations did not exist is shown to be symbolically false. Mudrooroo uses the graphic and violent emblem of the vampire to demonstrate that mixings inevitably occurred. In addition, the nightmarish presence of Amelia, with her airs of civility and violent sexuality and blood focus, alludes to the links between the opposite poles of anti-miscegenation colonial discourses and the reality of frontier interactions. Both were part of the colonial process and operated to form oppressive narratives.

Amelia, then, stands as a symbol of the complexities of imperialism. I have argued throughout this chapter that Mudrooroo has constructed Amelia in this way for a number of reasons. She stands to locate European concepts of ‘native’ savagery within Europeans’ own Gothic fears and fantasies rather than Indigenous realities. She is an explicit image of the violence of colonisation, and the contrasting and contradictory European responses of repugnance and desire to the indigene. Amelia also embodies the actuality of miscegenation, through her graphic focus on blood and her mixing of it.

\footnote{SCHAFFER, Kay. 1995, 85.}
with her own in order to control others and ‘others’. The problematic surrounding Amelia as an emblem of imperialism lies in the fact that she is a woman, and while European women were certainly present and complicit in the machinations of colonialism, it is/was largely a patriarchal discourse. In addition, her overtly sexual depiction in Mudrooroo’s texts shares much with the colonial and, even twentieth century, sexist conceptions of female sexuality as vampiric. As Bram Dijkstra has argued, the “‘discoveries’ of early-twentieth-century biology saddled Western culture with a vicious eroticism centred on images of the sexual woman as vampire’.76 The significant element of Amelia’s construction as female vampire, for the purposes of this dissertation, lies less in feminist re-evaluations of Mudrooroo’s work and more in her casting as an Australian historical figure of vital nationalistic importance. By using the female vampire Mudrooroo is able to remove, from his re-writing of history, the format of rationalist, imperical research and create a narrative which combines the thematic conventions of non-realist narrative in European culture (that is, Gothicism) and those he believes to be thematically similar to Indigenous narratives. In doing so, he not only carries out the anti-colonial deconstructions referred to above, but creates a new narrative form which highlights the different themes of the cultural products within Australia while at the same time merging them in acts of incorporation. Once incorporated, some cultural elements no longer serve their nationalistic purpose, leaving a possibility for emphasis on Indigenous sovereignty. In this reading, Mudrooroo’s work highlights the elements of western culture which feminists have been drawing

attention to for decades, such as the intrinsic connection between many vampires and monsters and feminine sexuality.\textsuperscript{77}

The complex multi-signifying Eliza Fraser figure, is emphatically re-presented in the finale of the next book in the \textit{Master of the Ghost Dreaming} series. The fact that Mudrooroo is using her to satirise, invert and mimic elements and assumptions of colonial and national discourse is made clear in this text. This novel, \textit{Underground}, displays many of the complexities attending a discourse which embodies the tensions between a desire for the ‘other’ as ‘racially seductive’ (but impure) and a desire for celibate purity in racial terms. In this text the central narrator, the young Aboriginal boy, George, spends much time voyaging with his friend Wadawaka, the African convict. George has lost his parents and attributes father-like status to Wadawaka, while also responding to the calls of his 'mistress', the white female vampire, Amelia. These three are linked earlier in the underground sections of the novel as a ‘family’, albeit a captured and tortured one. In this setting George is told that his real father is not Jangamuttuk, but the white priest, Fada, an incarnation of Augustus Robinson.\textsuperscript{78} This unveiling of parentage is not necessarily stagnant; the unveiling suggests the possibility for parentage to change again. George’s parentage is one of the many unfixed tropes in these novels. Again, as with Thomas King, there is a deliberately tantalising use of apparent dichotomies (such as black and white, desire and self-discipline) while at the same time, the text rejects them. By this it is meant that the text reveals truths only to later destabilise them. For example, George is Jangamuttuk’s son,

\textsuperscript{77} For more on the connection between female sexuality and vampiric imagery see: Bram DIJKSTRA. 1996.
\textsuperscript{78} MUDROOROO. 1999, 174.
then Fada’s son, then Wadawaka’s ‘son-like’ apprentice. George is also Ludjee’s son, but then, Ludjee is not a fixed entity either. She is a re-incarnation of Truggernanna from Doctor Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World, and George is orphaned by Ludjee’s death in Underground, then re-claimed by her re-appearance from death in The Promised Land. George is also s/mothered by Amelia. For both King and Mudrooroo, the text acts to confuse a polarised or inverted dialogic by its very refusal to stand still and by its attempt at double positioning.

Like King’s selection of the Robinson Crusoe and Hawkeye stories, Mudrooroo’s choice of the Eliza Fraser story redresses the dilemma of mythologies in the past and in the present. This is because this tale is such an oft-repeated racialised narrative. In this context, Patrick White’s A Fringe Of Leaves is perhaps the most significant re-writing of the Eliza Fraser story. This is particularly so since this novel seems to have supplanted the documented historical events in the Australian consciousness. It appears that Mudrooroo is re-casting White’s version of this narrative more than any other. This is made particularly evident when the death of the husband of White’s heroine is examined:

He was several yards from the dying man when Mrs Roxburgh became aware of a terrible whooshing, like the beating of giant wings, infernal in that they were bearing down on her more than any other being. […] For a spear, she saw, had struck her husband; it was hanging from his neck, long and black, giving him a lopsided look.

79 SCHAFFER, Kay. 1995, 159.
White’s version of Eliza Fraser imagines the impending doom of the ‘savages’ weapon through images of ‘giant wings’, ‘long and black’. Mudrooroo re-writes the death of white men (and black men and women) on the frontier through these same images of giant wings and blackness. But he explicitly expands this image into a giant vampire and re-originates this fearful image as coming from England, not a weapon of the Indigenous people. In this way, Mudrooroo does not allow White to use Indigenous acts to stand as metaphors for white Australian psychology and angst.

For White, the focus on the space between classes, races and genders no longer constructs an imperialist imperative in Australia. In White’s ‘first contact’ narrative, the theme of Victorian morality ceases to be a warning about the loss of civility, as it was in Curtis’s text. Instead, it is an epilogue for the spiritual losses which adherence to Curtis’s brand of morality has wrought. White rewrites the history in terms of an individualist transcendental search for ‘truth’; in his words:

I substituted Ellen Roxburgh for Eliza Fraser, little more than a hardbitten shrew from the Orkneys...[to explore]...the psychological complexities, the sensibility and passion.

White deliberately explores a far more sexualised depiction of the white woman than Curtis. But he does so through the vehicle of aligning feminine sexuality with the ‘primitive’, symbolised in the Aboriginal people of the text. Mudrooroo is clearly playing with this conception in his construction of Eliza Fraser as sexual. But

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81 SCHAFFER, Kay. 1995, 165.
Mudrooroo’s Eliza Fraser is sexual because of her connection with her own culture’s ‘magic narratives’, not with an ‘other’s’. This allows Mudrooroo’s text to expose some of the colonisations White’s postcolonial text performs. White contrasts the confining trappings and hypocrisies of western civilisation with the essential human self through his use of the first contact narrative. In this instance the Indigenous people come to stand, metaphorically, for an ineffable human essence. This has two consequences for the metaphoric significance of the Indigenous people. Firstly, they are confined in a cell termed ‘pre-history’ — a vacuum of cultural sameness — which positions them only as another opposition to Imperial power, another ‘other’, which elides individuality. Secondly, the Indigenous community which captures Ellen is signified primarily as a stage in her own individualist, psychological and emotional journey, a return to her primal origins. White’s heroine, Ellen, describes the landscape through which she travels as a ‘remote country! […] Of dark people.’ This completely removes any real agency and can be viewed as an attempt to locate and reconcile the western self in the new colonial landscape.

(v) Myths of dying races

Ironically, another method by which European colonisation attempted to find itself was to empty the landscape. This lies at the heart of the pronouncement of ‘terra nullius’ in Australia. More significant and destructive were the sense of belonging and the appeasement of guilt offered by the myth of the dying race. James Fenimore Cooper’s *Leatherstocking Sagas* were fundamental to the development of this myth in North America. In many ways his texts can be read as a elegy for Native peoples, with
the character of Hawkeye playing a hybrid role between cultures. His own dislocation by civilisation and his ultimate demise acts as a Messiah-like expurgation of the sins of that civilisation while the death of Chingachgook before him emphasises the predestined nature of Native 'extinction'. The naming of Natty Bumpho as ‘Hawkeye’ in the sagas is an important moment in his inscription into the landscape. It is not so much that he wants to be Indian but that Cooper’s text enables Natty to adopt an archetypal role, which provided North Americans with legitimacy in the landscape. 

Natty or ‘Deerslayer’ is renamed ‘Hawkeye’ by the first Indian whom he kills, who is (ironically) able to admire Natty’s supreme skill in being able to shoot him, ‘eye’s sartain — finger lightning — aim, death— great warrior soon. No Deerslayer— Hawkeye — Hawkeye — Hawkeye. Shake hand.’ The fact that the ‘Mingo’ accepts his death (and even his commending of Natty in bringing it about) epitomises one of the central themes of the sagas. The epic served as a catharsis for the Non-Native peoples of the American continent because it demonstrated the inexorable demise of Indigenous people, autogenocide, in which the European could only act as voyeur.

This myth of the 'dying race' was so ideologically successful in its complicated game of silencing and erasure that when, two centuries later, Natty is reincarnated in popular culture as the Lone Ranger he is able to assert white legitimacy to the ‘vacant’ land. Laws of possession are accorded by the US national government and by Christian morality. Thus, in the contemporary world the Lone Ranger operates to mark out the...

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boundaries of national identity. To cite an instance, in one episode Tonto parts with the Lone Ranger; Tonto is angered by the discovery of the Lone Ranger’s childhood involvement in the massacre of his people — the Potowamis. But then, the two men are in turn reconciled by the need to fight the injustices of the Wild West. The message is clear: the past incidences of violence were part of the natural order and there are current ‘crimes’ to investigate and solve which are more important to the contemporary world.89

As said above, both Hawkeye and the Lone Ranger are characters in *Green Grass, Running Water*. In fact, the extent to which non-Natives saw Indigenous demise as being inevitable is emphasised in another of King's central inspirations, that of the classic Melville novel, *Moby Dick*. The white narrator, Ishmael, is the only survivor of the experience of the chase of the whale and the wrecking of the ship, ‘The Pequod’; itself named after an 'extinct' tribe of North Americans from the imperially named region, ‘New England’.90 This tribe, the Pequots, reappears in the storyteller's dialogue in King’s *Green Grass, Running Water*. King revises Melville’s use of the tribal name as a symbol of the dying race and re-activates the responsibility for this tribe’s decimation. In having the storyteller correct Coyote's 'book' knowledge, King emphasises the power of utilising this act of imperial violence as a literary conceit91, just as Mudrooroo rejects Patrick White's construction of Indigenous people in *A Fringe

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91 FEE, Margery and Jane FLICK. Coyote pedagogy: Knowing where the borders are in Thomas King’s *Green Grass, Running Water*. *Canadian Literature*. 161/162, Summer/Autumn 1999, 136.
of Leaves. Coyote says:

“I read the book. It’s Moby-Dick, the great white whale who destroys the Pequod.”

“You haven’t been reading your history,” I tell Coyote.

“It’s the English colonialists who destroy the Pequots.”

Melville pursued the myth of the dying race and the romanticisation of Native peoples in other ways. In his book he symbolises the emergence of the west in an enlightened vein, following the hardships experienced through the death of the indigene. Ishmael survives the shipwreck by floating upon the coffin of Queequeg, his Native companion. In *Moby Dick* Indigenous death seems to be a necessary precondition for the survival of whiteness in the new continent.

King’s characters Hawkeye, Lone Ranger and Ishmael dissent completely from this mythology of the dying race. The act of naming exists in *Green Grass, Running Water*, as it does in the aforementioned ‘Mingo’ incident in Cooper’s *Deerslayer*. But in this case it is Natty who, upon dying from a gunshot from ‘an unknown assassin’, names Old Woman ‘Hawkeye’. He does this in order to get things ‘settled’ and he gets the name from his ‘book’. The written fixing of identity and history is clearly lampooned here. The assassin is commended as ‘Hawkeye’ and the figure of death is derogatorily identified as a ‘mingo’ in Cooper’s text. Conversely these figures are ‘unknown’ and ‘Hawkeye’ respectively in King’s. The characters from western fiction who appear in the incarnations of the story in *Green Grass, Running Water* are always involved in this attempt to make the woman of the story conform to their own story or

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92 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 220.
‘book’. In essence, these characters are involved in a satirical recasting of the colonial and racist texts surrounding the indigene.

King satirises these 'imaginary Indians' (Mingo, Queegueg, Tonto and Chingachgook) and illustrates their irrelevance to First Nations peoples. First Woman, masked as The Lone Ranger, does not know who Tonto is, even when the soldiers send their regards to him.93 This indicates a deliberate refusal to recognise the western construction and mythologising of the Indian. The fact that King selects cultural icons from the recent mediums (such as the Lone Ranger) as well as from canonical literatures of the past suggests a parallelling consistency in non-Native portrayals of the indigene throughout North American history. By refusing to recognise such discourses of power and oppressive representations the myth of the dying race is invalidated. The myth of the dying race is also elided in the presence and symbolically equal significance of the coeval Native characters. Characters such as Lionel, the television salesman, Eli, the university professor and Charlie the lawyer are all in the process of learning about themselves rather than fixed in any degenerative existence.94

The myth of the dying race was integral in white Australians’ construction of national legitimacy too. As Cassandra Pybus has argued, the myth of the dying race forms an important part of the way that Tasmanians, in particular, have seen themselves. There is an easier ‘racial guilt... uncomplicated by problematic issues of reparations and land rights’.95 The implications of this mythology are significant,

93 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 457.
94 The depiction and function of the contemporary characters is dealt with in depth in Chapter Four.
resulting in outrage at the claims and assertions of identity amongst contemporary Tasmanian Aborigines. The attempt to discredit Michael Mansell for not being an ‘authentic’\textsuperscript{96} Aboriginal person points to the tendency of the majority to believe in the demise of Truggernanni as symbolic of the demise of all Tasmanian Aboriginal people. In turn, the importance of Truggernanni as tragic last member of her race began because of her romanticisation in the journals of George Augustus Robinson — and those journals have served as a vital document in First Contact history. Therefore, the successful genocide of the Tasmanian people has been literally textualised into existence.

Governor Arthur employed Robinson as the conciliator of the Aborigines, in order that they might be ‘civilised’. His role eventually involved him in the rounding up of the Aboriginal peoples of Tasmania and the shipping of these tribes to Wybaleena Island.\textsuperscript{97} In the twentieth century these journals were an important source for Mudrooroo partly because of their very ‘constructedness’. They have been used as historical background, yet as Mudrooroo has argued, they are more akin to fiction in that Robinson was engaged in a creation of images of Indigenous peoples as well as in a favourable reinterpretation of himself; for history, for posterity and — ultimately for a written legacy.\textsuperscript{98}

\textsuperscript{98} JOHNSON, Colin. Private voice, public reaction: The journals of George Augustus Robinson. \textit{Island}. 33, Summer 1987, 42.
Mudrooroo’s use of Robinson can be seen as part of his rejection of rationalistic, nationalistic history. History becomes fiction in his historical fiction. Mudrooroo’s depiction of Fada clearly demonstrates Robinson in this act of reconstruction. He attempts to sketch an idyllic pose of Truggernanni, now re-envisioned as Ludjee, diving into the sea. Fada wants to freeze her in a romanticised vision of past tradition: ‘It must be as you once did’. But Ludjee escapes this oppressive attempt to cement her representation and dives into the sea, out of Robinson’s picture, and into the maban reality, with her totemic companion Manta Ray. This is similar to Thought Woman’s ‘floating off’ in King’s Green Grass, Running Water. Fada then is left with a sketch of an empty terrain, and replaces Ludjee with a crude sketch of a woman, likened by the narrator to a stereotyped image of an English prostitute. This scene reenacts the process of colonisation in many ways. The positioning of the image of the prostitute in Ludjee’s place is, in part, a humorous comment on Fada’s creative limitations and also a demonstration of the way in which the colonised woman occupied circumscribed and binarised roles. Fada desires Ludjee at this point, and therefore envisions her as a fallen woman rather than simply as a woman. The Victorian ethos of women as either ‘damned whores’ if desirable as opposed to ‘God’s police’ when morality is alluded to. With this one image Mudrooroo suggests a connection between this ethos in the male colonial mind and the sexualisation of the indigene in colonial discourse discussed in section four of this chapter. Additionally, Fada’s initial attempt to freeze Ludjee

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100 MUDROOROO. 1991, 62.
within an image he deemed ‘authentic’ — yet necessarily in the past — evokes the
myth of the dying race.

Mudrooroo clearly depicts Fada as a character that recognises his own role as a
chronicler of that which is passing or past. This is reflected in an earlier incident in the
same text. Fada bemoans the dying of the ‘traditions’ after he witnesses a ceremony,
which is actually one of Jangamuttuk’s newly formed, anti-colonial devices. What is
more, Fada plans to ‘improvise’ the designs (which he cannot remember) in order to
write an anthropological paper, while he at the same time asserts the need to prevent
and wipe out such ceremonies as his ‘Christian duty’. The processes of genocide,
therefore, exist coterminously with discourses of both the dying race and a fixed
‘authentic’ past. And, significantly, all are re-membered and recorded by Fada as a
fabrication. The function and origins of exploitative images are thus clearly exposed.

Mudrooroo could also be seen as subscribing to the myth of the dying race.
Undoubtedly the title, Doctor Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the
World could be seen to be suggestive of an apocalyptic vision. Kateryna Arthur has
gone so far as to propose that the progressive historicity present in this text is
incompatible with Aboriginality because it involves consequential and linear thought.
She points to the use of the words ‘times’ and ‘ending’ (throughout the novel, and in its
title, respectively) to illustrate what she feels to be an alien grammar’s failure to project

These points of criticism are not accurately placed upon a text in which there is not so much an evocation of a dying race, but a continual process of encounter and interaction. The pluralisation of the word 'time' and the adjectival use of the word 'end' remove the sense of an historical *fait accompli*. Doctor Wooreddy’s *Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* must be read symbolically in order to discover its impact. Even after all the death, rape and cultural dislocation, there is enlightenment in Wooreddy’s discovery of oneness in the caves with his companion Waau. The ending of the novel projects a potentially hopeful future:

The yellow setting sun broke through the black clouds to streak rays of light upon the beach. It coloured the sea red [...] the clouds closed again and the world vanished.

Thus the changing of a culture under attack is not transformed into the myth of a dying race, but reimaged as a nebulous and empowered culture via the iconic appearance of the colours of the Aboriginal flag.

The rejection of the myth of the dying race is taken even further in the 1991 rewrite of *Doctor Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World*, entitled *Master of the Ghost Dreaming*. Here Wybaleena is not the final resting-place of the tribes from Tasmania, gathered by Robinson. These people escape the island upon a stolen ship (itself a possible metaphor for Mudrooroo’s ‘borrowing’ of the past and politically loaded fictions and histories). The characters then enter a non-sequential

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series of texts which continually reenact different elements of the imperial encounter in the three books *The Undying*, *Underground* and *The Promised Land*. These will be the subject of more detailed analysis in this, and in future chapters of this thesis; suffice it to say here that any intimation of the allegedly moribund nature of Australian Indigenous culture is totally rejected by the author in these latter works.

**(vi) Native/non-Native partnerships**

Four points are vital to King and Mudrooroo’s preoccupation with the non-Indigenous appropriation of the indigene into like discourses of national, colonial and imperial identity. These include the previously discussed topics surrounding the obfuscation of affinities between the colonised, the dismantling of the inscriptions of loss and captivity, issues of desire and fear and the myth of the dying race inherent in the legitimisation of colonies. A fifth mythology, which is unpacked and exposed by both writers, is that of the Native/non-Native partnership.

The need to find and assert the colonial self at the inception of settlement/invasion paradoxically resulted in the construction of contact histories and stories which foreground the indigene. This foregrounding could coexist with myths of the dying race because the Indigenous figures involved were extraordinary individuals, unrepresentative of the collective whole. Their collusion could operate at a similar appeasing and cathartic level to the autogenocidal implications of the myth of the dying race. These figures provided extensions of the ‘good Indian’ referred to above, and are just as prevalent an image in the Australian context.
seen in this light, Thomas King’s four Indians in Green Grass, Running Water are all incorporations of the Native/non-Native partnership: Ishmael and Queequeg; Robinson Crusoe and Friday; Hawkeye and Chingachgook; and The Lone Ranger and Tonto. Augustus Robinson was connected to Truggernanni in historical records, while Eliza Fraser was found by a convict who used his connections with other Indigenous tribes who knew the Badtjala people. This echoes a number of other ‘first encounter’ histories, so many of which underline the importance of the ‘Jacky Jacky’ figure as guide, interpreter and assistant to explorers. This image is evoked differently in Mudrooroo’s use of the revolutionary tracker Sandawara and in the same author’s exploration of the bizarre, almost mystical, character Jackamara Holmes.

One of the most insidious features of the imperial focus upon the Native/non-Native partnership is that it involved an implication of Native collaboration in Indigenous oppression. It also suggests that frontier interactions were individualised, friendly encounters when in fact they were often en masse and violent. King and Mudrooroo both demonstrate the presence of this colonial myth by particularly selecting the partnered characters that are all originally lone figures. These figures operate in isolation from the rest of their own community, with the Native companion positioned as a sidekick. For their part, King and Mudrooroo disrupt the notion of Indigenous complicity in colonisation by undermining the validity of this lone figure and his/her Indigenous accomplice.

106 Recently historians have documented and asserted the importance of Indigenous armed resistance during the frontier interaction of early ‘settlement’ and invasion. See: Henry REYNOLDS, The Other
For example, Jackamara first appears in *Wild Cat Screaming* as the detective who is placed in the prison in an undercover operation to uncover the institution's panopticon racket. The prison image itself stands for nation mirroring the convict origins of Australia as a penal state. But this prison, built on the Jeremy Bentham panopticon model used to control the convicts, is restyled as a subversive panoptic scam, controlled by the imprisoned. Jackamara (or Jacky as his white police commanders call him) is sent into gaol to uncover this inversion of the panoptic state of incarceration for the profit of the inmates. Here ‘Jacky’ is at one level inscribed with the traditional helpful tracker image, so familiar to readers of Australian novels such as those of Arthur Upfield. However, this image becomes far more complicated in *The Kwinkan*. In this book, the white narrator only sees Jackamara as a unidimensional ‘Jacky’. The narrator continually undermines himself through his own misunderstanding and misinterpretation of events. The ‘Jacky’ in this text is very much unknown and unknowable in terms of his affiliations. He holds multiple positions and both the narrator’s and the reader’s searches to define him are fruitless. In fact, contrary to the colonial image of the ‘Jacky’ figure, the white narrator is no intrepid explorer, and Jackamara becomes the prime focus. It is the white, unnamed narrator who is effectively made the sidekick, while making futile attempts to assert his own primacy:

[… ] Jackamara is the hero of this tape, and I’ll get to him, but well, what about my life? You have to pass through some of it to get to him, so you better listen,

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take me along with the good Doctor and then cut and shape it; but, but, I have veto on the material, on my life as it were. It is my life and I want to keep it mine[...].

King makes a similar point via his four undefined partnered ‘Indians’. In his case, it is the Indians who have taken the Non-Native names, calling themselves: the Lone Ranger; Hawkeye; Robinson Crusoe; and Ishmael. They do not act out the role of the accomplice, maintaining the control and the focus of the narrative itself in their story telling. They also confuse the whole structure of partnership in that the characters are no longer white men with an inferior Indigenous companion. They are amorphous and ‘androgynous’, occupying multiple positions within ‘the story’. They are simultaneously Thought, Changing, Old and First Woman, the rebelling men in the history of the prison at Fort Marion, and the ageless male/female characters (depending on the interpretation of the files or of Babo) in the mental hospital. Building on the renunciation of the stereotypical oppositions which King has invested in his novel, the listing of such attributes appears in the book only in order to enable King to explode their relevance. First he writes:

Indians can run fast. Indians can endure pain. Indians have quick reflexes.

Indians don’t talk much. Indians have good eyesight. Indians have agile bodies.

These are Indian gifts, says Nasty Bumppo.

Interesting, says Old Woman.

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Whites are patient. Whites are spiritual. Whites are cognitive. Whites are philosophical. Whites are sophisticated. Whites are sensitive. These are all white gifts, says Nasty Bumppo.

So, says Old Woman. Whites are superior, and Indians are inferior.\textsuperscript{111} Clearly, King does not believe this conclusion, and he induces the reader to agree with his implicit rejection of this viewpoint by stating it so starkly and satirically. On top of this exposé of the oppressive binarism, which has run through this entire chapter, King reinvents the discourse by removing the partnership structure all together. There are four Indians, not two, and they move as an organic whole. They are not lone crusaders upon the landscape, but are in the process of a communal attempt to ‘fix things’; regardless of whether or not it is entirely successful.

In the same way, in \textit{The Kwinkan}, Mudrooroo’s reinscription of the partnership mythology allows space for failure. Complete resolution and dominion over the problem is not pursued. Jackamara becomes a mystery. He is implicated in activism on behalf of the rights of his own local Aboriginal people, and the activities of the freedom fighters on the South Pacific island plantation. But it is also insinuated that he is a symbol of neo-colonialism — in that it seems he is a friend of Carla and Miss Tamada — a member of the South Pacific elite and a Japanese corporate investor, respectively.

In another incongruous turn, it appears that sometime after he was nearly flailed to death (by Carla for his political subterfuge) he becomes a major political figure in her island country. Therefore, Mudrooroo has used the character of Jackamara to

\textsuperscript{111} KING, Thomas. 1993a, 434-5.
simultaneously isolate and link individual and communal sentiments and, in so doing, has questioned racial binarisms.

(vii) History, fiction and the constructed subject

In keeping with larger imperial experiences, and with mythologies of being lost and of the dying race, the partnerships between Europeans and the ‘good native’ operate to desensitise the reader against ill-founded definitions of the legitimacy of non-Native people. As Chadwick Allen has noted, the concept of a masked lone ranger, the seer in Foucauldian terms, holds power over that which he perceives. The lone ranger not only polices the boundaries of Americanism in his protection of the Wild West and the great North American dream, but he incorporates Tonto into that, binding him into this project through the secret of his identity.\(^{112}\) The codified frontiers present in this encounter, as with those in the Eliza Fraser narrative, and, indeed, all of the imperial mythologies I have discussed in this chapter, operate to build and create the 'nation'. The most important element of King’s and Mudrooroo’s exposé of these mythologies, then, is the manipulation of the characters to remove their masks, so to speak. The textual enactments of King and Mudrooroo actually pronounce themselves, self-consciously, as re-presented constructs in order to highlight the false foundations of national myths, while still recognising their power to influence the present.

Mudrooroo’s more recent work also engages with this interplay between that which is revealed and that which is residual. *The Undying* revisits a national myth born

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\(^{112}\) ALLEN, Chadwick. 1996, 629-30.
of an unstable narrative. Michael Alexander, writing Mrs Fraser’s history in 1971, says, ‘objective fact in the Stirling Castle story is an elusive spirit and just as it is about to be grasped it has the habit of changing form.’\footnote{ALEXANDER, Michael. Mrs Fraser on the Fatal Shore. London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1971, 108.} Indeed, the history of ‘Eliza Frazer’, in the years following Eliza’s ‘rescue’, was continually contested. This included debate over the most basic facts (such as the specification of which convicts were involved in her return to Moreton Bay) and more complicated moral issues concerning her inscription as whore or victim and her worthiness of financial assistance.\footnote{HEALY, Chris. Eliza Fraser and the impossibility of postcolonial history. In: Chris HEALY, ed. From the Ruins of Colonialism: History as Social Memory. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 166.}

Mudrooroo’s subversion of these narratives demonstrates that questions of truth are corrupted, and indeed become inapplicable as narrative becomes myth. For Patrick White, others control the depiction of his character Ellen, and it is her own self-discovery that is vital. She is first re-invented by Mr Roxburgh as a lady, and then recreated by the ministrations and adornments of the Aboriginal women, and finds potential balance in the embodiment of merchant life through Mr Jevons.\footnote{HASKELL, Dennis. “A lady only by adoption” — Civilisation in A Fringe of Leaves. Southerly. 47, 1987, 440.}

Conversely, Curtis promotes his ‘history’ as the pure evidence, as can be gathered from the title page:

Shipwreck of the Stirling Castle, containing, a \textbf{faithful} narrative of the dreadful sufferings of the crew, and the cruel murder of Captain Fraser by the savages. Also the horrible barbarity of the cannibals inflicted upon the Captain’s widow, whose unparalleled sufferings are \textbf{stated by herself}, and \textbf{corroborated} by other
Mudrooroo’s Amelia stands, then, in stark contrast to White’s Ellen and Curtis’ Eliza. The latter two are constructions of femininity that, respectively, represent the search for truth (nationally and individually), and the espousal of imperial truth and righteousness. Amelia, on the other hand, is continually toying with notions of truth and 'story' and operates continually to veil any truth. This element of her character is embodied literally in her flight from sunlight and her revelling in darkness. Apart from her many other symbolic significations discussed in this chapter she also stands as a graphic symbol of the bias and 'creation' implicit in myth. Like Robinson, Amelia attempts to manipulate her own construction and is firmly in control of her own story. She shipwrecks her boat deliberately on the shore. She has to land because she has consumed all of the crew on board the ship. She re-invents herself — for both the colonial settlement and for her Aboriginal slave Galbol Wedgna — as her sister Eliza, a maiden in distress and — respectively — as a goddess and source of power.

This self-invention reaches delusional proportions with her theft of the Aboriginal children in Underground. She consumes the blood of these children and feeds them with her blood, incorporating them into herself, and maniacally conceiving of them as her own offspring. This event has a dark analogous relationship with the histories uncovered in the Australian Bringing them Home Report of the 1997 National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families. These children are commonly known as the ‘Stolen Generation’, although

\[\text{survivors’.}^{116} \text{[emphasis mine]}\]

116 CURTIS, John. 1838.
117 MUDROOROO. 1998b, 75.
118 MUDROOROO. 1999, 103.
there has been some political controversy about the use of this term.\textsuperscript{119} By depicting his reincarnation of Eliza Fraser as mother to the stolen children, Mudrooroo suggests that it is the imperial nationalist myths upon which we base ourselves that are responsible for the perpetuation of racist attitudes.

In response to this oppressive myth-formation the textual narrative becomes a contested site, shifting between the point of view of a range of characters: that of George, the Aboriginal yarn-spinner recounting events in which he was involved; Amelia’s voice; and that of an omniscient narrator. If primacy is to be given to one of these voices it must be to George, whose tale frames the text, and who is \textit{The Undying} to which the title refers. George self-consciously refers to his narrative as both story and songline. This theme of self-conscious storytelling is repeated in the preface of the novel itself with the lines, ‘To my friends and enemies, this story is fiction and should be treated and read as such. No reality where none intended.’\textsuperscript{120}

This statement is also a comment on the precarious and multiple nature of reality which is present in both Tom King's and Mudrooroo's fiction. This element is examined at greater length in the chapter entitled 'The Lost Men' of this dissertation;

\textsuperscript{119} Senator John Herron, defended in the Lower House of the Federal Parliament by Prime Minister John Howard, offended Aboriginal groups in early 2000 by suggesting that these children were not ‘stolen’ as the authorities of the time believed they were operating in the childrens’ interests and because statistically 10% of children did not constitute genocide. HERRON, John. A generation was not stolen. \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}. 4 April 2000. URL: http://www.smh.com.au/news/0004/04/pageone/pageone09.html (20 Feb 2002). Such petty haggling over semantics is graphically and violently overturned in Mudrooroo’s bloody image of nurture in this section of the texts.

\textsuperscript{120} MUDROOROO. 1998b.
however, in the present context, *The Undying* — which in itself is a revisiting and rewriting of some of Mudrooroo’s earlier texts — demonstrates that there are no fixed truths. A story’s meaning is continuously changing and it is important to understand the negative effects the myths formed from narrative have come to hold.

King also creates a contested narrative in which ‘truth’ as a fixed concept is defused. There are several narratorial positions: firstly that of the ‘omniscient’ narrator, particularly present in the realist section. But there is also the perspective of the storyteller who, as has been mentioned previously, is played by many possible characters, being either differentially or simultaneously, one of the four Indians, Coyote or the external narrator, King. The four Indians preface each telling of the story with the statement 'this according to' followed by one of each of their names. This suggests that each of the four Indians takes a turn in being storyteller, while simultaneously being involved in other elements of the story. Thus construction itself is satirised in the act of repetition and multiple existence. The notion of fixed position from which to control the narrative is also humorously dismissed in these multiple existences. It is implied that problems and ‘mistakes’ can evolve from omniscience:

“How long do we have to wait?” said Robinson Crusoe.

“Not long,” said the Lone Ranger.

“Are you being omniscient again?” said Hawkeye.

“I think so,” said the Lone Ranger.
“I was afraid of that,” said Robinson Crusoe.

“What else would you like to know?” said the Lone Ranger.  

As is discussed in the first section of this chapter, both authors blur genre boundaries and the meaning of the split between the disciplines of History and Literature. For both authors this blurring of the genres on which they base their texts is taken even further by contesting the boundaries between more ephemeral concepts such as ‘truth’, ‘reality’ and ‘representation’.

King and Mudrooroo illustrate textual examples of hiding behind masks of signification. King’s use of the *Moby Dick* narrative is interesting because this novel has been read since its inception as an examination of the truths behind masks, an expose of the commodification inherent in colonialism.  

Like White, Melville criticised the hypocrisy of an imperialism that hid behind falsely benevolent masks to pursue self-interest. And yet, Melville’s text has the multicultural crew dying in their commitment to a crazed union with Ahab who is obsessed with the destruction of the white whale. The whiteness of the whale literally whites out cultural independence in the attempt at a universalist statement about the search for truth or revenge. The harpooning crew of the Pequod in Melville’s text all originate from colonised cultures and are all identified through their ‘difference’ to western culture rather than as individual people with separate cultural backgrounds. Ironically, despite this *en masse* dissimilarity they still sacrifice their lives to Ahab’s quest, and in a sense, Melville’s

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121 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 51.
122 SIMPSON, David. *Fetishism and Imagination: Dickens, Melville, Conrad*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1982, 92-3. Of course, there are many other elements of Melville’s canonical text, which King is deconstructing, such the human capacity for evil and the western fear of ‘chaos’ in ‘nature’.
narrative meaning. By this it is meant that the harpooners exist as caricatures of base
instinct and passion, similar to the ‘savages’ in Ellen Roxburgh’s psychic journey in A
Fringe of Leaves. Melville’s ‘colonised’ are symbolic elements within the narrative
and lose agency in this characterisation. Like White's depiction of Indigenous people,
the portrayal is representational rather than individuated, unlike his drawing of the
European characters. Both people — the colonised in Melville's and White's texts —
are subsumed into the individualist search for ‘truth’. And that search reveals
allegorical types rather than human beliefs with recognisable attitudes.

Like Mudrooroo, King does not allow the west to adopt Indigenous culture as
part of its own Edenic gesture story — a stage in the west's development. Ahab’s
attempts to see the whale as representative of all that is evil in the world are similarly
dismissed. In Green Grass, Running Water King does not have a great white whale;
instead Ahab is frustrated by the appearance of
‘Whaleswhaleswhaleswhaleswhalesianswhalesianswhaleswhaleswhales [...]
Moby Jane [...] The
Great Black Whale.’ As a result, all of his crew jump in boats and row away. The
whole attempt at a Universalist, and necessarily culturally reductive, tale is confused by
the chaos that King inserts. There is also no fixed ‘truth’ possible; just continuing
cycles of action:

And Moby-Jane swims over to the ship and punches a large hole in its bottom.
There, says Moby-Jane. That should take care of that.
That was very clever of you, says Changing Woman as she watches the ship
sink. What happens to Ahab?

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124 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 219 and 221.
We do this every year, says Moby-Jane. He’ll be back. He always comes back.\textsuperscript{125}

In this way King removes the patriarchal white focus of the tale and shifts the epic sequential quest into a circular dialogue. The whale is no longer a masked symbol. She has entered the story in her own right, emphasising the importance of the removal of destructive constructs. As King has said:

Nobody has ever asked anything about the whale in \textit{Moby Dick}. The whale is just sort of this Christian icon, maybe it’s good, maybe it’s evil. Ahab and Ishmael are at the centre of the whole thing. But as far as I’m concerned, really it’s the whale’s story, and it’s a very different kind of story. And I just tell, just a small part of it. I mean some people complain that I’m just, you know, fooling around with history, but it’s not true, I’m getting it straight for everyone.\textsuperscript{126}

King and Mudrooroo, then, are ‘getting it straight’ for everyone\textsuperscript{127}. The stories of empire, which delineated and provided sustenance and substance to the nation, are seen as being based upon dichotomies and imaginary constructs of Indigenous people. But in ‘getting it straight’ they do not advocate a new polarised, policed and bordered authoritative construct. Both authors draw analogies with experiences from ‘others’ in order to demonstrate that the imperial moment is by no means past. In their intertextual selections they plot a common trajectory of nation forming, from the savagery and chaos to be conquered in the shipwreck and captivity narrative, to the absolution of colonial guilt in the myths of the dying race and the Native/non-Native partnership. In

\textsuperscript{125} KING, Thomas. 1993a, 221.
\textsuperscript{126} KING, Thomas. Personal interview. 1998.
\textsuperscript{127} There may well be further gender and sexual connotations to King’s word choice here, but there is not room to go into King’s use of homosexual political word-play at this point.
exposing these tales as constructive of the nation, King and Mudrooroo simultaneously invent a new discourse with which to breach the colonial encounter. This discourse is not based only upon dichotomies and thus deliberately evades stasis. King and Mudrooroo not only insert Indigeneity into a dialogue with such mythologies, but they also imagine a discourse occurring around and beyond it. The textual focus is often on what is not in history rather than a prescriptive resolution to what is included in the historical record. This is because process and movement are emphasised. History becomes one of many possible fictions and thus the concept of nation dependent on this history is avoided altogether. The necessities of a whole complex interweaving of stories in that process will be the subject of the next chapter.
Chapter Three

Gothicism and Christianity:
Different uses of satire and incorporation.

As I have emphasised thus far, Thomas King and Mudrooroo attempt to move beyond the realm of purely oppositional writing, even when in a dialogue with oppressive colonial narratives. In this chapter I will be continuing this argument by highlighting the inter-textual incorporation of older stories, perceived here as inherent to colonising narratives; namely, Christianity and Gothicism. Gothicism and Christianity are complex categories, which are not immediately similar and both embody a diverse range of perspectives and interpretations. Conversely, they cannot be imagined outside of one another: for example, the Gothic is often dependent upon notions of Christianity as the base of civilisation and ‘the natural’. Here, Christianity and Gothicism are examined because of their capacity to perpetuate the colonisation process — for their deployment in the western construction of the indigene.

King and Mudrooroo creatively recite (and re-site) Christianity and Gothicism, respectively. There is even some cross-over, in which Mudrooroo employs Christian related motifs and King semi-Gothic ones. There are also important differences in the approaches of the authors. Mudrooroo is able to appropriate the Gothic genre in his writing back to its colonial usage. King, on the other hand, does not specifically appropriate the style of the Christian genre in this way. Instead he uses Christian motifs as signifiers of colonising culture. King also differs from Mudrooroo in his very specific redress of theoretical discourses around colonisation. But there is a vital similarity in the technique of ‘incorporation’ and
‘reframing’ of grand narratives, in the same way that their attempts to step outside of dichotomised discourse are comparable, as discussed in the last chapter.

By ‘incorporation’ and ‘reframing’ I mean that King and Mudrooroo do not use Christian motifs and Gothicism to simply create a hybridised Indigenous/non-Indigenous space; although there is evidence suggesting a locale ‘in between’ in these works. Rather, Indigenous themes construct the imaginative boundary framing both Christian and Gothic images themselves. In King’s and Mudrooroo’s texts these grand narratives or ‘stories’ become integrated into a performative rather than prescriptive re-presentation of Indigenous identities. As with the obfuscation of colonising binaries in the work of both authors, discussed in the last chapter, there is also an attempt to breach theoretical discourses themselves. This chapter is concerned, then, with the way in which King and Mudrooroo engage in a simultaneous satiric deconstruction and strategic use of grand narratives. These include the images and terms of Christianity and Gothicism, and even, at moments, of the theoretical frameworks used to deconstruct these colonial discourses.

(i) Christianity and Gothicism: textualising the colonised

It must be said from the outset that Christianity is not simply an imaginary framework, nor is it a unified discourse at an empirical or theoretical level. Unlike Gothicism, Christianity as a whole cannot be described in terms of an artistic expression of unconscious images and desires. So in many ways the exploration of King’s use of Christianity and Mudrooroo’s use of Gothicism is a discussion of contrast as much as it is a point of comparison. What Christianity and Gothicism do

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share, in terms of the limited treatment of such discourses in this chapter is that they are dependent on the concept of the grand narrative. The notion of the grand narrative is inherent to the treatment of Christianity and Gothicism in this chapter. This involves some simplification of these terms and the many implications each entails. For example, there are significant differences between the brands of Christianity utilised by different colonising nationalities, such as the French and the English in Canada, and the English and the German (to name two examples) in Australia. More importantly, Protestants and Catholics exhibited differences in their approach to, and, subsequent images of, Indigenous people. But, as Greenblatt has maintained, these differences are reduced in the light of a shared sense of ‘mimetic capital’, and the deployment of a similar ‘mobile technology of power’.\footnote{GREENBLATT, Stephen. \textit{Marvellous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World}. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991, 8-9.} The South African resistance writer, Mphahlele, has argued that the infusion of Christianity into the culture of colonised peoples involved an inherent process of domination, which was not varied by denomination.\footnote{MPHAHLELE quoted in Jean and John COMAROFF. \textit{Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa}. Volume 1. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991, 4.} King and Mudrooroo seem to reflect this view in their more total treatment of the discourses of Christianity. Thus, in this chapter, Christianity will be treated as a cohesive monolith.

In the same way, the use of the ‘Gothic’ in colonial representations of the indigene requires a more general perception of a Gothic discourse rather than a specific Gothic genre. While it is possible to discuss the Gothic as a medieval architectural term as distinct from a highly specific \textit{fin-de-siècle} literary genre, these particularities are largely irrelevant in the colonial context. I will be defining the
Gothic as being those practices involved in the ‘horror’ literary genre. This also includes a definition of the Gothic as containing those images and discourses of horror applied in representations of the indigene during colonisation — rife as they were with images of the unnatural, demonic and the ‘savage’. Key elements of Gothic discourse pertinent to King’s, and more particularly Mudrooroo’s, textual encounters include the Gothic expression of unspeakable acts, tension with European rationality, and the theme of human consumption.

Gothicism and Christianity were vital tools in the colonial process, providing both the means to express colonial experience of ‘the other’ and to justify the act of colonisation itself. But these were tools used in very different ways. The use of Christianity in colonisation was a conscious, sanctioned attempt to replace and control the original cultures of colonised peoples. Gothicism, on the other hand, was not a cohesive institution, but a creative sub-conscious set of images, which arguably provided a framework for perceiving the unknown. It is still useful, however, to deal with them together in this chapter. Put simply, these two narratives provided two alternative means of perceiving and expressing the indigene: as either a savage horror to be feared and controlled; or a lost soul to be saved, and, thus, still controlled. There were complicated intersections between these two. As discussed in the last chapter, colonial inscriptions of the indigene included Gothic discourse (cannibalism, for example). These inscriptions could justify the Christian mission. Many

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4 For example, such wide ranging styles as pulp horror, science fiction, and post-colonial literature can all possess qualities of the Gothic. For more on this see: Victor SAGE and Allan Lloyd SMITH. *Modern Gothic: A Reader*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996.

5 Jahoda Gustav has highlighted the depiction of the indigene through themes and characters from mythical and Gothic stories, bestial imagery and demonic Biblical referents, the connotations of this representation fixing colonised peoples within the realm of the unnatural and inferior. His own argument is apparently ironically demonstrated in his use of ‘savage’ as actual noun, not a value-laden
missionary documents contain entries which often justify failure and withdrawal, and which suggest Gothicism in their style. For example, Annette Hamilton quotes the following extract:

A native of New South Wales, without any knowledge of his Maker, ignorant of almost all useful arts; abandoned to gross and brutal passions when roused; slothful and improvident when the impulse ceases; buried in dirt; shivering with cold; and prowling, emaciated with hunger over the soil [...] thinking only, when thought is present, in the vainest and most puerile imaginations.\(^6\)

This intensely racist depiction could be likened to the reaction of Mary Shelley’s Victor Frankenstein’s to his creation, ‘that most depraved of human creatures’.\(^7\)

What is vital to my reading of King and Mudrooroo through the Gothic and Christian discourses is that in both cases the imbrication of these two discourses into representations of colonised peoples involved an application of foreign imagery. As was the case with the specific colonial fictions and histories discussed in the last chapter, there was an assumption that the colonised peoples could not represent themselves; thus, these external narratives were situated in a perceived vacuum.\(^8\)

In addition, the notion of self-evident truth is inherent to Christianity. The entire missionary practice is underpinned by the belief in the absolute truth of a single term itself. GUSTAV, Jahoda. *Images of Savages, Ancient Roots of Modern Prejudice in Western Culture*. London: Routledge, 1999.


conceptualisation of the world (and the word) — it is ‘world formation’.\(^9\)

Conversion, then, was not limited to actual governance and physical practices. Like the external application of Gothic imagery onto representations of the indigene, it was designed to effect a politics of perception, to influence the ways in which Indigenous people were viewed, not simply control the behaviour Indigenous people. In other words, there was an assertion of European superiority implicit in the whole Christianising process.\(^10\) Christianity aimed to instil itself into every level of cultural infrastructure, as was evident in the practices of the missions of Australia. Policies were deliberately set up to destroy and replace traditional culture. The Aboriginal people there were watched, confined, segregated, denied their language, and separated from their children.\(^11\) It was a colonisation of the mind as well as of the body.\(^12\)

This colonisation of the mind went so far as to affect the early forms of resistance by colonised people, which, ironically, were often expressed through Christian discourse.\(^13\) As an ideological tool, Christianity became doubly inscribed. It posited the west as the fount of self-evident and fixed truth, which necessitated a natural hierarchy, oppression of Indigenous traditions, and absolute control of and responsibility for Indigenous peoples. But it also served to protect Indigenous people from other colonial elements and gave voice to notions of equality.

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\(^10\) HAMILTON, Annette. In: Margaret JOLLY and Martha MACINTYRE, eds. 1989, 236.


\(^12\) COMAROFF, Jean and John. 1991, 4.

\(^13\) COMAROFF, Jean and John. 1991, 4.
This double inscription laid open an irony at the heart of the Christian mission. The missionaries were often involved in an act of double-talk — imaging the new colony in terms of their own religious narratives of purity and a lost Eden, while at the same time desiring to remove the Indigenous peoples from this state of imagined ‘paradise’. There was a struggle to simultaneously adhere to the supposed protection and enlightenment of Christianity while maintaining the image of these people as Adam and Eve-like innocents, children of God, before their interaction with the European. This paradox marks out Christian discourse for special satire by King and Mudrooroo. To cite one instance, the ever-present character of George Augustus Robinson in *Doctor Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* and the *Master* series continually refers to his ‘sable’ companions, and indeed renames himself as Fada. The character is clearly condescending and patronising, and his assumptions of superiority become ridiculous in the light of his comically flawed and self-indulgent personality. As Emmanuel Nelson has noted, Fada characterises the hypocrisy of ‘ostensible altruism’ evident in missionary activity.

King, too, is aware of the facades of Christianity. The Garden of Eden story is rewritten by King, not just in *Green Grass, Running Water* but also in his collection of short stories, *One Good Story, That One*. In his version it becomes a tale about the greed and control of God, the stupidity of Adam (renamed Ahdamn) and the strength of Eve. In these stories Biblical and missionary texts are simultaneously satirised and re-framed. By this it is meant that the ironic double inscription and manipulation of

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‘the word’ inherent in Christianity are unveiled through the satiric re-casting of the protagonists as self-serving and comical. In addition, these characters are placed within the framework of a largely pro-Indigenous story of creation and survival. These themes will be explored in depth below.

The Gothic’s double inscription in colonisation also distinguishes it as a complicated discursive category. Unlike Christianity, it is not so much an active tradition or belief system but a fundamentally ambiguous and vague set of tendencies.\(^\text{16}\) It has also been part of the discursive regime in which to image the indigene, structuring, in Hodge and Mishra’s sense, ways of knowing, though not necessarily always what is spoken.\(^\text{17}\) In many ways the Gothic is anchored to notions of the unspeakable; that which we fear but also wonder at. The wonder implicit in Gothic narrative is at the heart of its dual horror/desire presence. Descartes expressed the conundrum this ‘wonder’ evokes, perceiving it to be the moment in which ‘morality’ can become suspended.\(^\text{18}\) Gothicism is inherently ambiguous in that the unspeakable acts and beings it imagines are also tied into secret desires and fantasies. Thus the Gothic, when used to infuse horror into representation of the indigene, also expressed an implied forbidden desire. As Robert Young has argued, discourses of racialism themselves become infused with ambiguity: there was ‘a compulsive libidinal attraction disavowed by an equal insistence on repulsion’.

and temptation’, as Terry Goldie has termed it. Mudrooroo’s textual encounters demonstrate that such imaging is concerned with the observer — not the observed — and that it operated to form an oppressive perception of Indigenous people.20

If Gothicism gave expression to racist discourses in the colonial moment, it also became important further into the colonial period because of the way in which miscegenation was represented. If, as Wheeler asserts, Christianity provided the most important symbol for a purist European identity,21 Indigenous inclusion into this identity was through the supervised engagement. This engagement was to be one of Indigenous assimilation of ideas and practices, and, as was discussed in section (iv) of the last chapter, not through the interaction of physical bodies. On the contrary, such physical interactions were expressed via horrific images in Gothic discourse. In this way, Gothicism offered a form of discourse to express the ‘terror, disgust and alienation’ the notion of mixed-blood children or relationships inspired in the west. 22

For example, the policy of isolating Aboriginal missions in Australia was couched in the language of ‘protection’. But this isolation was also connected to the threat of miscegenation which was conceived of by the missionaries in terms of satanic unions.23 The fact that these children were forcibly removed from their mothers as part of Federal Government policy in Australia is tantamount to cultural

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This also reflects the attempt to confine mixed-race children within the realm of whiteness, justified as being superior and more natural. Indeed, the terms used to describe the results of mixed relationships are continually played out with themes from the Gothic genre. ‘Half-caste’, the term used in Australia, and the Canadian term ‘half-breed’, both reiterate dominant Gothic images of incompleteness such as ‘half-man’ ‘half-wolf’ or ‘half-dead’.

Historical records make graphic use of the Gothic instability seen to be inherent in mixed-race peoples. Louis Riel, the famous Métis resistance fighter and political figure, is an important element of King’s humorously subversive referents. In his radio series — The Dead Dog Cafe Comedy Hour — Riel is always the designated mystery guest, despite having being dead for over a hundred years. This humorous subversion of ghostly presence conflates linear perceptions of time, but it also satirises the Gothic representation of Riel in journalistic documents of the time. Riel is continually characterised in these media reports as being a Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde figure, the unstable ‘half’ of his person, his Native ancestry, a permanent threat. This demarcation of the indigene as Gothic evil is part of the transplanting of a discourse of Indigenous annihilation — part of the construction of the ‘imaginary Indian’ discussed in the last chapter.

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(ii) Appropriation and satire: Mudrooroo and Gothicism

Mudrooroo’s Master series, and also his text The Kwinkan are full of Gothic imagery and characters. In this way the Gothic discourse originally used by colonisers to describe the colonised is appropriated to describe the acts and personages of colonisation. Mudrooroo ‘writes back’ to the Gothic genre and its role in colonisation in the same way that many ‘postcolonial’ authors ‘write back’: such as Chinua Achebe to Joseph Conrad’s river, or Jean Rhys to Charlotte Bronte’s Victorian female subject, or J.M. Coetzee to Daniel Defoe’s imperial economic treatise. In Mudrooroo’s texts the whole colonisation process becomes a Gothic epic. Aboriginal warrior characters on both the physical and spiritual plane fight to remain free of the literal consumption of the emblems of Gothicism. This finds enunciation in the depiction of what Mudrooroo has termed ‘maban’ images, juxtaposed with Gothic ones. Maban reality includes the depiction of totemic dreaming companions and embodiments, such as Jangamuttuk’s goanna, Ludjee’s manta ray, Waai’s crow, as well as George’s transformation into the dingo, taken from the author’s 1998 novel, The Undying.

The Gothic re-presentations of European consumption are the were-bear and the vampire, and their violence enacts an analogy for the ‘literary’ consumption of colonised people by these images — to being written up as a horrific ‘other’. The presence of maban reality explores Indigenous resistance through the collision of iconic referents. Mudrooroo relocates the history of colonisation into this ‘Gothic meets Dreaming’ narrative to demonstrate how colonialism is, on one level, a matter

28 For more on the importance of ‘writing back’ to the imperial centre and its discourse formation in the post-colonial project see: Bill ASHCROFT et. al., The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures. London: Routledge, 1989.
of semantically competing narratives. By selecting the vampire as a textual image, Mudrooroo illustrates that the ascription of vampiric/cannibalistic discourse onto the indigene actually involved an even more effective consumption of the indigene.

The Gothic’s application to colonisation was the result of an anxiety about the stability of the human subject in the colonial encounter. As Europeans ‘discovered’ difference in landscape, culture, and identity, the secure nature of their subjectivity became threatened.29 The presence of Gothic images of savagery in this environment can be seen as an assertion of the European ‘natural’ in opposition to the colonised ‘unnatural’. As Malchow has demonstrated, Gothic images allowed discourses on race to develop into racism. The Gothic novel and racism contained interchangeable concepts:

[...] both dwell on the chaos between the natural and rational boundaries, and massage a deep, often unconscious and sexual, fear of contamination, and both present the destruction of the simple and pure by the poisonously exotic, by anarchic forces of passion and appetite, carnal lust and blood lust.30

Mudrooroo demonstrates then that by contextualising the colonial encounter within frameworks of Gothicism, Europeans were revealing mostly their own anxieties. The discourses of perception and misunderstanding are dramatised in the encounter with the unknown.

Mudrooroo’s use of the Gothic differs from King’s use of Christianity. This is

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29 Kelly Hurley suggests that the Gothic literary genre is a response to the instability of the human subject at the turn of the century, that the disbanding resulting from colonisation formed part of this perceived chaos. HURLEY, Kelly. *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siecle*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

in part due to differences in authorial style, but more importantly it is a result of the wide distinctions between Gothicism and Christianity, the former being more relevant to art than to ideology. In any case, it is clear that part of Mudrooroo’s subversion and incorporation of Gothic images is embodied in ironic momentary uses of the Gothic form. It is not surprising that Mudrooroo is able to manipulate Gothicism in this way, using its very form to satirise the colonial application of its images.

Gothicism is also arguably a form of counter-discourse in that it deliberates on, and works through, the threats to order and stability. Kelly Hurley argues that Gothicism has been used to express the incertitude and de-familiarisation of industrialisation and the growing of scientific and technological epistimologies.\(^{31}\)

For example, Hurley reasons that Darwinism’s suggestion of evolving bodies, adapting to their environment, caused an anxiety concerning the non-ossified human subject and its morphic possibilities at the fin-de-siècle.\(^{32}\) It is important to note here that Darwin and his theories are intrinsically linked to debates concerning race. Darwin drew on the theories of productive competition in the writings of political economists to develop his biological ideas. But it is well-known that these theories were, in turn, reduced by racialist discourse, particularly that of Herbert Spencer, to explain a doctrine of master races, a Social Darwinism justifying racial violence and oppression in terms of the survival of the fittest and moralisations of superiority.\(^{33}\) My point here, however, is to emphasise the way in which Gothicism could explore, and revel in, anxiety over the instability of the human subject which Darwinian theory

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\(^{31}\) HURLEY, Kelly. 1996, 4-5.
\(^{32}\) HURLEY, Kelly. 1996, 6-7.
\(^{33}\) For more on the specifics of these debates see: Ivan HANNAFORD. Race: The History of an Idea in the West. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.
introduced. It displayed monstrous morphic transformations as part of theorisation about the possibilities of this scientific knowledge.\textsuperscript{34}

Apart from the subversive element of the Gothic form, Mudrooroo is also able to utilise the structured horror inherent in Gothic discourse, which is dependent on the strategic build-up of suspense and secrets but does so to destabilise western narratives of surety and superiority. For example, the multi-layered perceptions of truth and reality present in \textit{The Kwinkan} infuse this text with Gothicism. The unnamed narrator perceives himself to be trapped between secrets, in that he is sworn to secrecy by ASIO, but he fails desperately to unveil the secrets of the island community in his ‘fact finding mission’. He is simultaneously a keeper of secrets and the victim of secrets, misunderstanding events around him and feeling manipulated by them, as he says, ‘I was in the grip of forces that kept me off balance’.\textsuperscript{35}

The imbrication of aspects of secrecy and mystery is a part of Mudrooroo’s politicising and adapting narrative forms which suggest Gothicism. The narrator’s lack of balance and the shrouds of secrecy and misunderstanding in which he finds himself tangled, express an inversion of the traditional politics of control of information. In this way, the recording of oral stories by Europeans and subsequent ossification of these cultural elements into a doctored ‘artefact’ in Australia and Canada is inverted in \textit{The Kwinkan}.\textsuperscript{36} The white narrator is an informant for a text written by an ‘Aboriginal researcher’ on an ‘Aboriginal celebrity’. More significant is the fact that the narrator’s ability to inform is impeded by his position of ‘being in

\textsuperscript{34} HURLEY, Kelly. 1996, 7-8.
\textsuperscript{35} MUDROOROO. \textit{The Kwinkan}. Pymble, NSW: Angus and Robertson, 1993c, 27.
the dark’. Thus the colonial assumptions about who has the authority to narrate history are completely undermined.

A struggle to find and maintain balance pervades the narration of events in *The Kwinkan*. The chapters are constructed as interview sessions, labelled ‘Session One’ through to ‘Session Thirteen’, and consist of stream-of-consciousness monologues rather than questions and answers, the interviewer being mostly implied rather than present. The numbering of the chapters specifically to thirteen seems to suggest that the author meant this narrative to be read through discourses of horror and the unnatural. These sessions are structured in a dichotomy which Allan Lloyd Smith has defined as particularly Gothic, the opposition between the ‘irrational but intractable facts of experience and the belief in the benevolence and order that make such facts possible’.\(^37\) They oscillate thematically between the narrator being caught in the immediacy of his memory, in the terror and uncertainty of a particular experience and a calm rationalising of that experience with the beginning of each new session.

For example, the narrator remembers an incident of a cat being flung at him, missing him and falling into the sea, its corpse caught on a rope. This morbid feline image and the fear that someone threw the cat at him either to wound him or to frighten him off the boat and into the sea clearly shook the narrator:

I shuddered as I saw caught at the end of the trailing rope, the body of the wretched cat. Caught by the neck, it bobbed and thrust against the side of the

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boat. I vomited and bile came to embitter my lips […] The cat flung itself away and was gone. How I wish that I had floated away with it […] .

But in the beginning of the next chapter the narrator is irritated by the interviewer’s reference to the cat. He insists that he was in ‘delightful company’ and reproduces the tale of the cat in a realm of normality:

But, why do you mention that cat, that mangy animal which had succumbed to mania and launched itself at me? Cats are like that […].

These oscillations mark the battle with the rational that is prevalent in the Gothic.

In his theoretical work, too, Mudrooroo has highlighted the role of scientific discourse of rationality in the assertion of European superiority, as follows:

[...] scientific natural reality [...] changed the consciousness of others as it shape-changed the world, flowing along with the colonial expansion program of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which was not only an invasion and stealing of land, but an imposition of a singular European reality [...].

Gothicism, then, can be used as part of an opposition to dependence on the scientific, and its construction of the European as superior and rational. But as Mudrooroo signals, the Gothic genre is paradoxically part of those discourses of superiority. Thus there is a clever double use of the Gothic in that its form can be used to destabilise non-Indigenous realities by demonstrating the images of horror and fantasy within them. Like King’s disruption of Biblical narratives, there is a simultaneous exploration and disavowal of colonial paradoxes. In this way, European

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38 MUDROOROO. 1993c, 48.
39 MUDROOROO. 1993c, 49.
assertions of superiority through Enlightened rationality collide with the revelations of European imaging of the ‘other’ as Gothic unnatural and horrific fantasy.

All of these techniques culminate in an unmasking of imperial fixations on inflexibly loaded interpretations of the colonial encounter. Mudrooroo’s fictions suggest that the texting of this encounter, in history, literature and even in policy involved a one dimensional, uni-directional narrative. Mudrooroo’s examination of this process involves a re-positioning of this authorial and authoritative stance.

Mudrooroo’s most important use of the Gothic form is allowing it to speak the unspoken. This is very similar to Toni Morrison’s expression of the Gothic as the mouthpiece for the horror of Black oppression and slavery in America. This is because, as I have shown, the Gothic literary genre is principally concerned with graphically displaying the unnatural against an underlying discourse of the possibility of the rational. Gothicism revels in those things which societal codes deem to be tabooed and unspeakable acts and beings. In this way, Mudrooroo articulates the unspeakable acts of colonisation, the violence and the destruction of culture, through the blood-letting and consumption of his European Gothic creatures — the were-bear and the vampire. In *The Undying*, the character of George is psychically connected to the vampire, Amelia through his nightmares because of a consumptive, rather than genetic, sharing of blood:

I even dreamt of a woman, a ghost woman with flowing yellow hair, [...] of the phantom lap of waves or of seeing in a dim darkness unspeakable acts in which the tart taste of blood filled my mouth and flowed down my throat. 43

This connection is a parable for the Australian history of blood-taking writ large, and is expressed by Mudrooroo through the nightmare of the Gothic form.

_The Kwinkan_ is a more contemporary text, dealing with another section of Australian history. It is a book about a destabilised Australia trying to rationalise itself into the locale of the Asian Pacific community and failing dismally. The unnamed narrator is representative of this Australia struggling to assert and redefine itself. The other characters signify that which Australia fails to understand in an international and cross-culturally sensitive market. They include Carla — the mysterious and alluring woman from a ‘Pacific nation’ who combines chief-like and colonial bureaucratic heritage in a pseudo-aristocratic style and Miss Riyoko Tamada, her Japanese confidante and business adviser. The Aboriginal detective, Jackamara Holmes, is the fulcrum of the text; the unknown narrator’s diatribe takes the form of research interviews on Jackamara’s biography, in which the narrator recalls his mission to a group of South Sea islands after a messy Queensland election. His destination as well as his motivation both remain unspecific; the location is referred to as being ‘British, at least for the time being’. 44 In short, shrouds of non-specificity and secrecy pervade the novel.

The narrator swings from desire to contempt to suspicion of the three main

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43 MUDROOROO. _The Undying_. Pymble, NSW: Angus and Robertson, 1998b, 65.
44 MUDROOROO. 1993c, 23.
characters of the book. He is also distrustful and, significantly, images of consumption permeate the text. He refers to himself constantly as being eaten. Miss Tamada is described with cannibal-like and predatory imagery, in both her business dealings and personal interactions — thus she stands symbolically for the *nouveau* colonialism of Japan. The character Carla is also framed with images of consumption, being involved in a ‘cut-throat’ capitalist enterprise and the suppression of the resistance activities of the local population. Both characters enchant the narrator to a degree that borders on the neurotic.

These suggestive, consumptive images shift into even more graphic allusions. For example, the narrator recalls a conversation with a ship’s captain on the supposed cannibalism of the local peoples. Carla and Miss Tamada regard the descriptions with morbid interest. The discussion on cannibalism leads into a description of Miss Tamada’s ‘first taste’ of blood, which becomes a sexualised monologue:

> Kumi smiled at me and tried to pull herself up by holding onto my ankles.
> She did this suddenly and I fell face down, on top of her as if I was embracing her […] Soon I heard her regular breathing and I bent down and tasted the blood on her lips. I lapped it up and it was so sweet, so sweet this taste of wine of her body.⁴⁵

Tamada celebrates this initiation into blood-taking by building her first real estate development upon the site. These sexualised, vampiric descriptions of moments of morbidity and the deliberate celebration of deviance are accompanied by analogies of the consumptive act with colonialism, as well as the *nouveau* colonialism of big business and of the potential colonial impetus of the Asian region, particularly Japan.

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⁴⁵ MUDROOROO. 199c, 45-6.
This use of consumption appears again in Mudrooroo’s later additions to the *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* novel. As pointed out in the previous chapter, the inclusion of an ‘Eliza Fraser’ character as a vampire in *The Undying* reflects a rewriting of the discourses of cannibalism. Patrick White is also one of a number of contemporary Australian writers who has rewritten the Eliza Fraser history. So, in many ways Mudrooroo’s text revisits the White novel, *A Fringe of Leaves*, as well as colonial histories themselves. *A Fringe of Leaves* retains the image of cannibalism implicit in early historical documentations of the Eliza Fraser narrative; however, it is noteworthy that White imbues these cannibalistic images, not with terror, but with heavy symbolism:

She flung the bone away only after it was cleaned, and followed slowly in the wake of her cannibal mentors […] The exquisite innocence of this forest morning, its quiet broken by a single flute-note endlessly repeated, tempted her to believe that she had partaken in a sacrament.\(^{46}\)

Here Eliza Fraser becomes Ellen Roxburgh — Cornish peasant girl transformed into a gentrified lady and then reduced (yet enlightened) as a captured woman in the wilderness. These transformations symbolise a journey into the essential self. Ellen’s cannibalism seen as a quasi-religious initiation into the dark side of herself contrasts sharply with the Eliza Fraser figure’s experience of cannibalism in Mudrooroo’s *The Undying*. In Mudrooroo’s novel, the character Amelia’s use of her Aboriginal servant is sinister rather than transcendent, ‘I am sucking on you and my tongue is in you. Now I am tasting your blood and I shall be your mistress.’\(^{47}\) Here the discourse is


\(^{47}\) MUDROOROO. 1998b, 93.
infused with dichotomies of dominance and subordination. The Gothic use of the
vampire and imagery of human consumption re-establishes the roots of such
discourses in European anxieties and desires. It also allows the Gothic to speak the
unspeakable acts of European appropriation.

Acts of appropriation are so often central. For example, Terry Goldie has seen
White’s use of the cannibal image as an assimilation of Indigenous authenticity in the
landscape.48 It is a response to European-Australians’ fear of illegitimacy in
belonging and in land ownership, what Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra have termed the
‘bastard complex’.49 Mudrooroo’s *The Undying* re-contextualises this symbolic use
and this desire with reference to the unspoken violent repercussions. By contrast,
White’s work reduces Indigenous experience to a symbolic literary device, a means
for Ellen’s psychological growth. In re-writing this figure as the vampire Amelia,
Mudrooroo demonstrates that White’s textualisation of the indigene is an oppressive
mechanism. Mudrooroo insinuates this through Amelia’s enslaving of Galbol
Wedgna and the haunting of George, rather than the inverse positioning apparent in
White’s narrative.

What this involves is a complicated textual manipulation of the genre.
Mudrooroo uses the icons of horror and taboo to demonstrate the irony of this
discourse's application to colonised peoples. For example, in *The Kwinkan*, Carla
identifies analogies between the ironies inherent in the ‘civilising’ process and the

Literature Written in English*. 23(2), Spring 1984, 438.
49 HODGE, Bob and Vijay MISHRA. *Dark Side of the Dream: Australian Literature and the Post-
subsequent exploitation of colonised people — of becoming ‘cannibals not of their bodies, but of their souls’. 50

Part of this consumption of the ‘other’ is to textualise the colonial encounter inappropriately. Judie Newman has highlighted counter-discourse as being one that self-consciously assembles European textual specificities and genres in order to expose colonial textuality itself. By this she refers to the colonial predilection to read and represent the colonised through the already available European textual discourses. Mudrooroo is engaged in this ‘postcolonial’ process. The non-Indigenous narrators of The Kwinkan and of elements of The Master of the Ghost Dreaming Series (namely the interviewee and Amelia) are locked into their neurotic perception of events. Amelia deludes herself into believing the kidnapped Aboriginal children are her own, that she is concerned for their welfare, while she simultaneously sucks on their blood and feeds them her own blood. This appears to refer to the ambivalent relationship within Indigenous/non-Indigenous interactions in Australian history, an attitude of ostensibly ‘caring’ within a framework of actual exploitation and cultural genocide. The unveiling of past Government policies culminating in a ‘Stolen Generation’ is a recent reaction to these semiotic and practical paradoxes. Amelia’s ‘mothering’ through blood-letting is clearly symbolic of these political actualities.

Through his textual engagement with Gothicism Mudrooroo is demonstrating the European tendency to write and rewrite itself in the colonial moment. For example, the interviewee in The Kwinkan inscribes himself continually with victim status, but does not appear to realise his own complicity in the cannibalistic act of...
colonialism. In fact, immediately after Carla’s revelation concerning the consumption involved in colonisation, he imagines solutions to Europe's problems in equally cannibalistic colonial terms: ‘Europeans had grown tired and needed new blood to bring us energy’. This posits the narrator as being not only excluded from the confidence of the other characters, but also as being blind to his own investment in the cannibal/colonial metaphor.

Irony is a particular strategy here, and it can be interpreted in a number of ways. For instance, the idea that knowledge is power is at the same time played out and satirised. The narrator assumes that he is in the position of knowledge and power, that he can in fact take the blood, and symbolically the resources and knowledge of others, in order to benefit his own cultural authority. But in stating this assumption he is only revealing his own inability to receive the wisdom and information of ‘others’ experience by ignoring the potency of Carla’s references to the problematics of colonisation as consumption. Secondly, in terms of the narrative structure and Gothic undertones of this novel, the reader is aware that it is the narrator himself who is the victim of blood-taking, as he dissolves within the certainty of his own testimony and repeated references to his own consumption and wasting away.

All of this establishes The Kwinkan as a tiered, mysterious text, in which levels of meaning are played against one another, the narrator having the least understanding of all. His position is one of oscillating irrationality, not informed scribe. The narrator's instability and swinging reactions to the events he describes undermine his ability to narrate. We are constantly made aware of the fact that this is

51 MUDROOROO. 1993c, 47.
an interpretation of events, a textualisation of them, rather than a clear reflection or projection.

These presentations of non-Indigenous textualisation of Indigenous experience are made all the more graphic in the third chapter of the Master series, *Underground* (1999). The storyteller, George, in a very special context tells the history of violent attacks on a tribe of Aboriginal people by an English Vampire. This text is framed as a tale told to a group of gold-diggers. In this way the gold rush, a period of Australian prosperity and demographic growth, is viewed as being gained at the price of the vampiric murder and consumption of the Indigenous characters. Once again, Mudrooroo’s satiric invention of alternative realities confounds any traditional interpretation of historical truth, or even of truth-effects.

(iii) The Satire of Textualisation: King and Christianity

In the same fashion, King highlights the obsessive control at the heart of the Christian ethos of love and goodwill. This is all part of the exposure of the non-Indigenous authoritarian attempt to textualise the colonial encounter; to fix it in a set of value-laden images — transforming the interaction into a one-dimensional, uni-directional narrative. For his part, King situates discourses of Christianity as being central to colonisation. This is similar to Mudrooroo’s establishment of the Gothic’s role in the colonisation process. King is, in many ways, also ‘writing back’ to the presence of grand narratives in colonisation. Each of the ‘In the beginning’ stories in *Green Grass, Running Water* (involving First Woman, Changing Woman, Thought Woman and Old Woman) follow the same sequence. The women begin in the water, then confront a character from Christianity, then confront and become a character from an imperial text. Finally, each of these Creation women is arrested and detained.
in Fort Marion. King is thus establishing a connection between the use of Christian ideology and imperial texts and their representations of the indigene, and the subsequent oppression and confinement that these discourses perpetuate on Indigenous peoples.

As stated above, Christianity and Gothicism are comparable only in so far as they provided imaginative frameworks for perceiving the ‘other’ in colonisation. They are not structurally similar. For this reason, King does not appropriate the Christian form in the way that Mudrooroo appropriates Gothic forms. Gothicism can be seen to be sharing an agenda with Mudrooroo's creative space in that both are deconstructing the Enlightenment and notions of science and rationality. It is not necessary for King to engage in a similar double-use of Christianity, as there is no comparable connection between his own strategies and those of Christianity. This is because King is involved in a fictional energising of themed Indigenous narratives, while Christianity comprises an entire and very specific western ideological worldview with spiritual, ethical and financial (to name but a few) goals.

But King does engage in a satire of the reading of Indigenous people and experience through Christianity in the same way that Mudrooroo highlights the Gothic’s role in a like-minded practice of representation. The five Christian emblems King selects in Green Grass, Running Water: God and the moment of creation; Adam and the Garden of Eden; Noah and the Ark; the angel Gabriel and the selection of the Virgin Mary; and Jesus walking on water, cover a major span of the Christian faith.

There is Creation, the Fall, punishment, and the conception of a Messiah, and redemptive sacrifice. In including the entire breadth of Christian belief within his repetitions of the ‘in the beginning’ story, King destabilises the fixed, linear and grandiose nature of the Biblical narrative. Each of these Biblical references also has a relationship with the way in which Christianity was used against Indigenous people.

Interestingly, the Garden of Eden has been a vital notion for missionaries who were imagining pre-contact Indigenous civilisations. One of the most famous proponents of this image was Herman Melville, author of *Moby Dick*, another text which King deconstructs. Melville used the Garden of Eden metaphor in *Typee* and *Omoo* to imply that the Native lived in an idyllic state, now lost to western ‘civilisation’. Of course, this is another branch of the tendency towards the romanticisation of the Indian as a ‘noble savage’ discussed in the last chapter — the depiction of Chingachgook in James Fenimore Cooper's work, for example. The view of Indigenous people as encased in an Edenic state allowed for the concept of the destruction of this state, its demise being part of a natural progress. King’s rewriting of the Garden of Eden story refutes this appropriation of Indigenous experience, he rejects the altering of this experience into a European sense of the advanced, but corrupted, self. For King, the Indian is not part of a linear tradition in which the indigene marks a paradise lost and an idyllic state in the past. Rather, King exposes the use of Christianity as a discursive tool of power hierarchies.

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54 Missionary activity was involved in a debate concerning Indigenous races’ place in the hierarchy of races. All of the European perspectives in the debate resulted in the same surmise that Indigenous cultural genocide was inevitable. There was the missionary concept of ‘civilising’ the indigene to European ways, and out of innocence; the missionary code necessitating ‘civilisation’ as the stemming the decline of the indigene and eradicating the devil’s presence; and finally the scientific Social
The author does this through a reading of events through inappropriate referents and indifferent protagonists. This technique is exemplified by the unsuitable and ridiculous labelling activities of the humorously named Ahdamn in *Green Grass, Running Water*:

Ahdamn is busy. He is naming everything.

You are a microwave oven, Ahdamn tells the Elk.

Nope, says that Elk. Try again.

You are a garage sale, Ahdamn tells the Bear.

We got to get you some glasses, says the Bear.

You are a telephone book, Ahdamn tells the Cedar Tree

You’re getting closer, says the Cedar Tree. 55

There is a clear resistance to naming being carried out here, as well as a speaking back by those ‘named’. In addition, the heart of the Christian mission is unveiled as being not only an inappropriate and a self-interested insertion of images, but also as being intrinsically connected to contemporary consumerism. Thus, King reduces the power of European stories by repeating the same story in different contexts. Repetition can erase the significance of an individual story, and of the grand narrative which underpins it. Therefore, whether it is Christian stories of the Flood or of the Garden of Eden, it is the Europeans who continually misunderstand events around them, at the same time that they attempt to control and narrate them.

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King also points to the fact that Christian images not only provided ‘positive’ or nostalgic representations of the indigene but that there were extremely negative associations as well. The Gothic inscriptions of the indigene, discussed above, were frequently imbricated in discourses of the Devil and with Christian concepts of evil and darkness.\textsuperscript{56} But in the context of King’s selection of narratives — in particular, the story of Noah and the Ark — there is also a specifically negative representation of the indigene. This is partly because early European accounts of interaction with Native peoples in North America often positioned Native Americans as the descendants of Noah’s disgraced son Ham. This perception justified the assumption that Indians were supposedly naturally lawless; as the testimony of the colonial author, Roy Harvey Pearce demonstrates:

\begin{quote}
[Native Americans are] the farthest of all God's human creatures from God Himself […]. Descended from wanderers, had he not lost his sense of civilisation and law and order? Had he not lost, except for a dim recollection, God Himself?\textsuperscript{57}
\end{quote}

Like the imaging of the Native through Edenic references, this was a process of fixing Native identity as representative of a past, pre-civilised stage of European beliefs. In effect, the indigene was locked into a lower order of the European linear tradition, thus inscribing the European with inherent superiority.

King suggests that hierarchy and order are intrinsic to Christianity; this is not just in relation to race but also to gender. He repeatedly demonstrates the inherently patriarchal nature of Christianity. In \textit{Green Grass, Running Water}, King’s Noah

\textsuperscript{56} HAMILTON, Annette. \textit{In:} Margaret JOLLY and Martha MACINTYRE, eds. 1989, 241.
asserts that Changing Woman (as a woman and thus a relative of Eve, who sinned) is responsible for his predicament. Like Ahdamn's activities, the flexing of Christianity’s muscle is presented through mis-naming. Noah mis-recognises Changing Woman as a wife sent from God, and attempts to use force to establish this interpretation of events as fact:

The sky! shouts the little man. Hallelujah! A gift from heaven. My name’s Noah, and you must be my new wife.

I doubt that, says Changing Woman.

Lemme see your breasts, says Noah. I like women with big breasts. I hope God remembered that.

An explicit connection is made here between sexism, cultural control, and Christianity. The desire to see breasts reduces Noah’s significance as a key figure in Christian mythology to that of an infantile, lecherous man — in fact, he possesses many of the qualities inherent in the semiotic field of the indigene (as the fallen descendants of Ham) in colonial narratives. This also implies a direct link between male oppression and the dictates of the Old Testament God. All of this subverts the Christian attempt to control the interpretation of the events that it perceives.

Finally, Noah’s insistence that Changing Woman is his wife — and his comical pursuit of her around the boat and then the island — has sinister undertones. The sexualised nature of the chases and the power avowal of the Noah figure are suggestive of rape. And rape is an image frequently used by Indigenous writers in Australia and Canada, because of its terrifyingly real presence in the history of

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58 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 160.
59 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 160.
colonisation.60 Drew Hayden Taylor has also pointed to the symbolic use of rape in Native Canadian writings:

The dramatic version of rape is also the perfect metaphor for what happened to Native culture. In many communities, culture was matrilineal or matriarchal. Another culture comes in, forcing itself on the community, basically eradicating everything there, subjugating that culture to its will.61

King’s deployment of this implied symbolic violence is repeated again in the next encounter with a Christian emblem in *Green Grass, Running Water.*62 The A. A. Gabriel character (a pun on both the Archangel and on the self-help group Alcoholics Anonymous) tries to force Thought Woman onto the ground so he can ‘get on with the procreating.’63 When she says no, he says she means ‘yes’. The idea of no meaning yes is part of farcical contemporary ‘justifications’ for and about sexual violation.64 Thus, there is an implied correlation between the use of Christian signs in the moment of colonisation and rape — a cultural rape of nearly epic proportions.

Significantly too, A.A. Gabriel is continually attempting to fix Thought Women within his own perception of reality. He does this through two graphic methods of ossifying representation — photography and writing. Gabriel tells

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60 Particularly by male authors, for example: Sam Watson, Mudrooroo and Philip McLaren in Australia and Thomson Highway and Daniel David Moses in Canada. It is important to note that white feminists in Australia have condemned the symbolic usage of rape as trivialising women’s oppression, for example see: Lyndall RYAN. Aboriginal women and agency in the process of conquest: A review of some recent work. *Australian Feminist Studies.* 2, Autumn 1986, 35-43.


62 Violence is often an implied rather than an actual or graphic presence in King’s work, as indicated in Chapter Two. There are however exceptions, such as the domestic violence suffered by Latisha in *Medicine River* and Lum in *Truth and Bright Water.*

63 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 301.

64 For more on these discourses see: Susan BROWNMILLER. *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975.
Thought Woman to stand next to Coyote (whom he mistakes for a 'snake' — another
Christian icon and a symbol of uncontrolled female sexuality and the male phallus) so
that he can take her picture. When he asks her name she tells him ‘Thought Woman’
and he writes down 'Mary’. It is unclear which ‘Mary’ he is referring to, as his sexual
advances and his role as bearer of the news of the immaculate conception inform his
description of her with connotations of both virgin and whore. This is more than a
humorous farce. It is arguably an indicative re-presentation of cultural genocide,
through the overwriting and overriding of traditional cultural images and creation
figures with Christian motifs.

King also links the Christian oppression at first contact and the oppression
evident in contemporary politics. When Gabriel attempts to produce the ‘virgin
verification form’ he accidentally brings out the ‘White Paper’. This is a reference to
Prime Minister Trudeau’s Indian Affairs White Paper of 1969, which proposed the
total assimilation of Native Canadians. This concept was met with intense opposition
from the First Nations’ community.65 In this way, King integrates the contemporary
political discourses of appropriation with the past Christian attempts to dissolve
traditional Indigenous culture and to subsume it within a Christian context.

To take this theme further, the power of Christianity to iconically subsume all
that it encounters is displayed in Green Grass, Running Water through Young Man
Walking on Water’s reaction to Old Woman’s assistance. King’s Old Woman has
been seen as an allusion to the ‘archetypal helper to a culture hero’.66 The culture

65 CARDINAL, Harold. The Rebirth of Canada’s Indians. Edmonton, Alberta: Hurtig Publishers,
1977, 13.
66 FLICK, Jane. Reading Notes for Green Grass, Running Water (including list of works by Thomas
King. Canadian Literature. 161/162, Summer/Autumn 1999, 140-172.
hero she meets here is the Jesus of Christianity, and her attempts to help him are met with aggressive resistance:

Christian rules [...] the first rule is that no one can help me. The second rule is that no one can tell me anything. Third, no one is allowed to be in two places at once, except me.\(^67\)

Old Woman disrupts this attempt to police the boundaries of available reality. She lulls the waves through song while Young Man Walking on Water attempts to shout them into submission. She also demonstrates the hierarchically-ordered nature of so many of the cultural spheres in western society. Young Man Walking on Water cannot think of the word for the men who, presumably, are his disciples. Old Woman's suggestions undercut connotations of devotion with ones of power and control, ‘Factotums? says Old Woman. Civil servants? Stockholders? [...] Deputies? says Old Woman. Subalterns? Proofreaders?’ \(^68\) Each of the categories Old Woman cites involve people who are subordinate to others. The spheres of domesticity, policy-making, money-making, law-enforcement, coloniality, or literary production are, thus, all ordered by legitimising power of a sovereign government. The placing of these words in the context of a Christian cultural hero demonstrates that this oppressive hierarchy is inherent in the spiritual foundations of the west.

The Creation Women's encounters with each of the Christian icons are central to King's satire of the attempt to make the unknown understandable through inappropriate referents. This point is also played out in the realist sections of the text. For example, Latisha remembers a childhood experience in which she was asked by

\(^{67}\) KING, Thomas. 1993a, 388.  
\(^{68}\) KING, Thomas. 1993a, 389.
her teacher to give a report about Indian culture. After the report a white girl tries to understand the Sun Dance in Christian terms. The white child attempts to subsume difference through the notion of 'versions', despite her endeavour to accept Indian culture. For the white girl, Anne, Indian spirituality becomes an Indian version of Christianity. Latisha’s attempts to explain what happens at the Sun Dance and how it is organised are interrupted repeatedly by Anne's comparison with Christian organisations. King's understated depiction of the interaction clearly illustrates Anne's inability to listen to Latisha and the poignant frustration and gap in understanding these effects:

> Anne said it was probably a mystery, something you could never know but believed in anyway, like God and Jesus and the Holy Ghost. Latisha wanted to tell Anne that that wasn't it, but in the end she said nothing.  

This problem of appropriation engendering silence in the moment of Indigenous and non-Indigenous interaction is also played out in the character of Jimmy, the policeman, who attempts to understand the 'Skyworld', when Babo repeats the four Indians’ story. He wants to understand it as ‘heaven’ or as ‘Venus’. The western need to conceptualise Indian culture within its own symbolic frameworks is, in King's writing, not seen as an attempt at understanding. Instead, it is continually revealed to be a block to understanding. And, what is more, it is viewed as an attempt to oppress — clearly intrinsic to colonisation.

In the end, the confrontation between Christian and Native creation stories

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69 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 410.
71 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 97.
results in a repetition of the same message about the oppressive construction of the west’s ‘other’. Whether it is through literature, history, or discourses of Christianity, there is mis-recognition of the four creation women by and through the emblems of the west. In this way literature, religion and history — in fact all the textual acts of the west — become involved in the same oppressive and silencing process. King links all these elements of Western colonisation of the indigene to demonstrate the cohesiveness of the west’s cultural facets. Noah, Robinson Crusoe and Ahab, a reference to Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, remind Coyote of the 'God' figure, "Just around the eyes" says Coyote, "he looks like that GOD guy." And as the ‘I’ of the storyteller observes to Coyote, ‘It’s all the same story’.  

(iv) The intersections between Gothicism and Christianity

The notion of different texts being part of the same story is fundamental to my analysis of King and Mudrooroo. It is part of the authors’ incorporation of grand narratives, a process of reframing the interaction between the west and the Indigenous that is explained in the following section of this chapter. In addition, the themes through which King’s and Mudrooroo’s incorporative projects are read in this chapter have a relationship to one another. The grand narratives of Christianity and Gothicism intersect at certain points, in that they inform discourses of good and evil, respectively, within the western moral framework. In addition, the Gothic is not the only referent that Mudrooroo deconstructs. As discussed in the previous chapter, he revisits historical narratives such as the Augustus Robinson journals and the Eliza Fraser story. He also constructs eclectic allusions to Greek and Roman epics via the Ulysses-like boat quest and Underworld presences in the *Master of the Ghost*  

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72 This linking and repetition is referred to in more detail in Chapter Five.  
74 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 165.
In light of this integrated textuality it is interesting to examine the extent to which King and Mudrooroo intersect with each other’s deconstructing referents, despite the difference in their respective foci.

Mudrooroo’s treatment of Christianity is much less ironic than his approach to the Gothic. His deconstruction of the institution of Christianity occurs mainly in his examination of the missionary figure. The character of Fada in the *Master* series, or George Augustus Robinson in *Doctor Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World*, is mostly comical. The self-depictions of this character as being saintly and self-sacrificing are always parodied by the revelation of his true motives. Robinson is presented as destructive, but never powerful. He is cartoon-like, a comical, much less good-humoured Speedy Gonzales tearing through the bush in search of social advancement:

Ballawine rushed here and there at his usual scampering pace, which made Wooreddy wonder if he did not have some of those circles called “wheels” under the soles of his boots.76

It is explained in the text that the name Ballawine means ‘Red Ochre’ and refers to the redness of Robinson’s face during his skin ailment.77 At other points in the texts the missionary’s ‘objective anthropological research’ is unveiled as a practiced sexual advance on the Aboriginal women, while acts of cultural repression are revealed to be part of a plan of advancement in the social sphere. He is presented as repulsive, comical and essentially self-serving and hypocritical. Fada therefore symbolises a

77 MUDROOROO. 1987a, 101.
religion which exhibits all of these traits, a similar construct to the comically self-serving Noah in *Green Grass, Running Water.*

King’s steps into what might be termed the Gothic are more implied than overt; unlike the treatment he gives Christianity. The Gothic form is merely suggested in the ghostly presences that momentarily enter King’s texts. For example, King’s short story “Magpies” details a burial ‘tale’ which has become almost an urban legend — or in this case, a reserve legend: ‘This story is about Granny. Reserve story. Everyone knows this story’.78 This is principally a humorous tale about a man’s attempt to evade the provincial and religious authorities in order to bury his Granny as he promised. But it occurs under the threat of haunting and involves the shifting of corpses in the night and grave-robbing, all signifiers of the Gothic genre. What is more interesting than King’s delving into rituals of the dead is his conflation of the Gothic into an Indigenous narrative. As with the inexplicable, though comedic, presence of the long dead Louis Riel in the *Dead Dog Cafe Comedy Hour,* there is a refutation of the linearity of time. Ghosts then, come to re-present circular presence and past, removing horror from the Gothic to Indigenise the genre. This reframing is similar to Mudrooroo’s re-inscription of the European invaders as ghosts, unconnected to their dreaming.

*(v) Incorporation as a creative strategy*

The key to the similarities between King’s evaluation of Christianity and Mudrooroo’s examination of Gothicism is in their use of the technique of incorporation. The incorporative inter-textualities of both authors’ works do not simply deconstruct western representations of the indigene. Instead, their deployment

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and reframing of the Gothic and the Christian involve contestations of semantic space, which can denote a productive hybridity in the Bhabhaian sense. Bhabha provides a useful theoretical framework in his formulation, a kind of supra-textual enaction, beyond a clear mixing of the west and the colonised. Bhabha creatively theorises resistance as the disrupting of European order and power through repetition, ‘but as something different — a mutation, a hybrid’.  

It is important to note, however, that while King and Mudrooroo mutate discourses of Christianity and Gothicism, respectively, their construction of this process arguably involves a complication in the application of only postcolonial notions of hybridity. In fact, I believe that there is a deliberate attempt to push the boundaries of such theoretical formulations. This is, in part, because of the parody of the postcolonial, implied or blatant, within these authors’ fictions. King, in particular, positions his work in a satirical relationship to theoretical configurations, especially the postcolonial.

This is evidenced in King’s selection of the word 'subalterns' in the confrontation between Young Man Walking on Water and Old Woman in *Green Grass, Running Water*. The term 'subalterns' can be seen as a reference to postcolonial theory. It has become a key word, particularly because of its use by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a vital theorist in postcolonial analyses. The question for Spivak is 'can the subaltern speak'?  


well as speaking positions, precisely the kind of discursive power critique King frequently engages in. But the fact that King’s Old Woman aligns subalterns with terms such as ‘disciples’ and ‘proof readers’ does not suggest an acceptance of this term. King is re-imagining this term through the value-laden associations of the word ‘sub’.

This conclusion is affirmed in one of his few specifically theoretical works — ‘Godzilla vs the post-colonial’ — which both lampoons the postcolonial term and redefines it in productive ways.81 Other references and parodies of the postcolonial are repeated in *Green Grass, Running Water* in King’s version of Cooper’s American archetypal hero, Natty Bumppo. Natty’s title in King’s text is ‘Post-Colonial Wilderness Guide and Outfitter.’ 82 This aligns contemporary attempts to evaluate the literary oppressions of the past with those acts of literary confinement themselves, and suggests some shortcomings of postcolonial theory as the only tool for analysing King’s work. Like the stepping out of the binaries referred to in the last chapter, there is an attempt to highlight the inadequacies of western discourse itself, even discourses of resistance.

This does not change the fact that much of King’s and Mudrooroo’s work is in relation to colonial texts, so much so that King’s satire of the postcolonial can appear contradictory. The previous chapter in this thesis, ‘Deconstructing Imperial Myths’, is testimony to the importance of postcolonial concepts in these authors’ fictions. The content and thematic structure of these authors’ works require multiple theoretical

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82 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 433.
critiques. Margery Fee and Jane Flick have suggested an addition to postcolonial notions of counter-discourse and hybridity. Fee and Flick have defined the ‘overall strategy’ of Green Grass, Running Water ‘subsumes European culture and history into an Aboriginal framework’, and the same can be said of the rest of King’s novels. Indeed, for both authors’ writings, the textual encounters are always encompassed and defined by an Indigenous framework.

The inter-textuality of the two authors is, then, I believe, involved in a framing as well as a blending process. By this I mean that the authors attempt to deconstruct western oppression through the analysis of the iconic struggle of colonisation by creating a new story framed and narrated by Indigenous emblems. The west is incorporated in this larger, reframed story. The grand narratives of the west (particularly Gothicism and Christianity in the context of this chapter) become part of an Indigenous-themed story. Because of this, Indigenous-based theories of understanding both the real and the textual are important to use alongside postcolonial frameworks in regard to these authors. These possibilities will be explored in more depth in the last two chapters of this thesis.

At this point, the placing of King and Mudrooroo both inside and outside the postcolonial bracket can best be understood in terms of a concern with discourse and discursive regimes. In selecting Christian and Gothic icons, King and Mudrooroo are specifically gearing their writing towards a postcolonial approach. This is because postcolonial theory is a reworking of the colonial, in this case rewriting the colonial attempt to explain its own enterprise through narratives of Gothicism and

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83 FEE, Margery and Jane FLICK. Coyote pedagogy: Knowing where the borders are in Thomas
Christianity. And yet both authors layer their texts, although very differently, with all elements of the discursive practice as well as with the physical policies of colonisation. And while discursive focus still very much includes the authors within the realm of postcolonial studies, the issues they discuss and undercut include elements such as academic theory, particularly the postcolonial. In addition they frame this discussion within an assertion of Indigenous ‘realities’ and themes.

Indigenous is not simply synonymous with colonial resistance in this formulation. For example, Mudrooroo doubly appropriates the Gothic, in part to show the colonial use of the Gothic genre and, also, because of its transmorphic qualities, its resistance to rational evaluation and definition. In addition, Mudrooroo’s prioritising of Indigenous textuality through the introduction of what he terms maban reality both parallels and redefines our understanding of the postcolonial arena.

Re-framing of grand narratives does not only respond to the power inherent in their construction but also changes their actual effect. When applied in colonisation grand narratives often present a one-dimensional representation. In Doctor Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World, Mudrooroo responds to this predilection to write history from a one-sided perspective. Mudrooroo creates a fictional voice to provide an Aboriginal ‘history’ and experience of colonisation, as has been demonstrated by many critics. All of the binaries of good and bad played out in colonial discourse are complicated by this voice, and the white invaders become interpreted as the ‘num’, ghosts haunting and punishing the Indigenous

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people of Tasmania. Consequently the colonisers themselves become part of Aboriginal mythology. Mudrooroo makes reference to this concept of the ghost in his rewriting of this novel, *Master of the Ghost Dreaming*. In rewriting the history of colonisation Mudrooroo is creating a Gothic ‘ghost’ story played out against the ‘dreaming’ stories of the Indigenous characters.

The Gothic versus the Indigenous is not simply an even battle. Jangamuttuk is portrayed as ‘master of the ghost dreaming’ [my emphasis], able to enter the spiritual realities of the invaders as well as that of his own people. George, Jangamuttuk’s son in the two books following *Master of the Ghost Dreaming*, is also able to inhabit and ‘master’ both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous meta-narratives. George becomes his own dreaming companion — the dingo. He is also connected to the dreams and realities of the vampire Amelia, because they have shared each other’s blood. And, as is discovered at the end of the latest book in the *Master* series, George is also the genetic son of the missionary Fada. He provides an insight into the powerful discourses of oppression present at colonisation through his symbolic and biological connection to the Gothic and the Christian.

This two-way gaze\(^8\) is structured by an Indigenous character’s response and control of narration in that George is always more Dingo than Vampire. He can never bring himself to take blood, despite his desire. This point of narration is vital. In all of Mudrooroo’s novels, except for *The Kwinkan* (where the narrator is uninformed and undermined), narration is framed and controlled by an Indigenous

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111, 1988, 47-53. ARTHUR, Kateryna. Fiction and the rewriting of history: A reading of Colin Johnson. *Westerly*. 30(1), March 1985, 55-60. These articles are just a few of many on this subject.\(^8\) The notion of the two-way gaze is discussed in Chapter One of this dissertation, in the context of the ‘mixed-blood’s’ dual perception.
character. The same is true of Thomas King’s novel, *Green Grass, Running Water* and many of his short stories, despite much of his work being presented in the third person or in blocks of dialogue. First person narration is only used in *Green Grass, Running Water* in the story repeated in turn by each of the four Indians. Some critics have seen this ‘I’ as King himself or simply as part of the omniscient narration. But since the ability to be in many places at the same time is part of the text’s creative reformation of reality, it seems more likely that the ‘I’ is each of the four Indians in turn. This is because of the role in describing different versions of the tale. Each ‘in the beginning story’ is preluded with the isolated statement, ‘This according to’, and then the name of one of the four Indians. The point is that, in both authors’ work, the narrative framework is continually established as self-conscious Indigenous story-telling. This is true even as double and complex presences are evoked within this story-telling arena.

For Mudrooroo, titles can also act as a reduction of the Gothic within a framework suggestive of Indigenous empowerment. I have referred above to the title of *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* [my emphasis], but the titles of the two books which follow and rewrite *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* are also suggestive of both Gothicism and Indigenous resistance. *The Undying* is definitely a term embedded in the Gothic genre, suggesting images of vampires, mummies and unnatural creations such as that of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. But, in terms of a textual re-adaptation of the Tasmanian Aboriginal history, ‘the undying’ takes on different connotations. Truggerninni is rewritten as Ludjee, and escapes on a boat with her clan, rather than being cemented into tragic history as the last of her race. This is a strong refutation of

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86 Linda Lamont-Stewart suggests that the four Indians tell their stories separately to the ‘I’ in: Linda
the ‘the myth of the dying race’ discussed at length in the last chapter. In this way, the title disavows the presence of Gothic inscriptions of the indigene as unnatural and horrific at the moment of colonisation, while simultaneously asserting Indigenous resistance to nostalgic myths of Indigenous auto-genocide.

The title of the next book in this series serves a similar function. Underground has associations in Christian mythology of hell, and it is where the dead lies. Also, in classic Greek and Roman myths, the underground signifies a place of fear and punishment, the land of the dead. Hades, the lord of the underworld, kidnapped Persephone, the daughter of Zeus and Demeter, the Goddess of the land and of agriculture. Demeter neglects the land in her desperate search for her daughter. Thus, Wadawaka's imprisonment underground coinciding with the European occupation of Australia is likened to making the land barren in the classical myth. But the term ‘underground’ is also one of resistance, as in the French underground movement during the Nazi occupation in the Second World War. ‘Underground’ has many complex associations in Mudrooroo’s text. It has a parabolic relationship to Australia in that Australia is seen to be underneath the imperial centre. The story is told to a group of gold diggers, who regard the underground as the source of wealth. More importantly, the Underworld realm that Amelia, the English vampire, inhabits during the tale, is actually a sacred and powerful Indigenous site:

LAMONT-STEWARD. 1997, 124.
87 Persephone is also known as ‘Kore’, which is the name of the ship Amelia arrives upon in Mudrooroo’s novel The Undying.
The darkness was a felt thickness and even in my Dreaming animal shape, I walked on verging on panic. I sensed the ghosts of my mob shuffling along beside me. My nose smelled only death and decay. As if from afar, my ears caught the droning of Wawilak’s didgeridoo.  

Thus oppression and exploitation, and the discourses that accompany and support them, are exhibited and exposed but framed within Indigenous resistance.

The Gothic form, particularly the vampire, and consumption in general, is vital to Mudrooroo’s latest writings. It is first introduced in *The Kwinkan*. The Gothic quality of *The Kwinkan* is always framed by an inherently Indigenous meta-structure. The eponymous creature of this text comes from a traditional Aboriginal tale told by Jackamara, one of the central characters. Kwinkans are men who have had ‘the flesh drained from their bones’, been ‘sucked dry’ by enchanting *Gyinggi* women. They become animal-like, lost to the tribe, ‘thin and elongated, living in the rocks and crevasses, afraid to face the light of day and other men.’ The white narrator of this text analogises himself with the Kwinkans, seeing himself as a victim of the political machinations around him. The position of narration, and thus of control, is undermined. As a result, the white narration is surrounded by Indigenous belief, the discursive battle over narration is reframed and literally consumed within tribal dreaming stories.

Mudrooroo and King are self-consciously involved in a re-contextualisation of Indigeneity in terms of the important signifiers of colonisation. This involves a satire

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90 MUDROOROO. *Underground*. Pymble, NSW: Angus and Robertson, 1999, 98.
91 MUDROOROO. 1993c, 5-6.
of colonial textualisation and, for Mudrooroo, an opportunistic appropriation of the Gothic form itself. But all of this effects, most importantly, a reductive incorporation of the form. Similarly, King is continually reframing Christianity within an Indigenous context. The most graphic example of this is, again, in *Green Grass, Running Water*. Here, the Christian God’s origins are defined within Native American belief. God is little more than a small escaped Coyote dream of a dog with delusions of grandeur. A delusional palindrome, in fact:

I am god, says that Dog Dream.

“Isn’t that cute,” says Coyote. “That Dog Dream is a contrary. That Dog Dream has everything backward.”

But why am I a little god, shouts that god....

“Okay, Okay,” says Coyote. “Just stop shouting.”

There, says that GOD. That’s better.92

The most significant element of King’s re-framing of Christianity within an Indigenous imperative is his re-telling of the Bible stories as corrections. The original biblical incidents themselves become Indian mistakes, or at least Coyote ‘mistakes’.93

The ‘mistake’ of God as Coyote dream is paralleled later in *Green Grass, Running Water*, in Alberta’s immaculate conception. Alberta’s inexplicable pregnancy is explained in the four Indians’ remonstrations of Coyote:

“But I was helpful, too,” says Coyote. “That woman who wanted a baby. Now, that was helpful.”

92 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 2-3.
93 The fact that Coyote is a ‘trickster figure’ is central to this cultural ownership of ‘mistakes’. The vital importance of the trickster is expanded upon in Chapter Five of this thesis.
“Helpful!” said Robinson Crusoe. “You remember the last time you did that?”

[…] We haven’t straightened out that mess yet,” said Hawk-eye.

“Hee-hee,” says Coyote. “Hee-hee.”

This moment of Coyote mischief is connected, through inference, to the Virgin Mary’s immaculate conception. Thus, the birth of Jesus Christ, and the consequential birth of Christianity become part of an Indian story. And in the context of all the Creation Women’s repeated iconoclastic engagements and confrontations with Christianity, it appears that the Indians are still trying to clean up the ‘problem’ of Christianity.

King’s re-naming of the Christian characters is as central to his incorporative project as the mis-naming of the Creation Women by the Christian characters is to his satire. Jesus becomes Young man Walking on Water. This name decentralises the Messiah figure, focusing on his acts rather than on worship, and hierarchy. It is also, arguably, a play on the Hollywood construction of Indian names. As Kevin Costner’s 1990 film, Dances with Wolves, is inscribed with white characters such as ‘Dances with Wolves’ and ‘Stands with a Fist’, Jesus comically becomes ‘Young Man Walking on Water’. The Noah story is also disrupted through Indian reframing. This is not just because of the presence of Changing Woman, but also because of the analogous use of the ark in realist sections of the narrative. Eli and his hut can be viewed as a displacement of the Noah story. Clifford Sifton, the managing engineer of the Dam who threatens Eli’s cabin, and whose name is an allusion to Sir Clifford

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94 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 456.
Sifton (adamant promoter of the Prairie West Movement and of the settlers in Canada early this century)\textsuperscript{96} makes this connection, ‘this house is going to turn into an ark’.\textsuperscript{97} But this ‘Noah’ does not accept the vengeful God’s water — here compared with capitalism’s attempt to control nature in the form of a dam. Instead he blocks the water through his presence and through litigation, and it is only Coyote’s intervention that brings on the flood, which destroys the dam itself as well.\textsuperscript{98}

\textit{Green Grass, Running Water} stresses the importance of reworking these mythologies of Christianity, emphasising that ‘there is no truth, only stories’.\textsuperscript{99} This involves a new treatment of power itself; it is not just an inversion of the power relationships. If, as Foucault posits, ‘we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth’\textsuperscript{100}, then King’s assertion of ‘no truths’ disavows the oppressive production of power. The postcolonial project has been seen as struggle for power, for control over the language which positions truth.\textsuperscript{101} King, then, steps into this postcolonial arena of power struggle, but also attempts to step outside of it, incorporating and reframing this struggle within a larger fluid space.

Christianity becomes part of an Indigenous story, one of many stories; part of the fluid oral-like approach to story-telling. This is portrayed most vividly in King’s short story, “One Good Story, That One”, in the short story collection of the same name. In this narrative, anthropologists come and visit a ‘bush’ Indian, eager to be

\textsuperscript{96} FLICK, Jane. 1999, 150.
\textsuperscript{97} KING, Thomas. 1993a, 156.
\textsuperscript{98} DONALDSON, Laura E. 1995, 38-9.
\textsuperscript{99} KING, Thomas. 1993a, 432.
\textsuperscript{100} FOUCAULT, Michel. The political function of the intellectual. \textit{Radical Philosophy}. 17, 1977, 12.
told an ‘authentic’ Indian story. King parodies western culture’s attempt to ‘version’ Indian culture through itself. The story-teller tells the anthropologists a bizarre retelling of the Genesis story in which Eve, as Evening, owns the garden but is evicted by a violent, unsharing and selfish god, along with the stupid and dependent ‘Ahdamn’. Here Ahdamn’s inane ‘writing down’ is ridiculed as being boring. Ahdamn is tricked by Coyote into thinking there are many more animals than there actually are, ‘All those animals come by. Coyote come by, maybe four, maybe eight times. Gets dressed up, fools around’. Thus Ahdamn’s list, a symbol of the ability to inscribe, is devalued in the same way that western versions of Indian orality are devalued. Also the western expectations of stereotypical Indian culture are rejected via the incorporation of the western sacrosanct into Indian story telling. This is an analysis and a reframing of the function of storytelling itself. As Atwood has argued,

His [the narrator’s] story is about telling a story, and about the kinds of stories that are expected of him, and about the kinds that have been told to him; it’s also a story about refusing to tell a story […].

The specifics and ‘truth’ of the Biblical story are undermined in this reframing process. They are to be ‘forgotten’ in the repetitions of the Indigenous story. In *Green Grass, Running Water* Coyote mischievously attempts to draw Biblical referents into the storyteller’s tale. His guesses as to what will happen next include: a golden calf; a pillar of salt; and a burning bush:

“Where do you get these things,” I says.


“Forget the book,” I says. “We’ve got a story to tell.”

104 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 387.
This reduction of a grand narrative is by no means a nihilistic destruction of western culture — a colonisation of the coloniser. It involves an integrated view of cultural reality with, admittedly, some strong satire of an institution, which is central to the colonisation of the Americas.

The reduction of the Christian grand narrative is part of a non-hierarchical approach to the construction of history, of literature, of faith. Catherine Hall has theorised integration as a way out of hierarchal power formations and necessary marginalisation, though still structured at moments through power.105 This integrated policy is a way out of the essentialisms of negative racism — which reinscribe the same categories of oppression, which originally policed the boundaries of identity.106

This is why it is important to stress the incorporative element of King and Mudrooroo’s writing strategy. Incorporation allows for resistive empowerment, beyond a merging of oppositional textual sites. Reading of the works as both interactions between sites as well as an incorporation of the traditionally dominant narratives suggests a textual process which creates an Indigenous border around a connected interaction of colonised and coloniser. It is important to emphasise that this process is not an essentialism. An exhibition of the contesting of ideological ground is present in both authors’ work. As the vampire figure of Mudrooroo’s Amelia Fraser collides with the maban figure of Jangamuttuk and his giant goanna dreaming companion, so do the Women of King’s repeated creation myths collide with the figures of God, Adam, Noah, the Angel Gabriel and Jesus. There exists in

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both authors’ works a repetitive creative struggle between the emblems of empire and of Indigeneity. In addition the construction of Indigenous identity is deliberately complex and fluid. The authors are performative rather than prescriptive in their formation of Indigenous borders, and this is the subject of the next chapter.
Chapter Four

Re-inscribing Loss: ‘An Indian in the Twentieth Century’?¹

The last two chapters have been concerned, primarily, with Thomas King’s and Mudrooroo’s constructions and reconstructions of the past. This thesis argues that the past, as imagined by both authors, is vastly different from modernist, Eurocentric notions that assume time is always linear. Instead, for King and Mudrooroo the idea of the ‘past’ is concurrent with, and disruptive of, coeval moments. This being granted, it is important to discuss the authors’ depiction of a contemporary existence and identity. The negation of contemporaneous existence within the semiotic field of the indigene marks the authors’ construction of an unusual and distinctive ‘present’ as being particularly relevant to my study. In the 1998 Native American motion picture entitled Smoke Signals, the storyteller, Thomas, claims that his uncle was arrested for being ‘an Indian in the twentieth century’.² This humorous statement has import for Indigenous people in Canada and Australia because, so frequently, non-Indigenous representations of the Indigenous milieu have fetishised it into an equation with the past and the ‘traditional’³.

Both authors construct their contemporary visions through the quests and confusion of what will be termed here, ‘lost men’. The lost man expresses identity through a negotiation of the locales of 'inside' and 'outside'. This ambiguous positioning is mediated through the stories the protagonists tell about themselves and

¹ Taken from the Native American feature film Smoke Signals. Directed by Chris EYRE. Miramax, 1998.
their surroundings. The central character or ‘lost man’ is explored through the absence of a specific father-figure and the presence of community. Additionally, multiple re-presentations and role-plays involve displacement of stereotyped and fixed identities of Indigenous peoples. This is not an uncomplicated process, in that the focus upon ‘lost men’ can also result in the marginalisation of female subjectivity. This chapter will be discussing these issues primarily through an examination of Mudrooroo’s Wild Cat series of novels and Long Live Sandawara, as well as King’s Medicine River. These novels complicate essentialist or excavatory approaches to Indigenous identity; they examine the constructedness of the semiotic field of the indigene. The semiotic field of the indigene, or more simply the representation of Indigenous people in western discourse, is of course a complex and varied field. Previous chapters have focused on this discursive regime in terms of its past embodiments, the connotations of the term ‘savage’, for example.\textsuperscript{4} This chapter will discuss this past image, as it plays into contemporary misconceptions surrounding Indigenous people. This chapter also explores King’s and Mudrooroo’s treatment of western expectations of both the contemporary ‘authentic’ Indigenous entity and of a ‘lost’ or ‘broken’ contemporary Indigenous existence. This chapter will argue that both authors explore misconceptions of identity while moving creatively beyond ideas of what is true and false.

\textit{(i)The Lost Men}

The theme of loss is integral to contemporary identity in Canada and Australia. Grieving and loss underlie the impact of the colonial encounter and parallel discourses of reconciliation.\textsuperscript{5} Being lost is an undeniable motif in the books

\textsuperscript{4} See Chapter Two.

\textsuperscript{5} The \textit{Bringing them Home} Report of 1997 National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families (Australia) has been a repeated point of reference in this dissertation. The need to compensate for what has been and is lost is part of this Inquiry’s agenda.
of Thomas King and Mudrooroo. Thomas King has gone so far as to discuss the
disquiet of lost-ness on a personal level:

I wanted to deal with various forms that alienation might take and the ironies
that are created as people try to maintain or change their positions […] the […]
different facets of a particular malaise that I’ve known first hand. ⁶

This is not to suggest that King and Mudrooroo are autobiographical writers. The
interpretation of Mudrooroo as being Wild Cat has been an obsession in the media,
which has dogged the author for years.⁷ Nor is it the case that King’s and
Mudrooroo’s characters express alienation in the same ways. On the contrary,
Mudrooroo’s male characters are primarily in their youth, while King’s are at least in
their middle age, although his latest novel, *Truth and Bright Water* (1999), features
two boys in their teens. There are other significant differences in the characterisation
of being or becoming lost. Mudrooroo’s characters exhibit cultural dislocation
through nihilistic apathy and militant resistance. King’s male characters, on the other
hand, evoke detachment and confusion, often misunderstanding their communities.

Both sets of characterisation present very different elements of what Fanon
has described as 'black skin, white masks', or the colonisation of the mind.⁸ The
Aboriginal critic, Cliff Watego, has identified Mudrooroo’s depiction of this
internalised racism as being one of one of the most virulent elements of continuing
colonisation. It is the dilemma, expressed by Watego, of ‘white material culture

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⁷ For a good example of this tendency see Mudrooroo’s interview with David KERR and Phillip EDMONDS: Recipe for a writer. *Times Literary Supplement*. 26 June 1984, 74-6.
eroding […] the faith of the Aborigine in his own culture.’⁹ The men are, in many ways, detached, ‘numb’.¹⁰ The connection between colonisation and this numb-ness or lost-ness is made literally in Mudrooroo’s *Doctor Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the End of the World*. The white settlers are called ‘num’ meaning ghosts. The protagonists of the novels are not, however, terminally lost. They are not enacting white mythologies concerning the indigene’s authenticity or its extinction. Rather, the ‘lost-ness’ is a result of a powerful colonisation and engenders various searches, the hope of becoming found, or belonging. Like all other elements of these authors’ works, this belonging is never linear, nor is it simplistically formulaic but is instead ambivalent, rehearsed and deliberately unresolved.

King’s lost men first seek identification in varied institutions. Assertion of the self is experimented with via cultural facets such as Hollywood, canonical literature and capitalist consumerism. It is not that these societal components are portrayed as specifically ‘un-Indigenous’, but rather that the sense of identity itself cannot be so neatly resolved. King demonstrates that such institutions as capitalism are apposite to Indigenous identity, providing that Indigenous identity is acknowledged. He refutes the binary oppositions of ‘the institution’ and ‘the Indian’, and, in so doing, reworks the limited definition of both.

Mudrooroo also deals with stereotypical representations of the indigene and of identity. Mudrooroo's characters experiment with opposite — yet similarly simplistic — identifications to those of King. The most obvious example of this process in *Long Live Sandawara* is the melancholy character of Tom, and his defeatist

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¹⁰ KERR, David and Phillip EDMONDS. 1984, 75.
alcoholism. The central character, Alan, imagines himself as a modern day freedom fighter. Alan’s attempts to assert his identity through exact mimesis of the past are shown to be misplaced: all of his friends are massacred tragically at the novel’s close. As Michael Cotter argues, ‘dreaming’ or identity cannot be willed: it is ‘a simple fact [...] an inheritance’. Mudrooroo’s characters do not find answers in direct and violent confrontation. Instead, Wild Cat’s desperate resort to violence by shooting a policeman in Wild Cat Falling results in his being sentenced to ten years imprisonment. Like attempts to deal with the world with nihilistic apathy, armed engagement becomes futile, a disengagement. These encounters delineate the limits of absolute answers. By the end of Wild Cat Screaming the protagonist is able to come to the conclusion that ‘everything comes in shades of grey’. In other words, in two of the novels from the Wildcat series, Wild Cat Falling, Wild Cat Screaming and in the quite separate Long Live Sandawara, the pursuit of a singular answer, or a quick fix, is refuted.

The depiction of loss, then, is complex and initially negative. Many of the characters have a problematic relationship with their own subjectivity. By this I mean that the central character frequently has difficulties identifying and acknowledging his own emotional responses or even recognising himself. In King’s Medicine River Will's main responses seem to be geared to annoyance at Harlen, his friend and the community healer/interferer — the symbolic trickster in the novel. Will reports conversations and situations with almost no judgement or evaluation of his own feelings, demonstrating disconnectedness to his surroundings and himself.

13 The import of this term ‘trickster’ is explored in the next chapter.
There are several moments in the novel in which Harlen defines and acknowledges Will’s state of mind while Will disavows these claims concerning his consciousness. This interplay occurs even as Will’s memories and actions confirm Harlen’s prognosis:

Harlen had an ear for depression.

[...] “So how come you’re so depressed Will?”

“I’m not depressed [...] I just don’t like losing close games, Harlen.”

“Will, they beat us by twenty points, hell they’re the team that took the championship. Maybe it’s about Louise?”

“[…] It has nothing to do with Louise”.14

After this protest, Will spends the rest of the chapter oscillating between attempting to telephone Louise and receiving the engaged signal, and, remembering his last affair (in which he found out too late that his lover was married). His frustration is clear, yet unacknowledged. There is a certain disassociation, or refusal to connect with the self. He is a man triply inscribed with loss, humorous as this often is in King’s novel. He is at a loss for words, lost in the interplays of his community and even lost in terms of his sense of self.

Such inscriptions of loss also occur in Mudrooroo’s texts. Upon leaving prison the protagonist of *Wild Cat Falling* feels isolation from his self, he notes how the ‘mirror reflects a person I take to be myself gazing back blank eyed.’15 The institutions of prison and the boys’ home have, symbolically and literally, almost erased the sense of self for Wild Cat. In the same way, in *Medicine River* Will’s sense of himself is unclear because he has no concept of his place. Will is also

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15 MUDROOROO. *Wild Cat Falling*. (Foreword by Mary Durack). Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1965, 16.
removed from his home and is off the reservation, because of Canadian laws concerning Status Indian women marrying non-status men. \(^{16}\) Since Will’s father is white, his mother, Rose, loses her Native status, and they must move into town. The painful childhood memory of this event is met with attempts to erase the father completely; ‘Our father’s dead’, Will declares as a child. \(^{17}\) For both characters, the physical dislocation operates to dissolve a potentially balanced and whole image of themselves.

\(\text{(ii) The Land of the ‘Lost Men’}\)

The inscription of place, and of landscape, is a central expression of the quest for belonging. For the protagonists in these novels first readings suggest that the presentation of landscape is structured to oscillate between the privileged bush or rural/reservation motif, and the alienation of urban existence. In like fashion, in the present-day section of *Long Live Sandawara* similes and analogies often refer to subverted bush symbols in order to emphasise what has been lost. For example, the alcoholic Tom is described as being ‘gaunt as a sickly gum tree’. \(^ {18}\) Here erosion in, and distance from, nature, and most specifically archetypal native flora is being aligned with the erosion of the community.

Re-infusion of ‘the bush’ as an important locale in the lives of these characters is represented as a positive healing and restorative measure. Part of Wild Cat’s emotional growth and acceptance of his culture is symbolised in his change in attitude to the bush:

\(^{17}\) KING, Thomas. 1989, 9.
[...] the bush seems more friendly now [...] High summer rings through the hot afternoon. Cicadas and sharp bird notes and a fitful wind among thin leaves and brittle grass [...] “Sorry, brother,” I say and step carefully over [the lizard]. It is sort of an apology to all the lizards I ever tortured with sticks as a kid, perhaps to all the bush and its creatures for my indifference.19

By contrast, Wild Cat’s alienation and his lack of place is obvious in the city of Fremantle:

Cars zoom past. Laden trucks lumber and clatter to and from the wharf. Fremantle is a busy port buzzing with movement, everyone but me with somewhere to go. 20

One can note a similar juxtaposition at certain moments in Medicine River. It is exhibited most graphically in the first conversation between Harlen and Will:

“You like it there in Toronto?”

“It’s okay.”

“James said you went there to get away.”

“My job’s in Toronto.”

Harlen turned the radio down a bit. “Can’t see Ninastiko from Toronto. So, when you think you’ll be moving back home? [...] Ninastiko [...] Chief Mountain. That’s how we know where we are. When we can see the mountain, we know we’re home.”21

As Cotter has argued, such dichotomies between nature and the urbanised metropolis clearly symbolise the significance of connecting to land in identity formation.22 This

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19 MUDROOROO. 1965, 129.
is a point that both King’s and Mudrooroo’s writing repeatedly makes. But it is vital to my analysis of these authors to emphasise that they do this in a non-specific way. The central characters of both authors’ works do not ever lay claim, so to speak, to the land they inhabit, nor do they give away any specific cultural stories, or currency, to the potentially white reader.

I believe there are a number of reasons for this thematic choice. The connection of land is necessary for these authors because of the political actualities present in both Canada and Australia. In fact, in terms of the historical ‘reality’ of these issues it is important to note the significance of land as undeniably vital to most conceptions of Indigeneity. Land rights, and associated treaty rights, are central to Indigenous politics in both Australia and Canada. Pat Dodson, prominent in Aboriginal affairs, has defined land as ‘the generation point of existence; it’s the spirit from which Aboriginal existence comes’. Although Canada has an entirely different and equally diverse Indigenous culture to that of Australia, the political conception of land can be paralleled in these two cases. In 1989, George Erasmus, the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, defined the fundamental link between land as mother and land management in the development of sovereignty and de-colonisation. As Erasmus terms it, ‘as First Nations we should have our own government with jurisdiction over our own lands and people.’

Thus, King and Mudrooroo evoke these similar convictions in their literary construction of Indigeneity. This evocation is combined with another more complex

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standpoint. As this thesis has repeatedly argued, both authors refuse to offer a new truth, beyond the mis-truths they reject and satirise. In so doing the dialectic of the bush or ‘land’ in preference to the city is not a clear polarity. Put another way, in the work of Mudrooroo, urban existence is not simply portrayed as the site of dislocation and inauthentic identity. Rather, the complication of authenticity is central to the depictions of place and identity because both of these elements are so fascinatingly variable. The bush offers a positive symbolic identification with Indigeneity and an acceptance of culture rather than a mimetic representation of it. Imbricated into this acceptance is a continual movement of identity. For example, in Mudrooroo’s 1979 novel Alan cannot replicate the past bush battle of the long dead hero, Sandawara, in contemporary Perth. The results of this attempt are tragic in the extreme. He can, however, return to his ‘country’, with the living elder and keeper of Sandawara’s (hi)story, Noorak:

Already he [Alan] is seeing the worn purples and reds of Noorak’s home and Sandawara’s land. Noorak is smiling too. Already he feels as good as on his land with his people. It is long past time for the boy to be initiated into manhood and he will do it as soon as possible.25

Mudrooroo’s evocation of rural landscapes is not a specific, localised prescription concerning the need to return to traditional life. Instead, it is an expression of empowerment. The image of the bush, combined with Uncle Wally’s song and his explication of Wild Cat’s dream and dreaming, allow the latter freedom within the jail at the end of Wild Cat Screaming:

I feel the stars beam through my body. I’m light as feathers, as insubstantial as moonbeams. I exult in my freedom. I leave the barren city behind me and

25 MUDROOROO. 1987b, 170.
reach the dark thoughtfulness of the bush [...] “[The bush] lives in you,”

[Uncle Wally] says [...] “Lots of things they can’t take away from us [...]”. This symbolic use of the landscape and the movement within it reaches an extreme with the introduction of maban reality, the topic of the next chapter of this dissertation.

The assertion of non-ossified place is also repeated in the dominant natural imagery in the text. Apart from his return to the bush, the major natural image for Wild Cat is the sea. The sea provides his glimpse of freedom during his incarceration, and he is drawn to it upon his release. Much of the Master of the Ghost Dreaming series is structured in terms of voyaging on water. It is an image that provides a flowing underpinning for the thematic formation of the texts. Water also dominates much of King’s work. These techniques will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Five, which concerns the form of the authors’ work. The predominance of bursting dams, rivers, and watery creation stories in King’s work mirrors Mudrooroo’s fluid and symbolic treatment of landscape.

Wayne Tefs has argued that the landscapes in King’s texts are very much mindscape. Indeed, King’s work repeatedly evokes the need to gain strength and decolonisation through a positive identification with Indigeneity, and the depiction of land forms an important element in this process for both the authors. Again, this ‘scape’ is not cemented into place; it is not entirely specific, nor prescriptive. Will describes the wind as the most crucial element of the landscape in Medicine River:

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Medicine River sat on the broad back of the prairies [...] banked low against the weather that slid off the eastern face of the Rockies [...] Then there was the wind. I generally tried to keep my mouth shut about the wind in Medicine River. Harlen Bigbear was like the prairie wind. You never knew when he was coming or when he was going to leave. Most times I was happy to see him.28

Harlen is Will’s newfound link with his community. Therefore, the juxtaposition of Harlen and the amorphous and unpredictable quality of the wind demarcate a continually evolving connection between place and identity. The landscape itself refuses to remain fixed or to fix the identity of the protagonist. The close of Medicine River symbolises this process. Percy Walton has suggested that Will's walk off into snow offers a landscape symbolic of a blank page.29 Certainly the trackless wastes of a Canadian winter provide an uninhabited and invisible artist’s canvas for the storyteller. Will's trackless journey in the falling snow also metaphorically replicates his integration into community. Even at the 'finale' Will's story/community continues to be reformed. His identity is not ‘identifiable’.

(iii) Textualising the ‘Lost Men’

The evasion of closure of story and identity is reflected in the destabilised narrative structure of various books of the two authors. Shifts in narration are present in many of Mudrooroo's texts. The books in the Master of the Ghost Dreaming series, for example, are split between either Jangamuttuk’s and Fada’s, or George’s and Amelia’s narration. In the last section of Wild Cat Screaming, the narration swings precariously between unnamed wardens, superintendents, the undercover

detective Jackamara and then, back to Wild Cat. The fact that these narrators are un-named, also the case in Mudrooroo’s *The Kwinkan*, questions the notion of clearly established identity. King is able to simulate a similar process. It is rare for his novels to be propelled from a single narrative position. In fact he repeats the phrase ‘this according to’ various characters in *Green Grass, Running Water*. In addition, nearly all of his texts are formed out of dialogue, thus making the position of identifiable narrator redundant.

The absence of an identifiable and singular narrator operates to destabilise narrative subjectivity and structures Mudrooroo’s *Wild Cat Falling, Long Live Sandawara, Medicine River*, and King’s *Green Grass, Running Water* and *Medicine River* around what has been termed the ‘counterpoint narrative’. The counterpoint technique allows for ambiguity and irony through its swinging and contrasting images and perspectives. An interplay between perspectives and time periods also condenses and conflates western notions of time. Again, as seen with the discussions of these authors’ works in Chapters Two and Three of this thesis, there is a connection between the past and the present; in fact the nature of the present is in direct relationship with the past. The contemporary world in *Long Live Sandawara* parodies the past on a number of levels. Alan’s simplistic and militant ideological certainty is diffused through the comic presentation of his sex and drugs orientated entourage. This group stands in stark contrast to the visionary mythical character of the historical freedom fighter Sandawara; the past informs the present through opposition. This is not to say that the past is irrelevant in its own right; there are lessons to be learned from the past, such as unity and leadership, as ‘[Alan’s]
beginning to exude a sense of power and destiny which will one day make him a leader of his people’. But Alan's exact mimicking of Sandawara in the environs of the ‘crashpad’ is parodied as farcical:

‘Our national costume,’ the youth grins, posing nude in a spear-throwing attitude. His eyes go to the painting [of Sandawara] and he wishes for a full-length mirror to compare his stance.

The highlighting of these authors’ use of a counterpoint narrative is vital to my analysis of the work. This is because the counterpoint technique allows for exactly the kinds of double speak which this thesis argues both authors are constantly engaged in. The use of this strategy actually allows the fiction to demonstrate the importance and presence of past in the contemporary, while simultaneously invalidating unmediated tradition as the only authentic approach to identity formation.

An integral, evolving approach to time and identity is demonstrated in the narratives which compare memory, rather than ‘history’, with the contemporary. The point in these different approaches is not so much to draw a differentiation between ‘memory’ and ‘history’, but rather to conflate all notions of time into a holistic conception of period and place. For the purposes of this chapter the counterpoint narrative operates primarily to suggest the continual creation of identities. Interestingly, the creation of identity and /or protagonist is revealed through the narrator contextualising and textualising himself through the re-memory of the past of individual characters that are set against concurrent episodes in the contemporary world. By this I mean that the identity of the individual character becomes, self-
consciously, a text in creation. At the same time the narrator is often an image-maker who sets the stage for this character creation while he narrates it to the reader. For example, in the *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* series, George frames his narrative as fireside camp stories. In *Wildcat Screaming* the character Wild Cat refers to the book he is writing, which will confer status upon him in prison:

> Your good deeds and your bad deeds, your attributes and attitudes are entered into that file. [...] Now I’m studying for the matriculation and showing that I’m well under way to reforming.35

Then, in Mudrooroo’s *Doin’ Wild Cat*, this same ‘book’ has become, retrospectively, the author’s first novel, *Wild Cat Falling*.

King’s image-making mirrors this self-reflexivity and self-definition in progression. To cite a key instance, the character of Will in *Medicine River* is a photographer, an image capturer and image creator at the same time. As King has put it, Will is ‘behind the camera taking the picture’.36 And, in many ways the act of narration or of text creation is a source of the characters’ lost-ness. It situates them as 'outside'. A concept of the narrator is depicted in a dialectic with notions of power and the gaze.37 Who is looking at whom and for what reason is the focus of this dissertation’s discussion of these authors’ writings. It is interesting to note that a Foucauldian treatment of the gaze comes into specific focus in *Wildcat Screaming*, with Mudrooroo’s invention of the Panopticon Prison Society. Mudrooroo’s panopticon inverts the traditional power relations between those who are incarcerated and society. According to his formula, members of the public contribute funds in a

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35 MUDROOROO. 1995, 55-6.
36 KING, Thomas quoted in Constance ROOKE. 1990, 63.
37 Foucault has effected the imagining of power in many disciplines with his concept of the panopticon or the gaze, which controls all which it views through warnings of surveillance and the restrictions that
pyramid-style scheme for the ostensible reform of the prisoners as well as for the investor’s own financial benefit. In this con-trick prisoners are empowered, located at the eye of the panopticon model. They not only set up the model that exploits the ‘outside world’ but they also reflect the financial greed of that world in so doing.

Inversion of the panopticon form of control operates to problematise a controlled and stable perspective. Destabilising of perspective occurs frequently within the narratorial position. There is a self-conscious evocation of the split between subject and object. It is vital to emphasise that in the Wildcat and Master of the Ghost Dreaming series Wild Cat and George are between the ‘script’ (literally in the case of Doin Wildcat: A Novel Koori Script) and the events. According to Percy Walton, King’s character Will is involved in the ‘effort to control and fix the ‘reality’ he is constructing’.38 The use of the fluid image-maker marks a postcolonial satire of the classic anthropological attempt to fix Indigenous representation within the gaze of ethnographic photographs, as well as other colonial image-making discussed in earlier chapters of this dissertation. Surveillance becomes a disempowering position of not quite belonging, rather than of controlling.

Furthermore, the authors give their narrators no ‘authorial’ control. King and Mudrooroo depict the narrator within a framework of creative tension. As a consequence the narrators continually misunderstand their situations and are shown, even through their own narration, to make incorrect decisions or assumptions. Their attempts to forge the story or image are repeated, rewritten and reshot. This removes

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38 WALTON, Percy. 1990, 82.
the narrator from the centre of the text; in fact it queries the necessity of centres altogether.\textsuperscript{39}

Will is incorporated into the community photo with the camera left on automatic: I believe this event is noteworthy because of the ways in which it comments upon King’s technique of text submerging the narrator rather than narrator propelling text. Similarly, Mudrooroo’s character, George, becomes his dreaming companion — the dingo, rather than commanding a separate totemic figure, as was the case for characters in earlier books in the series. And Wild Cat’s ‘script/book’, in its multifarious forms, provides the character’s exit from prison, rather than simply explicating his incarceration. So narrative can — ironically — provide its own escape from a narrative prison. In addition, the events or community evoked by the text work to incorporate the narrator, and are not simply mediated by him.\textsuperscript{40} This means that, for both King and Mudrooroo, while the narrators are trying to reclaim and define their origins through the narrative act no definable ‘prognosis’ arises. Repeated image-productions collide with fixed definitions of the self and result in a constant re-imaging of that self. Identity is then situated within an ever-changing community. And some might argue that this position reflects the extra-textual debates over the authors’ own identities as well.

(iv) Positioning the father

Notions of ‘reclaiming’ and of loss are predicated upon absence. For the protagonists in both authors’ works one of the most significant, recurrent absences is that of the father.\textsuperscript{41} This is a remarkably similar facet of these authors' novels. And,

\textsuperscript{39} WALTON, Percy. 1990, 82.
\textsuperscript{40} This process will be explained in greater detail in Chapter Five, with the discussion of textual form and structure.
\textsuperscript{41} A psychoanalytical study of this phenomenon is a rich area for further study, given its appropriateness to the analysis of the familial.
in the cases in which characters have their fathers present, the relationship is a problematic one. An example of this dilemma in *Green Grass, Running Water* is the relationship between the sleazy lawyer, Charlie Looking Bear and his father, Portland. The sections pertaining to Charlie’s flashbacks are wholly concerned with his memories of his early teens and his father’s actions following the death of Charlie’s mother. Here, Portland’s attempts to recapture the dream of the Hollywood Indian result in humiliation being acted out upon the stage of a burlesque theatre:

The cowboy and Portland fought a short fight with the cowboy winning, and as Portland crawled off the stage in defeat, the cowboy began dancing with Pochahontas, their groins pressed together tightly, the cowboy’s hands clutching the woman’s buttocks.42 This highly physical strip-club scene demonstrates King’s emphasis on the recent and continuing use of sexualised images of Indigenous people in contemporary culture. Portland’s participation in this image act highlights the issue of internalised racism discussed above, and demonstrates how the acts of the father figure are implicated in the son’s shame. Such scenes also demonstrate that masculinity was a defining feature of the conflict and the competition between the ‘cowboy’ and the ‘Indian’.

The humiliation the father induces reaches an emotional climax, when after a brief and very unsuccessful trip to Hollywood, Charlie asks his father the same question his father had at an earlier point posed to him, ‘If you could go anywhere in the world [...] where would you want to go?’ 43 When his father had asked Charlie this question, Charlie had given the answer he knew his father wanted to hear — ‘Hollywood’. But after their futile trip to this Mecca, his father does not reply

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43 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 240.
‘home’. Therefore, his father fails to reciprocate Charlie’s earlier support, instead he repeatedly holds onto a derogatory image:

“‘Hollywood,’ his father said in a whisper […]. Charlie caught a taxi downtown, put his bags on the bus, and headed home alone.”

Portland is unable to give up the nationally available images of the indigene, he appears to prefer to keep within the semiotic field of the indigene than risk self-annihilation. In so doing, Portland does not take responsibility for his son’s identity and cultural development. Instead, Portland idealises the white desires to consume a prefabricated Indigenous culture, to make the goal of a Hollywood grail the Native Canadian grail as well. This position is only redeemed through the trickster-like intervention of the Four Indians in *Green Grass, Running Water*.

Mudrooroo’s ‘present’ fathers are also problematised. The character of George in the *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* series has a complicated relationship with any definition of fatherhood. In the first book, George is undifferentiated from the others in the community, but is probably one of the ‘novices’ Jangamuttuk initiates. By the second book, *The Undying*, George clearly identifies Jangamuttuk as his father. In the third book this identification has become obscured by the morbid familial metaphor that the white vampire, Amelia, uses to enslave George and the African convict, Wadawaka. In *Underground*, Amelia depicts ‘family’ in these terms:

Your friend is now my lover and my husband. He is king down here along with his queen. He does not want to leave what he rules.”

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44 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 240.
Here, apart from the fact Amelia is using dark forces to hold George and Wadawaka captive, she also obscures familial connections in the semantics of power and monarchy. This has the effect of de-familiarising (so to speak) George from the family Amelia is maniacally trying to enforce. George’s own father-son link is given the added complication of his mentoring by Wadawaka. At the end of the book, George’s biological father is revealed to him in a surprising turn: he is Fada, the white missionary. The effect on George is dramatic on a personal level, but there is another sense in which this revelation is important too. It is that the effects of colonisation are encapsulated in the problematics of fathering. Thus, the notion of ‘fathering’ is seen to entail a whole gamut of cultural responsibilities (and irresponsibilities) and not simply genetics. There are pluralities of inheritances and these fracture clear concepts of identity for George and for all of the characters in Mudrooroo’s books.

Both Will and Wild Cat are dislocated from their culture. The strange sense of cultural disassociation can be juxtaposed with the negative or possessive demarcation of the protagonists as being ‘Native’ by the white characters within the texts. The interaction between the protagonists and ‘sophisticated’ white women is a case in point. Will’s lover Susan tries to encourage him to read Basil Johnston’s ‘native’ writings; in effect, she attempts to guide him toward a concept of his own Indigeneity. While, in Wild Cat Falling, June shows off the central character to her friends, the university sociology and anthropology students, in order to discuss ‘aboriginal’ issues. I am arguing, then, that for these characters to be displaced

47 KING, Thomas. 1989, 108; and MUDROOROO. 1965, 73.
from their culture yet still defined by Euro-centric and thus external visions of this culture, amounts to a loss of identity. In response to this particular malaise, First Nations critic and poet, Kateri Damm, has critically re-imagined notions of ‘mixed-ness’ and authenticity in terms of positive self-definition, in which — as she puts it — ‘Indigenous literature will resist the boundaries and boxes.’

Identity is not something that can be prescribed by non-Indigenous people, and more importantly, it is not something that can be easily excavated and unpacked for non-Indigenous people. Mudrooroo and King attempt to avoid this by refusing to prescribe specific identity, gesturing towards a discounting of the possibilities of being ‘representative’ of a particular culture. This is conveyed through a fictional utterance that is multiple and repeated. Different positions are occupied and self-consciously ‘performed’ and then moved on from.

Ironically, one of these positions occupied and then moved on from in these authors’ works is the conundrum of ‘authenticity’ itself. Damm’s argument above does not imply that authenticity should not be an issue. Notions of what is real and of belonging are behind much of the flux for the characters of Wild Cat and Will, in particular. Wild Cat’s sense of himself as ‘mongrel’ is a direct reference to the discourses of authenticity. These discourses find particular expression in Chapter Five of Medicine River and can be read through the particulars of the counterpoint narrative. That narrative swings between the memory of the little intellectually disabled girl, May Dean, in Will’s childhood, and David Plume, a character from the reserve. In response to a childhood dare and in order to achieve a sense of belonging amongst the gang of children in the apartment block, May Dean climbs into the dryer.

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in the communal laundry. In the contemporary section of this chapter David Plume continually defines himself by virtue of the fact that he was at Wounded Knee, one of the major political activist sites of the American Indian Movement. He says to Will:

I meet a lot of Indians, you know, who are sorry they didn’t go to Wounded Knee […]. They feel like they got left out. It feels good to be part of something important.49

Thomas King has said of this chapter in *Medicine River* that:

The connection is for me community. David Plume goes to Wounded Knee because he wants to do something important. May Dean crawls in the dryer because she wants to be like everyone else. Will wants to be part of the community in Medicine River, but […] he doesn’t want to get into the “dryer”, as it were […] to keep himself from being trapped. 50

Therefore, both King and Mudrooroo examine and acknowledge the issue of authenticity in their fiction51, but this is not a prescriptive process. On the contrary ‘proving’ becomes the issue to overcome, or to become enslaved in, and it is not a thematic vehicle for determining authenticity in Indigenous life or literature for these authors. In addition, this dissertation has examined colonial approaches to miscegenation and authenticity in terms of its Gothic inscription. In other words, mixed-ness was equated with being not whole in this racist discourse. This theme, identified earlier in this thesis, is again part of my analysis of the contemporary sections of both authors’ texts. This is because much of the process of the ‘lost men’ unlearning colonisation and becoming theoretically whole is tied to the whiteness of

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50 KING, Thomas quoted in Constance ROOKE. 1990, 65.
51 I say ‘fiction’ quite deliberately here. The issue of authenticity in the critical work of these authors is another matter. See Chapter One and Preface.
In this literature, wholeness, loss and seeking to become found are mediated again and again through a negotiation with the absent (yet complicating) white father. The white father is clearly emblematic, at one level, of the intricacies of colonisation. For example, the whiteness of the father is the root cause of Will’s physical dislocation from his community in King’s *Medicine River*:

“‘You guys have to live in town cause you’re not Indian anymore.’”

“Sure we are,” I said. “Same as you.”

“Your mother married a white.”

“Our father’s dead.”

“Doesn’t matter.”

In the context of those childhood taunts there is an attempt to erase the white father, but the identity complications of the absent white male parent are replayed throughout the novel and throughout the life of the narrator. In fact the entire text is structured around the discovery of letters from Will’s father. This discovery instigates his return to Medicine River, and forms an important part of the counterpoint narrative. The very first lines of the novel are taken from one of the letters, and they continue to inform and provide catalysts for action throughout.

In Mudrooroo’s case, the Wild Cat character also feels dislocated from his identity because of an absent white father. In *Wild Cat Falling* his mother’s internalised colonisation culminates in her rejection of her heritage and attempts to ‘pass’ as a white woman. Importantly, the Nyoongah children align this ‘fraudulence’
with her connection to the white father. They tease Wild Cat with taunts of ‘she’s stuck up because she married a white chap […] My mum went to the same mission only she don’t get stuck in no Department house like a cocky in a cage’.  

It is also significant that Wild Cat’s rare references to his father are directed towards a definition of himself as being not whole or pure. He continually defines himself as a ‘delinquent half-breed’, ‘I’m not what they call Australian. I’m just an odd species of native fauna cross-bred with the migrant flotsam of a goldfield’. These statements reflect colonial myths of authenticity. Like the narrator’s process of self-textualisation, both Wild Cat and Will are each unlearning a sense of self, based on white mythologies of authentic Indigenous identity formation.

One of the most telling impacts of the absent father is the inability of the character to ‘father’ others. For example, the harsh dislocation of family that the prison system engenders is graphically exhibited in *Wild Cat Screaming*. At the opening of this book Wild Cat garners his memories, expressing them in vitriolic, dreamlike segments. His bitterness is so complete that he loses the ability to communicate with his only two visitors. His past love Denise brings him a son whom he perceives with a mixture of confusion and disdain:

I stare at the kid and he is a mumma’s boy and ignores me […] It’s just too much. I’ve never ever thought in my wildest dreams that I would be a daddy, and now that I’m one, I have to reach for emotions I don’t feel […] So much for fatherhood, so much for visitors. I’m feeling like shit now. There’s all that movement out there and in here I’m motionless.  

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53 MUDROOROO. 1965, 12.  
54 MUDROOROO. 1965, 31 and 69.  
This stasis — which the prison symbolically and literally re-presents — stunts the formation of the self.

King’s central characters also problematise the fathering role. In fact, none of the ‘lost men’ in his novels are fathers, even though they are often in their middle age. Will does attempt to symbolically enact the father role but there are significant gaps in his ability to do this in *Medicine River*. The transition to fathering behaviour is always a result of Harlen’s interference, and is not always successful. For example, when Clyde Whiteman, the star ball player on the reserve, gets in trouble with the law, Harlen tries to push Will to advise Clyde, ‘like a father’. But Will responds with the line, ‘Never knew my father’.\(^{56}\) This is clearly an issue that needs to be resolved before Will can locate his own belonging and his sense of self.

The only case in King’s fiction of specific fathering by the protagonist is in his short story, ‘Traplines’. Here the narrator swings between his disconnection with his own son and the remembered alienation from his father. This is brought together at the end of the story when the son takes the grandfather’s fishing box, and the father is forced to let go of his father in order to give to his son.\(^{57}\) The dislocation is repeatedly expressed in the inability to regenerate the self in the form of progeny, to properly let go of the specific father for the sake of the continuing community of children. A sense of future is absent within the focus on the past, as Ziggy Marley so lyrically put it, ‘You don’t know your past, you don’t know your future’.\(^{58}\)

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\(^{56}\) *KING*, Thomas. 1989, 123.


Knowing that which is absent involves a process of recovery, but for both Will and Wild Cat the father is so elusive that it makes it also a process of creation. Will lies to strangers, enjoying the feeling of being able to define his father:

I didn’t miss him. I didn’t even think about him. I had never known the man.

So I began to invent him.

“My father’s a pilot. He flies the big jets for Air Canada.”

“Dad’s in stocks and bonds.”

“He’s a career diplomat.”

“He’s a photographer.”

As a child, Wild Cat attempts to ascribe the role of father to his mother’s boyfriend. Importantly, the most euphoric, least nihilistic moment in *Wild Cat Falling* is the point in which Wild Cat is taken on a wood gathering trip with Mr Willy, who calls him ‘son’:

“Get a good view from up there?” Mr Willy asks.

“The whole world,” I say.

“Hmm,” says Mr Willy and shakes his white head.

“The world’s a big place, son.”

“I know,” I say. And I feel it is a good and wonderful world.

Happiness and belonging are tied up with the creation of the father-figure. However, the symbolic undertones of this passage undermine this happiness. Willy negates the euphoria with a shake of his ‘white head’, delineating the limits of the dominant culture. This is accented through the contrast a little later in the text; ‘I drift away past the little groups, looking for a place for myself.’

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59 KING, Thomas. 1989, 80.
60 MUDROOROO. 1965, 36.
61 MUDROOROO. 1965, 37.
bush is juxtaposed with the narrative of the lost young man on the beach to emphasise the extent of Wild Cat’s dislocation.

The movement away from dislocation becomes a movement away from a focus on the specific white father. For many characters in both authors’ texts, travelling from alienation to belonging seems to be interpolated with a shifting conception of the definition and function of the father. In other words the specific father is first painfully absent, tenuously created and then, as will be discussed below, removed in favour of a more general vision. In Medicine River, the absent father, who provides many of the catalysts for the trajectory of the storyline, becomes decentred in a pivotal and highly symbolic moment. At this point, even Will’s bracketed narrative subjectivity becomes diffused and decentralised. In this case, Will finds himself taking a photograph of the entire Reserve community of Medicine River. In a twist on the division between photographer and photograph, Will is also circumscribed into the image itself, by Harlen calling on his knowledge of the time delay button to incorporate Will into the photo.

At this point the community replaces the specific white father for Will, providing the sense of belonging for which he yearns. This parable is accentuated through the comparative device of Will’s own ‘fixed’ family photograph: ‘You and James look like someone sprayed you up and down with starch.’ The community’s photograph and even the curling fading nature of the family photograph suggest the rejection of confining images. Single representation is again problematised. Additionally, in becoming whole, Will is no longer propelling the narrative as a

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63 WALTON, Percy. 1990, 83.
detached loner. He is decentralised, and integrated into the community that imagines itself diversely:

Then, too, the group refused to stay in place […] I had to keep moving the camera as the group swayed from one side to the other […] I took twenty-four pictures. And each time I had to set the camera, hit the shutter delay button and run like hell. 64

This anecdote stands as a parable for Indigenous identity. The protagonist is able to find fulfilment, to be ‘smiling in that picture’65, once he accepts the limits of defining himself according to specific genetic (yet absent) connection and embraces a belonging to an undefinable (in the categorising sense) community.

The metonymic significance of Uncle Wally enacts this process in the first two Wild Cat books. Uncle Wally is the old Aboriginal tracker who cares for Wild Cat in the bush during his attempted escape from the police, and who claims kinship with the boy. Uncle Wally stands as a connection for Wild Cat with his larger Nyoongar community. For example, section three of Wild Cat Falling, entitled ‘Return’, could be interpreted as flagging the return of the Wild Cat character to prison. Chris Tiffin, however, has identified the point in which Uncle Wally provides Wild Cat with the water bag in this section as signifying the sustaining impetus of community identification.66 ‘Return’ positively indicates Wild Cat’s restoration to his community.

The song Uncle Wally gives Wild Cat and his explanation of the wild cat /

64 KING, Thomas. 1989, 214-5.
65 KING, Thomas. 1989, 216.
crow dream, which is interpellated throughout both texts, is highly significant. Wild Cat’s connection with Uncle Wally allows him to transcend the nightmarish quality of the dream. This process can be clearly seen by comparing the following two dream sequences:

[W]ildcat] is falling, falling, falling and the scream in his head starts up again and he screams and screams. And Crow is swooping beside him, seemingly urging him to fly, or is he? 67

This contrasts starkly with the sequence at the end of the text:

Old Crow comes to squawk to me. ‘You want to fly?’ he says, and I see the gloating look in his eye and I know that he ain’t going to teach me anything. I reply, ‘Yeah,’ and rise towards the moon. 68

The evocation of flight indicates Wild Cat is found, yet not fixed. For example, Wild Cat’s first affirmative expression of community is directed in general towards his fellow Nyoongah inmates. These boys and men are part of larger sense of community for Wild Cat. He resolves to bring incarcerated Nyoongahs together to learn and write, empowering himself through his own commitment to community. 69

It is also interesting to note that both Wild Cat and Will symbolically ‘find’ their communities through the emblem of ‘representation’, the song and the photograph respectively. Repeatedly in both authors’ work the act of re-presentation is both vitalised and un-cemented.

Like Wild Cat, Will also begins to take on responsibilities in his community. The letters from his father seem to function at many points as structural and thematic catalysts, but for Will they are also didactic. King has discussed the letters thus: ‘I

67 MUDROOROO. 1995, 40.
68 MUDROOROO. 1995, 141.
69 MUDROOROO. 1995, 142.
suppose in some ways the letters from the father remind him of what [Will] should do and what he must not become.’70. The father is not simply a clear reference to whiteness, as in a binary opposition, but rather insinuates the problematic of being absent from the community; imagined and silent.

It is perhaps ironic, in light of the focus on the absent father in this chapter, that King expresses Will’s growing commitment to community through the iconic significance of the baby South Wing. King has suggested that Will’s relationship with South Wing is a positive product of his negative past.71 South Wing is not actually Will’s child: she is the deliberately illegitimate daughter of the woman ambiguously positioned as Will’s girlfriend. But Will begins, with Harlen’s boisterous encouragement, to reconcile the failed responsibilities of his own father through his interaction with the baby.

This activity finds embodiment in the metaphor of children’s gifts. This metaphor of ‘gifts’ parallels Wild Cat’s emphasis on teaching his fellows in prison, or the character Alan’s commitment to leading the Nyoongah kids in *Long Live Sandawara*. ‘Gift’ is suggestive of that which you are able to give to your children. In one of the letters from the first chapter, Will’s father complains about the mail system that failed to deliver the Christmas present of the spinning top to his sons:

Boy, doesn’t the mail drive you nuts […] I’ll try to buy another one. It was a red one with those cute animals along the side. It had a nice sound, too. I’ve got some bills to pay off first, so it may have to wait a bit.72

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70 KING, Thomas quoted in Constance ROOKE. 1990, 69.
71 KING, Thomas quoted in Constance ROOKE. 1990, 69.
This letter gives a sense of the failed responsibilities of the father, and culminates with the other letters to form a picture of the father as hopelessly inept at being both a provider and support figure. The gifts Will buys re-present stages in his own personal development in relation to the absent father. The present he brings South Wing in the maternity hospital is a stuffed penguin, but more importantly he *names* the baby — South Wing — a punning echo of a hospital sign that gets mistaken for a traditional name, and sticks. South Wing’s first birthday present from Will, a traditional rattle, is also significant. It is procured, through the interference of Harlen, from Martha Oldcrow, a medicine woman who specialises in healing marriages. Martha provides a definition of fathering which clarifies the significance of the ‘gifts’:

“My [South Wing’s] father?”

“I jumped in, before Harlen got started. “I’m a friend.”

“Don’t need a friend,” said Martha. “Needs a father, that one.”

“This is Rose Horse Capture’s boy, Will […]”

“Sure, I know him. No father that one, too.”

Martha asks Will if he was at the birth and if he loves the child and mother, and then declares that Will ‘will do’. The same rattle is given to South Wing’s mother, Louise, in a similar process and the sense of unity and community input into child rearing is emphasised.

The final gift that Will gives to South Wing pertains directly to the never-received gift from his own father. In a simultaneous recovery of his own past and his responsibility for South Wing’s future, Will buys South Wing a musical top for Christmas. Will begins to lose his anxiety over South Wing’s genetic father with

73 KIng, Thomas. 1989, 40.
74 KIng, Thomas. 1989, 139.
75 KIng, Thomas. 1989, 260.
his acceptance of the interdependence of community. The plurality of coming from
many lineages to take on such roles refutes formulaic identity and asserts the
interdependence of community. The recuperative gestures Will makes towards the
role of father are part of his movement into the community, through the taking on of
community responsibilities. There is a deliberate shift from individual angst and
absence through the focus of the missing white father, to taking on the role of father
for many within the community, in order to support and heal.

(v) Questing and Multiplicity: evading the stereotype and reimaging loss

But before this positive affirmation of community can take place, the
community must first be located through experimentation. King’s and Mudrooroo’s
characters continually enact an almost Bhabhaian mimicry of roles situated outside
stereotypical ‘Native’ experience. Bhabha’s theories evoke the importance
of ambivalence. Both authors prioritise the expediency of negotiating an amalgam
of identity over prescriptive negation of identities produced because of imperial
mythologies. Plurality is the key device. Like Bhabha’s critical writings, King’s
and Mudrooroo’s fictions re-present identity as being apparent and empowered — yet
at the same time — amorphous. It is a presentation that cannot become representative
because it is non-static and continually rehearsed.

The experiment with different locales and identifications also involves
elements of the quest motif in the works of both authors. The concept of the quest
implies manifold tensions since it eschews the idea of a destination. According to
one interpretation, a ‘quest’ can connote a motivation for the formulation of authentic
identity as a grail to be discovered or uncovered. This notion is one that must be

77 BHABHA, Homi. The commitment to theory. New Formations. 5, Summer 1988, 8.
treated carefully as it has caused some furore in Australian Indigenous literary circles. Jackie Huggins’s rejection of Sally Morgan’s almost detective-like ‘solving’ of the mystery of her identity in *My Place* is a case in point. Because of this I would argue that the notion of the ‘quest’ is more an entry into, rather than a conclusion of, the analysis of loss and role-playing. This is because for King and Mudrooroo the ‘quest’ becomes a non-teleological process, it is the ‘quest’ itself ‘that matters’.

Thus alienation and positive identification are not only connected with the father-figure, but also with an experimentation upon varied roles and the ‘quest’ for identity. The contemporary male characters are continually (and almost self-consciously) moving towards a sense of self that can never be finally realised. As a consequence, the theme of role-playing is dominant in both King’s and Mudrooroo’s novels. The role-playing theme obviously speaks into conceptions of representation, each play only ever being one of many re-presentations.

Some of the most obvious cases of role-playing in Mudrooroo’s texts exist in *Long Live Sandawara*. The character of Alan is continually referred to as playing the role of political leader, specifically the ‘new’ Sandawara. Alan takes this enaction so far as to attempt to change the names of his entourage to match those from Sandawara’s historical band of outlaws:

‘I’ve decided we should drop our white fellow names and have Nungar names […] From now on I’ll be known as Sandawara. I’ve told you about him and his men and women. His struggle is now our struggle.’

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78 HUGGINS, Jackie. Always was, always will be. *Australian Historical Studies*. 25(100), April 1993, 459-464.


80 MUDROOROO. 1987b, 117.
The renamed members of the crash pad, shifting in time and history, are also presented as performing one-dimensional roles. All of the ‘kids’ have one main identifying feature that characterises them. Tom is the drunk, Alan is the leader, Sue is the supporter, Greg is the muscle-man, Rob is the chef, and Rita is the sex-mad lover. These singular ‘types’ become transgressive through a mosaic-like interpellation of multiple varieties and the morphic power of revisionary history. By ‘transgression’ I mean that, despite the simplified nature of the characters, the multiplicity of types moves the re-presentation beyond non-Indigenous assumptions about identity. There are many interpretations of existence here, none of which are fixed, all of which are continuous.

The same effect occurs with the more rounded presentation of the protagonist of *Wild Cat Falling* and his experiments with a number of different roles and societal locations. The concept of ‘acting’ is most evident in the intertextual inclusion of Becket’s *Waiting for Godot* in this novel. The choice of Beckett as a playwright is an interesting one. His plays reflect life as being absurd to the point of meaninglessness. The inclusion of this play, therefore, simultaneously reinforces the themes of isolation and of ‘acting’. The ‘Wild Cat’ character acts out many roles in *Wild Cat Falling*. He investigates several modes of living including university life, fringe existence and life behind prison bars. He caricatures these existences in response to society’s own stereotyping of him.81 He is a drunkard, a ‘bodgie’,82 a hardened criminal, an intellectual, a psychoanalyst, and an art critic:

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82 Bodgie is Australian slang for a male member of a particular youth cult. It was a frequently used term in the late 1950s. See: Probert Encyclopaedia. URL: http://www.probertencyclopaedia.com/ZB.HTM (20 March 2002).
I think he’s telling someone the bull I put over in the coffee shop. Phoney stuff but this mob will swallow anything […] give it a name and they can fake they’ve put it in its place, put it back where it belongs.  

The protagonist’s trialing of a number of different roles and positions, is, then, part of his hostility to frozen western classifications. His rejection of the court’s attempt to stereotype youth reflects this hostility:

“Do you call yourself a bodgie?”

I try to find an answer to that one.

“Do you?”

“No […] Sir.”

“What do you call yourself?”

“A progressive dresser, I guess, Sir.”

The many garments that Wild Cat dons re-present the refutation of a fixed identity. He dresses variously in prison uniform and in the suit that institution gives on his release, as a black bodgie, a beatnik, and a fringe-dweller.

The same effect occurs through a different process in King’s texts. The theme of different costumes is present in a literal sense. In *Green Grass, Running Water* and *Medicine River*, the desire for acceptance is expressed through the wearing of various jackets. For example, David Plume aggravates the local Medicine River Reservation community by continually wearing a red nylon club jacket, with the letters AIM (for ‘American Indian Movement’) plastered across the back. Harlen identifies the limiting consequences of David’s obsession with ‘Wounded Knee’ as defining his own and others’ ‘Indianness’. At the other end of the spectrum, the

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83 MUDROOROO. 1965, 89.
84 MUDROOROO. 1965, 103.
character Lionel in *Green Grass, Running Water* has jackets, which symbolise his association with the dominant culture, but without a true sense of himself. For example, the jacket he wears for his job as a television salesman is a thinning, fading gold blazer — emblematic of capitalistic consumerism. Both jackets — the red and the gold — are confining because of the boundaries they imply, not because of any relationship with authenticity. At other points in *Medicine River* the iconic significance of clothing reappears. The dispute between the tie and suit-wearing Big John, and the choker and fringe-shirt wearing Eddie, over what constructs a ‘real Indian’ is portrayed by King as being destructive.  

Clothing provides an important means of discussing the ways in which self-images and stereotypes are presented. The clothing gift the four Indians give Lionel — another jacket — provides a complex didactic response to Lionel’s desire to erase his Indigeneity. It is a cowboy style garment, reflecting the fact that by ‘the time Lionel was six, he knew what he wanted to be. John Wayne.’ Lionel is given the same John Wayne jacket that his sister’s white ex-husband had worn, graphically exhibiting the destructiveness of this desire. This is the jacket that was worn during a domestic violence episode between Latisha and her ex-husband, George:  

> [George] still had on the jacket. Latisha hadn’t even seen it coming. George turned the television off, got out of the chair as if he was getting up to get a cup of coffee, grabbed Latisha by her dress, and slammed her against the wall. And before she realized what was happening, he was hitting her as hard as he could, beating her until she fell.  

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87 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 263.  
Lionel comes to a gradual realisation of the inappropriateness and destructiveness of the ‘John Wayne desire’ through the metaphor of this same jacket. First he realises that the coat offers no protection from the cold; then that it is too tight and restrictive — both of which are symbolic of colonising effects of western culture on Indigenous culture. Lionel’s return of the jacket to George parallels a significant shift in his attitude to the community:

Lionel slipped out of the jacket and handed it to George. George snapped the lid on the case and smiled at Latisha. [...] 

“Go away George,” said Latisha. “Just go away.”

“You’re a joke!” George’s lips were wet with spit. “You all act like this is important, like it’s going to change your lives. Christ, you guys are born stupid and you die stupid.”

Lionel picked up the case and set it on its feet. “There’s nothing for you here.”

The jacket is removed to protect his sister and to prevent George from contravening the Blackfoot law prohibiting photographing the Sun Dance. Lionel, for the first time, actively engages in a rejection of the assumptions of Indian stupidity.

Interestingly, his shift into a more comfortable ‘role’ in his community is not allowed to take on the simplistic form of his desire for the John Wayne persona. Lionel assumes that he can move into his Uncle Eli’s hut, after it is rebuilt. But he cannot simply occupy a hut, in the same way that he occupied the John Wayne jacket. It is Lionel’s aunt Norma who corrects him. She does not allow him to formulaically mirror or replicate his uncle; instead there are cycles to move through:

89 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 426-27.
“You know, like Eli. Maybe that’s what I’ll do.”

“Not your turn,” said Norma.

“It’s my turn. Your turn will come soon enough.”

Loss cannot be finally resolved by simply adorning or living within a neat symbol of idealised or traditional identity. A complicated notion of identity is evoked. Thus, it is also important to emphasise that the occupying of locales within the dominant culture do not mutually exclude a First Nations identity in either authors’ writings. The belief that an Indigenous identity cannot coexist with the professional interaction with society is part of the internalised racism of the lost men. The refutation of this assumption is vital and is demonstrated by interaction between the dam manager, Sifton, and Eli, Lionel’s uncle:

“[…] you guys aren’t real Indians anyway. I mean you drive cars, watch television, go to hockey games. Look at you. You’re a university professor.”

“That’s my profession. Being Indian isn’t a profession.”

The fact that all the characters in the book maintain a wide range of professional existences exhibits a positive multiplicity that is similarly present in Mudrooroo’s work.

This technique of multiplicity escapes a representation of static identity, and as a consequence becomes a political strategy countering the negative stereotyping of Indigenous peoples. It is also a wider claim about the nature of the power divisions, as both writings enforce the idea that the entire material world is not the exclusive preserve of the non-Indigenous community in the twenty first century. As was noted in the second chapter of this dissertation, Mudrooroo and King position their writings

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90 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 464.
91 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 155.
in a direct relationship to such images of the indigene as merely spiritual. Damm has stressed the importance of avoiding ‘solitary labels’ precisely because of the issue of the negative discourses which can and do inform them.92 Mudrooroo has also discussed the importance of images of Indigenous people in his theoretical writing:

It is not so much the stereotype that is upsetting; but the ownership, the appropriation of that stereotype and the political use that is made of it […]. It depends on whether we have the power to select our stereotype, as a source of empowerment, rather than of negativity and division […]. All singular, totalistic representations of the Aboriginal […] are suspect. 93

King agrees, suggesting that the ‘whole idea of “Indian” becomes, in part, a construct. It’s fluid. We make it up as we go along.’94 Like the reinterpretation of imperial literature, and of Gothicism and Christianity discussed earlier in this thesis, the characterisation of questing causes dissonance within particular discourses and assumptions about Indigenous peoples. Both authors expose that all representations of identity are a construct and avoid a singular definition.

Furthermore, both authors use narrative techniques that implicate white readers and their baggage of assumptions. These assumptions have been clearly demarcated by many critics. For example, Goldie puts it most succinctly in his major work *Fear and Temptation*, where he states that the ‘commodities — sex, violence, orality, mysticism, the pre-historic — can be seen as part of the circular economy within and without the semiotic field of the indigene’. 95

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95 GOLDIE, Terry. 1989, 17.
Damm adds the ascription of drunkenness, laziness and promiscuity to this negative and narrow catalogue of racist stereotypes. The narrative allusion to these assumptions, I believe, operates to specifically integrate the non-Indigenous reader. Both King and Mudrooroo highlight previous racist discourses of that reader’s culture and also the possible imaginings a non-Indigenous reader might hold about the novels themselves. In other words, neither author allows their work to re-present a new ‘authenticity’ in opposition to the stereotypes they expose. The point is this: stereotypes such as violence are present in Mudrooroo’s and King’s texts but they are provided with a significant context and, as such, allow for reception of the critique of white society and resistance. For example, in Wild Cat Falling, the protagonist’s own act of violence — the injuring of the policeman at the novel’s close — is presented as the cumulative effect of his own brutalisation in the Christian boys’ home and his fear of prison. This act of violence is followed by remorse, and in Wild Cat Screaming it is depicted as part of an oppressive cycle of violence:

I shot a copper […] They don’t like it, witness my broken arm. They done that after the kicking I got. This big copper takes out his baton real slow and real deliberate.

This technique is evoked in a more complex manner in Long Live Sandawara. The impact of the simplified character-types is reinforced by the fact that all of them are continually reflected in the mirror sunglasses of the mad white man, Ron. Ron’s one moment of clarity at the end of the novel is described below:

Something, he feels, has happened, something terrible like the last few pages

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98 MUDROOROO. 1995, 6.
of a good story flickering to a tragic end and the sudden awareness of the reader that he will be alone again.\textsuperscript{99}

Thus, Ron signifies the white reader of the text. He is perverted and traitorous, responsible for major turns in the plot, betraying the kids twice, because of his own assumptions. It is Ron’s mirrored sunglasses, his ‘eyes’, which reflect the other characters, but never truly interact with them. He categorises and typecasts the kids, and is ultimately responsible for their deaths because he ‘dobs’ them in to the police as being true criminals when they are actually only playing superficial roles of criminality.

A more humorous, yet equally incisive depiction of readers’ assumptions occurs in \textit{Medicine River}. King, too, contextualises and inverts expectations concerning violence. This occurs via the existence of two competing narratives of the same event, a newspaper article and Harlen’s community grapevine.\textsuperscript{100} As reported in the newspaper, argument between David Plume and Ray Little Buffalo results in David shooting Ray. In many ways, Will stands as the literary embodiment of the influence and acceptance of stereotypes.\textsuperscript{101} In this case, as in others, Harlen operates to correct Will and to invert these expectations, ‘Ray wasn’t shot. The papers sort of got that mixed up […] Ray tried to get out of the way, but he slipped and fell on the bottle.’\textsuperscript{102} This pattern is repeated when Will is fooled by one of Floyd’s stories, and his own presuppositions, into believing that Harlen is on an alcoholic binge, when he is actually in bed with the flu.\textsuperscript{103} Walton has argued that this novel is meta-discursive; that ‘rather than trying to refer to “reality” outside of language, it refers to a discourse

\textsuperscript{99} MUDROOROO. 1987b, 167.
\textsuperscript{100} WALTON, Percy. 1990, 79.
\textsuperscript{101} WALTON, Percy. 1990, 79.
\textsuperscript{102} KING, Thomas. 1989, 254.
\textsuperscript{103} WALTON, Percy. 1990, 80.
constructed about the native.\textsuperscript{104} This concept is central to my dissertation. Both authors are consciously constructing a discourse about the constructedness of the semiotic field of the indigene. In so doing they do not suggest a ‘new authentic’, instead they suggest its impossibility.

My naming of the protagonists as ‘lost men’ is deliberate. The authors’ construction of lost-ness becomes ambivalent as these various stories progress. While textual affirmations of cultural identity and vital refutations of stereotypes and racist discourses exist, the ‘lost men’ do not necessarily become found. The texts remain open-ended. As stated above, Will walks off into the snow, leaving no trace; Lionel misunderstands his place, falsely assuming occupation of the hut; Wild Cat returns to prison; Alan leads his entire group of friends into a bloody ambush in the foiled bank robbery.\textsuperscript{105} There is no happy resolution. King has said of his writing that there is no clear-cut moral, he states:

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\ldots \text{there are writers, like Dickens, who take these wonderful things and just run them out in this direction} \ldots \text{where the character grows up and matures and learns about everything. With me} \ldots \text{it’s sort of that people just stand in the same spot with one foot nailed to the floor, walking round in circles.}\textsuperscript{106}
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In this light it is the attempt at balance that becomes important.\textsuperscript{107} The abdication of moral absolutes is exhibited in Mudrooroo’s texts also. Wild Cat’s nihilism could be interpreted through a vision of balance over resolution; as the character confides,

\textsuperscript{104} WALTON, Percy. 1990, 78.
\textsuperscript{105} These references concern the ends of Medicine River, Green Grass, Running Water, Wild Cat Falling, and Long Live Sandawara respectively. They are only touched on briefly here to avoid repetition.
\textsuperscript{107} KING, Thomas quoted in Jace WEAVER. Thomas King. Publisher’s Weekly. 240(10), 8 March 1993, 56.
‘Now I know that hope and despair are equally absurd.’\(^{108}\) This view is supported by Mudrooroo’s own critical definition of the almost post-modern quality of Aboriginal writings, ‘with the truth coming from the clash of discourses rather than as a thing-in-itself to be uncovered.’\(^{109}\) So, through the exhibition of ambiguity, the authors are able to transgress the grail and revel in the quest itself.\(^{110}\) In summary, the characters do not completely resolve their identities because that would require essentialist stagnation. Lost-ness is almost embraced, in that the characters cannot be ‘found’ and pinned down by the white reader. As King has said:

> I want to make sure that people understand that Eli and Charlie and Lionel and Portland are all Native people doing various things with their lives. I wanted to emphasize that the range of “Indian” is not as narrow as many people try to make it.\(^{111}\)

Male angst and loss become empowering, and are not simply in and of themselves. As I have shown, alienation and loss can result directly from colonisation. But an atmosphere of loss can be transformed into an assertion of fluidity through the celebratory expression of multiplicity. The authors’ writings can be seen as an attempt to resolve the conundrum Margery Fee has described as the tension between the knowledge of race as a construct and the inability to abandon it.\(^{112}\)

\((vi)\text{Positioning the woman}\)

The focus on masculine identities by both King and Mudrooroo raises the question of whether this male angst is privileged at the expense of female subjectivity

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\(^{108}\) MUDROOROO. 1965, 41. 
\(^{109}\) MUDROOROO. 1997, 62. 
\(^{110}\) Bhabha’s notion of ambiguity comes into play here, movement between the one and the other means neither discourse is privileged. 
\(^{111}\) KING, Thomas quoted in Jeffrey CANTON. Thomas King with Jeffrey Canton, an interview. \textit{Paragraph}. 16(1), Summer 1994, 3. 
\(^{112}\) FEE, Margery. What use is ethnicity to Aboriginal peoples in Canada? \textit{Canadian Review of Comparative Literature}. 22(3-4), Sep / Dec 1995, 683.
in their work. The patriarchal language of identity and nation is deconstructed, by King and Mudrooroo, using its own terms. Their challenge to the image of the indigene necessarily includes woman, even though this inclusion is implicit. Put another way, not everyone can be prioritised; the question is: in the work of both authors, why is it that female characters are so often overshadowed? In very different ways, Mudrooroo and King situate women as a stable point (one which is either strong or weak, idealised or misogynist) around which the authors orient their own fluid conceptions of identity. This unfortunately echoes the classic structuralist positioning which feminism seeks to challenge. The fact that King and Mudrooroo reproduce this position is not necessarily a problem in relation to the arguments posed by this thesis, but it is important to identify this positioning at this point.

Feminist arguments which focus upon Mudrooroo as a misogynist writer are potent because of the relationship his writing has had with the colonising concepts of the Indigenous woman. Barbara Godard has identified a three-sided notion of the figure of female indigene in the English language literature of Canada, and similar colonising perspectives of that figure exist in Australian writing. This tryptich is paradoxical because its constituent elements are incongruous. The dominant representations of Indigenous women in the colonial period and beyond include the mother-goddess figure: ‘full-bodied, powerful, nurturing, but dangerous — embodying the wealth and danger of the New World’; the Princess; and the ‘squaw’, or ‘gin’ or ‘lubra’ in an Australian context.113 This last, more sexualised depiction

evokes seduction and promiscuity, ‘a despised conquest of colonisation’.¹¹⁴

Mudrooroo’s depiction of sex parallels some of these images because of the way it is heavily interpolated with violence. The author’s application of the rape motif is extremely problematic. Although the presence of a spectre of rape is not inappropriate in a novel about first contact, where rape reflects the actual historical events, Mudrooroo tends to use this image more metaphorically. Critics such as Lyndall Ryan have highlighted the silencing effect rape as a metaphor has upon women’s agency, speaking over the top of their own personally and communally painful memories.¹¹⁵ For example, in Doctor Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World the rape of Truggerninni by a group of white soldiers is an expression of the brute force of colonisation:

His wife and children huddled in terror at his side, but the good Doctor Wooreddy donned his cloak of numbness and observed the scene with all the detachment of a scientist.

On the soft, wet beach-sand a naked brown-skinned woman was being assaulted by four ghosts. One held both of her arms over her head causing her breasts to jut into the low lying clouds; two more each clung to a powerful leg, and the fourth thudded away in the vee. Wooreddy could only see the cropped head of the woman and not her face.¹¹⁶

This scene, with its idealised references to the female body, and the sensuous landscape in which it is set, fixes the woman within an objectifying gaze. In fact, it is

Canadian playwright, Tomson Highway, has also been criticised by Native and non-Native women for using rape as a literary device, see: Alan FILEWOD. 1994, 369.
almost a pornographic, and certainly a vividly horrific depiction. This silencing and sexist depiction of Truggerninni is repeated later in the novel with the suggestion that she either appreciates the attention of, or is apathetic towards, the whalers who would ‘take her off somewhere. At first she had found it flattering, but now it was just one of those things.’

Mudrooroo also tends to silence women’s voices in his writing set in more contemporary periods. In *Wild Cat Falling* the female body becomes part of a metaphor, but this time it is concerned with the vulnerability of the protagonist.

The narrator’s hatred of female corporeality does express the depths of alienation and internal colonisation of the protagonist, but it is also objectifying women. The Wild Cat character in *Wild Cat Falling* sees many of his sexual interactions through power relations and without love. He even goes so far as to make an analogy between his sexual act and rape because he wishes to become, ‘unmoved by everything — like a god.’

However, this desire for numbness and power, a repeated theme in Mudrooroo's work, is primarily a sexualisation and objectification of women in order to outline the effects of betrayal and abuse the protagonist experiences.

Another example of the tension caused by negative, sexist representations of women lies in the frequently simplified and highly sexualised nature of Mudrooroo's female characters. The only two Aboriginal women in *Wild Cat Falling* are Wild Cat’s mother, and the woman he meets on the Austral Grove mission. His mother is seen as an object of child-love, but there is always the strong undercurrent of sexual objectification:

“Mind the horse,” [Mr Willy] says, “while I have a word with your mum.”

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117 MUDROOROO. 1987a, 32.
118 TIFFIN, Chris. 1985, 164.
119 MUDROOROO. 1965, 59.
It is a long word [...] At last Mr Willy comes out alone. He has a satisfied look [...]  

The representation of the woman on the mission is more blatant, evoking images of drunkenness and overt sexuality. In response to the simplistic questions of the sociology students he encounters in the university cafe, the Wild Cat character's memories revert to his mission experiences. These are far more complex than the students could ever appreciate; it is surprising then, that the portrayal of the Aboriginal female character in that environment is so one-sided. Such female caricatures seem to form a repeated pattern, most dramatically in the depiction of the women in *Long Live Sandawara*. Rita is imagined in absurdly nymphomaniac style. The two young girls and even Sue, the dedicated political follower and campaigner, are continually eyeing off and desiring their men. These are moments in which the productive movement in Mudrooroo’s story focuses on women who are both the objects and the initiators of male desire.

It might be possible to justify these portrayals according to the standards of graphic realism. However, it cannot be denied that such unidimensional images also seem to reflect imperialist mythologies concerning the ‘promiscuity’ of Aboriginal women from the time of invasion. Such discourses operated to justify colonisation and blamed the victims for the genocidal effects of sexually transmitted diseases. The undeniable presence of matriarchal structures in contemporary and historical Aboriginal society calls into question such negative and limited portrayals of women. Anne Brewster, amongst others, has used the oral testimony of Nyoongah women to

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120 MUDROOROO. 1965, 33.
121 MUDROOROO. 1965, 74.
122 GRIMSHAW, Patricia and Andrew MAY. “Inducements to the strong to be cruel to the weak”: Authorative white colonial male voices and the construction of gender in Koori society. In: Norma
underline the central place of women in contemporary Aboriginal communities. This occurs to such an extent that resistance and empowerment are perceived through a concept of the family as community, redefining the family in a Black feminist context. Mudrooroo is clearly, then, not writing realism in his portrayal of women.

In the context of this strength and leadership of women in Aboriginal communities, Mudrooroo's uni-dimensional depictions may operate as a signifier of the male protagonist’s own lost-ness and alienation rather than simply a use of grunge realism as representative of femininity. In addition, Mudrooroo is often dealing with locales, such as the prison environment, from which women are denied access. One of his few contemporary set novels, which does not deal with the space of the prison, is *Long Live Sandawara*. Here the women characters are, as said above, leaders and initiators in their communities, even if this is often in a sexual context. This position is supported by the fact that both Wooreddy and the Wild Cat character have in common a desire to be numb in response to the oppression that surrounds them. It is vital not to underplay the problematics of sexism in Mudrooroo's novels, hence my prior discussion of this issue. But on another level the significance of the depiction of female characters, for the purposes of this thesis, lies in the fact that these female characterisations provide a contrast of stability to the unossified depiction of the male characters. Mudrooroo’s female characters simply do not suffer the same loss, nor are they invested with the same level of multiple meanings, personalities and angst as his male characters.

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To return to the work of Thomas King, the author's treatment of women appears to be more balanced than that of Mudrooroo. King’s female characters are not reduced to sexualised depictions nor are they idealised à la Pochahontas. His women are strong and assertive, holding professional and leadership positions within both the dominant culture and within the reserve community. In *Medicine River*, Louise is an accountant; Bertha runs the friendship centre and Martha Oldcrow is the community councillor and medicine woman. In *Green Grass, Running Water* Alberta is a university lecturer, Latisha owns a restaurant and Norma is a community elder. King is very aware of depicting women within a positive framework:

> My sense is that within society as a whole, men are simply more privileged and with that privilege comes a certain laziness. The women in my books don’t take things for granted. They work pretty hard to get what they want and have to make specific decisions to make their lives come together.\(^\text{125}\)

In the same interview, King refers to his playful manipulation of the apparent border between men and women. Notably, the four Indians in *Green Grass, Running Water* are perceived as both men and women by various characters in the novel. They are, in a sense, dressing up in the same way that they dress up as the Lone Ranger; Robinson Crusoe; Hawkeye; and Ishmael.\(^\text{126}\) Their varied role plays operate to disrupt the twin hegemonic discourses of imperialism and patriarchy.

Despite all of this positivity, there is still a sense that King’s women, unlike his men, remain fixed. They are always strong and empowered, knowledgeable and


\(^{125}\) KING, Thomas quoted in Jeffrey CANTON. 1994, 4.

\(^{126}\) For more on the place of androgeny in this novel see: Linda LAMONT-STEWART. Androgeny as resistance to authoritarianism in two postmodern Canadian novels. *Mosaic: A Journal For the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*. 30(3), September 1997, 115-130.
certain; and are often single mothers, rejecting marriage but nearly always desiring motherhood. Nevertheless, there is a problem with this approach. It is almost as if in evoking the binary opposite of misogyny King idealises his female characters out of the narrative. At no point is there a sense of female angst. Latisha was a victim of domestic violence and expresses a certain fatigue with the experience of single motherhood; but this does not result in a form of characterisation that explores uncertain, disillusioned or anxious female subjectivity. Alberta is divorced and has difficulties with teaching Native history to unreceptive white students; again, the potential for exploring this question in depth is left untouched by the author.

King draws distinct polarities between male loss and fluid identity-construction and female assuredness. Themes of femininity are repeated — most obviously the desire for children without marriage — but this assertion also limits the woman to a single form of reinforced behaviour, which operates primarily as confusion to the men and their ideas of patriarchal society. In other words, the female characters throughout King's novels, in repeating similar forms of anti-male freedom, are defined by their anti-male (or at least superior to male) experience, rather than their own multiple and varied female experience. For example, both Alberta in *Green Grass, Running Water*, and Louise in *Medicine River* evince the desire for children without marriage, and both of their anti-patriarchal stances work to cause some of the confusion and ambiguity for Lionel and Will, respectively. Both men respond with the assumption that the woman's choice concerns the selection of another man, Henry for Will and Charlie for Lionel:

“So,” Lionel said, “I guess you’re going with Charlie.”

Norma stopped what she was doing and hit Lionel on the shoulder with the stick. “Why would she do something like that?”
Latisha shook her head and laughed. “Why on earth would she do something like that?”

“Why would I do something like that?” said Alberta […]

“You sure got a way with women, cousin,” said Charlie.¹²⁷

This is not a problem *per se*. Rather this repeated motif limits depictions of women by their very uniformity, positive as it may be. In both texts, it is intimated that it is men who need marriage as another means of finding themselves, while women already know who they are. King’s assertions of variety are made primarily through male examples.

All this being said, it is true that both authors, in different ways, attempt to empower Indigenous femininity. In King’s case the androgyny of the four Indians in *Green Grass, Running Water* can be seen as destabilising western patriarchy.¹²⁸ In Mudrooroo’s case the depiction of Ludjee as an equal on the maban dreaming plane in the *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* series fairly re-presents the function of women as being of cultural and necessary significance. The most significant point for the purposes of this dissertation is that Mudrooroo’s overuse of sexualised depictions, like feminine assertiveness, and independence of King’s characters, stands as an inscription of sameness around which male multiplicity orbits.

The thematic presence of being lost is highlighted in the texts of King and Mudrooroo. Both authors are simultaneously attempting to escape discourses of the ‘authentic’. To this end the authors self-consciously highlight the ‘textuality’ of their work. They shift the specificities of parentage and place into a more decentralised,
communitarian and symbolic approach to identity. Multiple roles are played out in the depiction of loss, refuting stereotypes and flooding the issue of identification with plurality and possibilities. Ambiguity and the quest motif culminate to express variegated identity and the destruction of stereotypes. ‘Loss’ becomes a dual motif; expressing on the one hand the negative effects of colonisation, and on the other, the positive eliding of fixed identity. However, this occurs at a cost to feminine images. This negative attribute occurs in very different ways in King’s and Mudrooroo’s texts. In both cases, however, the problematic depiction of women is a result of a complex enterprise in which both authors are involved, to re-present, without becoming representative. The next chapter will be concerned with the endeavour of both authors to assertively create and to theorise a positive Indigenous presence within this polemical framework.
Chapter Five

Trickster’s Role

In the previous chapter I discussed the refutation of cemented contemporary identity in the works of Thomas King and Mudrooroo. This chapter, continuing the dissertation’s focus on meta-discursive acts of re-presentation, examines the ways in which King and Mudrooroo transform the tradition of the trickster story to structurally and thematically question the relationship between re-presentation and representativeness. The writings of both King and Mudrooroo interrelate with and can even be interpreted as trickster stories. The deployment of elements of the trickster story-telling tradition in the contemporary novel evokes a sense of present and continuing culture, and also embraces, in terms of representation, a deliberately incoherent and non-archetypal figure. Theoretically, this chapter also examines contemporary concepts of ‘trickster discourse’, particularly the work of Gerald Vizenor and the notions that he explores of chance, ambiguity and multiple inscriptions in texts.

Beyond this investigation, there is another important element which is suggested when one looks at the *oeuvre* of both authors. This element can be described as the ‘inter’ or even ‘supra’-textual movement of the writings within each author’s collective output. In other words, the ways in which the books speak to each other and how each work moves as a whole suggest a structural rejection of ‘progression’ (and even of sequence) towards a set narrative outcome. In the course of their careers, King and Mudrooroo have not simply ‘built upon’ previous works; even where subsequent novels are advertised as being part of a related family of
publications. Rather, there is a far more sophisticated relationship between all of their titles when viewed *in toto*: an intertextuality that elides progression and sequence through an expression of time as fragmented and circular. This expression of time is actually made possible through King’s and Mudrooroo’s very different uses of ‘trickster discourse’ which allows for a repeated, spiral-like literary creation through the multi-dimensional thematic and structural elements.¹ This creates an abrogation of any sense of closure. Indigeneity is simultaneously presented as having a continuing (as well as continuous) voice and a rehearsed yet undefined voice through the authors’ struggles to embody elements of ‘traditional’ orality within written text.

(i) *The tradition of the trickster*

Despite significant cultural differences, this thesis defines the trickster according to some shared common traits, including disruption, creation, subversion and ambiguity. In North America the animalian embodiments of the trickster are varied, for example the coyote, fox, raven, mink or rabbit.² The same variation is true across the Australasian continent. One key example of a recorded trickster story is the lengthy tale of the ‘Mischievous Crow’ collected by David Unaipon from tribal groups in South Australia in the early 1900s. In this tale Crow is repeatedly thwarted in his attempts at mischief. His ‘trickery’ and disruption invariably result in outcomes of creation as well as stability — such as the nesting habits of pelicans and the formation of adders’ fangs.³ Thus, while Crow repeatedly attempts to bring about

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³ This tale is told in a very simplistic manner and with undercurrents of western binarised thinking in RAMSAY-SMITH, William. *Myths and Legends of the Aborigines*. Twickenham, Middlesex: Senate, 1998, 120-147. (First published 1930). It has been more recently published under the original author’s
destruction and chaos, order is the result of his misdeeds in that he is responsible for
the physical and social structure of much of the natural world. The original
manuscript of this story exhibits many inconsistencies in time — the past and present
tense intermingles throughout — as well as other ambiguities. As an instance of the
ambiguities, the tale is a classic evocation of opposing characteristics residing in the
one mythical figure. For example, Crow is referred to simultaneously as ‘sleeping the
sleep of the just’ and as being ‘the evil one’.  

Like the ambiguous and deliberately contradictory image of any singular
trickster, variations and contradictions between regions complicate any attempt to
arrive at a unified definition of the trickster figure. Studies into the role and function
of the trickster have been debated widely over the last one hundred years or more. In
fact the representation of the trickster figure by non-Indigenous commentators has
been part of the colonising mis-representation of elements of Indigenous culture in
Australia and Canada. And, in many ways, both King and Mudrooroo are not only
drawing on their personal experience and readings, but are also using the
contradictory form of the trickster itself to disrupt an academic attitude to the trickster
figure. Despite the fact that the trickster is and was a part of story-telling traditions,
his/her was studied within anthropology as a cultural artefact, not a living literary
tradition. The trickster was initially seen by anthropologists as a signifier of
primitiveness in a supposed evolution of cultural development, or even as a problem
to be solved because of its dual heroic and disruptive status. Such ambiguity within
the one figure left many western academics, accustomed to cultural binaries,
flummoxed. Mudrooroo’s novel *Doctor Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* clearly satirises such anthropological assumptions through the eponymous character’s study of the inferior white race of ‘num’ or ghosts. In King’s *Truth and Bright Water* Monroe Swimmer destabilises museum-style attitudes to Indigenous culture by literally repainting the canvas of art depicting first contact and restoring cultural Indigenous human remains to the land, having taken them from museums where they were stored. This is an allusion to the Native American Graves Repatriation Act, which requires museums to return identifiable remains to the descendants for proper burial.

It is only recently that studies have embraced the ambiguity of the trickster figure in terms of the worldview from which the trickster actually comes. From this perspective the ambiguous elements of trickster figures can be seen as their very propellents. For example William Doty and William Hynes have researched the notion of ‘serious play’. They argue that humour in trickster tales should not be disregarded as a separate oddity but as an integral element in their formation, as is their very undefinability. Despite definitional problems and, while acknowledging the problems with universalising concepts of the trickster, the trickster’s qualities draw on common ground. As Barbara Babcock-Abraham puts it:

As Trickster travels through the world, develops self, and creates for mankind haphazardly, by chance, by trial and error without advance planning, he

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reenacts the process that is central both to perception and creation, to the constant human activity of making guesses and modifying them in light of experience — the process of schema and correction.10

Kimberly Christian agrees with Babcock-Abraham’s definition, focusing on the ‘unpredictability’, ‘liminality’ and ‘messiness’ as common traits of the trickster.11 As Christian says, duality is the key:

[... ] obscene and powerful, jester and culture hero; their roles are never easily defined. They personify the ability to be both respected and condemned by society.12

If cajoler and hero were the roles of the traditional trickster, or perhaps it is more accurate to say the ‘tribal’ trickster, how is this role re-enacted in the very different written forms of Mudrooroo and King?

I would argue that Mudrooroo’s and King’s similar textual re-presentation of identity involves many of the above factors. Their use of trickster allows them to utilise the ‘double speak’ that this figure embodies. The writing is both obscene and jesting, and it is certainly in a continual process of ‘schema and correction’. This is despite the fact that a literary trickster may be quite unlike any notion of the tribal trickster. In fact, it is not possible to completely copy these tribal tricksters.13 Yet, as some critics note, a written, contemporary use of the trickster can be considered to be

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12 CHRISTEN, Kimberly A., ed. 1998, xii.
13 Shanley identifies a predilection to view a central ‘trope of written literatures’ as existing in opposition to orality. She emphasises the importance of not assuming that the tribal trickster can be relayed in the written form without transformation. This is despite her praising King’s attempt in SHANLEY, Kathryn. Talking to the animals and taking out the trash. *Wicazo Sa Review*. 14(2), Fall 1999, 35.
an attempt to draw in tribal elements in order to embody a living, recuperated culture; the act of bringing history into the now (including a history of colonisation).\textsuperscript{14}

\textit{(ii) Bringing the trickster into a timeless now}

Non-Indigenous texts, both past and present, position the tribal as historical.\textsuperscript{15} The notion that the trickster motif can counter this and bring the tribal into the now within text is not new. Gerald Vizenor has been discussing the subversive and creative potential of what he terms ‘trickster discourse’ for many years, and it is clear that both Thomas King and Mudrooroo are aware of his work. Apart from the more obvious stylistic nuances discussed below, which lend themselves to a reading through this theoretical strategy, there are other clues that indicate both authors’ interaction with Vizenor’s work. Mudrooroo prefaces the third novel in his ‘Master of the Ghost Dreaming’ series with a quote from Vizenor himself:

\begin{quote}
We danced roundabout […] dressed in our academic sashes with all the animals and ghosts under the redwood trees […] The fogdogs laughed and barked from the rim.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

This quote, itself highly enigmatic, seems to denote a kind of trickster role for the author himself — of the textual, ‘academic’ act of reading and writing blending with the signifiers of mythical tradition. The quotation from the prefacing comment to the prequel of this text is ‘No reality where none intended’.\textsuperscript{17} Juxtaposition of these two statements suggests that Mudrooroo perceives the act of writing as a kind of trickery, a confounding of expectations and a creating of a world upside down. For his part,

\textsuperscript{14} SHANLEY, Kathryn. 1999, 35.

\textsuperscript{15} For example, Terry Goldie has pointed out that Early European ‘explorers’ felt themselves to be travellers not only across distance but back in time. He terms this predilection in anthropology and literature the ‘denial of the coeval’. In: Terry GOLDIE. \textit{Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian and New Zealand Literature.} Kingston, Ontario: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989, 164-165.

\textsuperscript{16} MUDROOROO. \textit{Underground.} Pymble, NSW: Angus and Robertson, 1999, preface.

\textsuperscript{17} MUDROOROO. \textit{The Undying.} Pymble, NSW: Angus and Robertson, 1998b, preface.
King has made repeated references to Vizenor in interviews discussing the use of the trickster figure. For example, he has commented on Vizenor’s importance within the Native literary field to fellow Native writer and critic Jace Weaver:

Probably more than any other Native writer, Vizenor understands the trickster figure. And he writes about that trickster figure over and over and over again in a very complex and, I think, very savvy way.¹⁸

King has even gone so far as to compare the role of the trickster within his own work with that of Vizenor’s creative pieces. King has acknowledged that ‘if there is any weakness in Green Grass it’s that I didn’t follow Vizenor’s example and make Coyote more complex.’¹⁹

The fact that both King and Mudrooroo commonly appear to be, at many levels, interacting with Vizenor’s theories exposes a significant contrast between these two authors. One cannot divorce these authors’ writings from their geographical contexts. King portrays his use of the trickster as drawing deeply on traditions that are part of his own experience of Indigenous traditions in the North American instance and even in academic study, as his teaching speciality is the Native literatures of North America.²⁰ In his writing King redefines this tradition in order to confound and recreate interaction with a continuing force of oppression on his own continent. There is an interesting conundrum with this focus on Vizenor’s theoretical formulation of trickster discourse, a storytelling connoting implied, given and often-ambiguous presence rather than fixed representative absence. The

¹⁸ KING, Thomas quoted in Jace WEAVER. 1997, 142.
¹⁹ KING, Thomas quoted in Jace WEAVER. 1997, 148. This comment may be a response to Vizenor’s own criticism of the Coyote figures in this novel as ‘trickster silhouettes’: see VIZENOR, Gerald quoted in Jace WEAVER. 1997, 148.
conundrum is that ‘trickster discourse’ must be seen in many ways as coming primarily from a North American tradition. So Mudrooroo’s deployment and very obvious connection with it seems to denote that Mudrooroo is a more internationalist writer than King, or suggest the possibility that North American culture is a presence in his work. King does make reference to other Indigenous issues, but more particularly through connections such as postcard comments from characters peripheral to the main story.21

In Mudrooroo’s writing Australia is often a focus, but many more themes are drawn into the narrative. So while I will be discussing the common thematic use of trickster motifs it must be acknowledged that, geographically at least, the focus of trickster discourse and textual movement occurs in opposite directions. The Australian locale for Mudrooroo (and for King the analogous ‘space’ is the Canadian prairies) might be imagined as being situated at the bottom of a funnel with the whole Universe situated at the wider opening above. In this scenario the movement between the general, or international, and the specific or local for these authors is quite different. Both operate in trickster-like spirals of ambiguity, subversion and meaning-in-process, but King’s clearly focuses down to the local level through infusion of ‘the rest’. It could be said that, for Mudrooroo, this movement happens in reverse.

This difference being given, the parallel connections with Vizenor’s work provide a good reason to employ the critic’s framework in my comparative reading of two geographically distant authors. Vizenor’s theories, particularly his emphasis on

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21 See the travels of Harlen’s brother Joe and Will’s brother James in Medicine River (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1989) and Auntie Cassie’s travels in Truth and Bright Water (1999a).
chance, can illuminate readings of the writings of both King and Mudrooroo. The themes of confusion and loss discussed at length in the fourth chapter of this thesis are all predicated upon a concept of chance. Many of the central male characters from both King’s and Mudrooroo’s oeuvres experience confusion over such matters as identity and place because of chance ‘mistakes’ which have occurred. In this context, the ultimate resolution of representative identity is so elusive that loss and searching become both parodied and embraced, replacing a singular notion of representative identity. The main significance of the trickster in Vizenor’s formulation is that the trickster is not singular, he/she/they/the story is neither heroic nor tragic and is not a representative of Indigenous culture but, rather, is an energiser of it. The trickster figure is not a cultural artefact, who functions to represent a museum-fixed culture, but rather is, as Vizenor states, ‘a creature of creative and liberative stories, a mind trickster’.22

This focus on the mind or world of the imagination is essential to an understanding of Vizenor’s formulation and to this dissertation’s discussion of the writings of King and Mudrooroo. As a critic, Vizenor positions the power of trickster figures and the larger form of trickster discourse in the ability to express identity ‘continuance’. This occurs through repetition, and is particularly evident in acts of construction and creation, story and imagination. Mudrooroo’s own critical work reflects an emphasis on the link between the discursive and the imaginative. The author is concerned with the way in which Indigenous discursive control and imagining of the real shifted with the colonisation of Australia. His own writing project, particularly in the Master of the Ghost Dreaming series, is an attempt to

suggest tribal or ‘dreaming’ discursive regimes. Mudrooroo does, however, assert that his concern is not the authentic actuality of the/a specific tribal ‘reality’, that his maban reality writing ‘is encased in language, rather than an actual state.’23 Thus, Mudrooroo’s fiction is itself another continuation of the trickster tradition, another narrative act, where the images within it re-present a reality that is not meant to be representative. Vizenor would argue that the trickster is not involved in representation of Indigenous life.24 Trickster tales exist concurrently in the past and the present to transform culture, and involve an inherent reworking of story, which in turn suggests continuance of identity.

Implicit in the notion of continuance or of the continual formation of meaning is an emphasis on absence and presence. Vizenor highlights the way in which many non-Indigenous depictions and concepts of Native people are absent of any Native reality. Vizenor contrasts these absent images with the Native ‘presence’, which he terms ‘survivance’:

[…] natives are the presence, and Indians are simulations, a derivative noun that means an absence [survivance] is more than survival, [...] endurance or response [It is ] an active presence [...] repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry.25

Through their use of trickster attributes, such as survivance, both Mudrooroo’s and King’s works can be seen as being continually in process rather than stagnantly representative of an Indigenous essence. Consequently, King and Mudrooroo are not simply filling ‘Native absence’ with some kind of authentic ‘Native presence’,
instead they emphasise non-representation and process to contest the Eurocentric fixation upon (and ‘fixings’ of) the semiotic field of the indigene. This emphasis on process also produces a shift from the perception of Indigenous inscriptions as being merely responsive if they are to be political, an idea central to the argument of this thesis. King’s and Mudrooroo’s writings are able to momentarily move outside the semiotic field of indigene, primarily because the works are not always concerned with opposing and reacting to such fields. Use of the trickster is effective in such semiotic escapes.

As Vizenor suggests, tricksters, or more specifically trickster discourse inserts his/her/its own continuance and survival within the story itself. It is not concerned with simply combating oppression but uses an unmitigated presence to suggest the natural-ness of Indigenous presence. Trickster discourse uses inherent presence, in rehearsed and repetitive narrative. King’s writing is therefore discussed in this thesis as rejecting non-Indigenous representations and discursive regimes, while privileging Indigenous presence over absence, and maintaining a non-representative stance in the narration. Put another way, both King and Mudrooroo do not dispel untruths with truths in terms of the combating of representation of the indigene, and it is arguably this factor that marks the writing out as trickster discursive. The presence of Indigenous identities and emblems are not proving themselves, nor are they unified and static in its utterance. There is no self-conscious ‘this is how it really is’.

Much of the tension in King’s *Truth and Bright Water* exists between themes of absence and presence. Munroe Swimmer is repeatedly engaged in magical and

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26 VIZENOR, Gerald. 1998, 1.
satirical activities that are designed to reject the Indian ‘simulations’. Monroe
describes himself as a restorer rather than an artist. He is hired by the non-Indigenous
institutions to ‘restore’ nineteenth-century landscape paintings in museums because
images of Indians keep bleeding through into the land picturesquely featured in the
painting. This is an example of trickster discourse; Swimmer does not need to refill
an absent space with Native presence because material ‘facts’ are challenged by
‘magical’ appearance of Indigenous figures in the art. In fact, he is able to ironically
re-imagine his intended function as ‘restorer’ of art, by refusing to respond to the
Non-Indigenous request for him to paint the Indians out of the picture and allowing
the images to inhabit the canvas. The ‘trick’ of the art piece suggests the sovereignty
and authochonous nature of First Peoples. This tricky use of the term ‘restore’ is
repeated when Monroe buys a church in order to ‘restore’ it.\textsuperscript{27} He then paints it green
as the grass and blue as the sky and in effect, out of existence.\textsuperscript{28} Thus the term
‘restore’ is played with outside the fixed possibility of the original term. King takes
this word-play even further by having Monroe plant metal buffalo across the prairies,
enacting a pre-colonial presence, while at the same time mocking the possibility of
such a simplistic transferral:

It’s a buffalo. Or at least, it’s the outline of a buffalo. Flat iron wire bent into
the shape of a buffalo. […]

“I had them made up before I left Toronto. It’s my new restoration
project.” [says Monroe].

“Neat.”

“I’m going to save the world.”\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{27} KING, Thomas. 1999a, 129-130.
\textsuperscript{28} KING, Thomas. 1999a, 49.
\textsuperscript{29} KING, Thomas. 1999a, 130-1.
Terms such as ‘restore’ and ‘save’ are parodied. Art can stand as an analogy for Indigenous identity; there is no need to restore a piece of art, or a landscape, which is already infused with healthy presence.

In relation to King’s novel *Green Grass, Running Water*, Shanley emphasises continuance and presence and the productive space they can engender:

Thawing Indians from the ‘iced’ permanence of museums and academic discourse becomes political because in doing so it enlivens the forever time frame implied in the pun of the language of treaties that is being made in the novel’s title, “as long as the grass grows and the river runs.”

Shanley’s term ‘forever time frame’ is significant because it is also pertains to titles which Mudrooroo often gives his own texts. Such titles frequently pertain to a continuous condition through the use of the active verb, including *Doctor Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World*, *Long Live Sandawara*, *Wild Cat Falling* and *Wild Cat Screaming*, and also *The Undying* [my emphasis]. Or, by contrast, they denote a locale — such as King’s *Medicine River* and *Truth and Bright Water* or Mudrooroo’s latest novels, for example, *Underground* and *The Promised Land*. In the titles of both these authors’ novels, imaginary or storied land is emphasised and rarely is the past tense used. This signifies a ‘tricky’ inscription by emphasising the imaginary (thus non-representative of the real and fixed specific) and the continuous (through the use of the present tense).

Trickster aspects provide the opportunity to develop character in ways that re-present identity as collective and amorphous rather than individualised and singular.

30 SHANLEY, Kathryn. 1999, 37.
At certain points the narrative subverts the dominant order and rejects what Shanley terms the ‘split between subjectivity and bodiliness’.

Shanley is arguing that if the self in an Indigenous narrative is an embodied self, it is part of a larger space of interrelated selves. Both authors attempt this presentation of the interrelated self. For example, Mudrooroo repeatedly uses the presence of crow, borrowed from the writings of David Unaipon and others, to conflate or ‘trick’ clear senses of the self. Crow, or Waau appears in *Doctor Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* as the figure who confounds Wooreddy’s binarised vision of the universe, reflecting the ambiguity and dual position which trickster figures frequently hold. In Mudrooroo’s *The Undying*, this crow figure is repeated, with less gentle wisdom and more cunning, as Waai, echoing some of the contradictions inherent in Unaipon’s construction of the crow figure. It is Waai who is responsible for the ceremony that transforms the notion of a dreaming companion into a process of dreaming embodiment, thus blurring ‘subjectivity’ and ‘bodiliness’ within the trickster figure. Jangamuttuk, Wadawaka, and George, with his recent initiation, can no longer travel with Goanna, Leopard and Dingo respectively; they actually are those totemic figures within the maban plane. With this transformation, the lines between the maban plane and the moments of what might be called literary realism become less distinct than they are in Mudrooroo’s earlier text, *Master of the Ghost Dreaming*. In fact, the young George never experiences the earlier accompanying style of dreaming interaction:

"Ludjee: ‘What have you done to my son? He wasn’t ready for such a thing. How could you do it when there are enemies about?’"

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31 SHANLEY, Katheryn. 1999, 37.
Jangamuttuk: ‘It was not my doing. I listened to that Crow and his three things that came together. Well, there were three things: a drug, a wily crow and his trickery.’

Crow is, therefore, the trickster figure, and he functions to create and disrupt stories and the sense of self. Trickster’s intervention allows for what Mudrooroo terms ‘maban’ existence to become less separated from the protagonists and more inherent to their beings as they collide worlds with the invading Europeans. Waai’s trickery, though deceptive, serves as a metaphor for the evolving nature of traditions. Thus, the trickster, as with Monroe Swimmer’s tampering with community and landscape in King’s *Truth and Bright Water*, initiates a ceremony of both good and bad outcomes, which make ambiguous the trickster’s motivation and also any essential distinction between pure good and evil. In so doing, continuance is privileged over clear notions of defeat and victory. An identity is simultaneously inherent and experimented with in the image-changing, from companion to embodiment of the dreaming. The powerful totem form used to combat the European characters is not formed out of that combat.

These ideas will be explored below through more textual examples. It is enough to note here, as Shanley asserts, that through the suggestion of community collectivity in formation and the deployment of trickster philosophy, a sense of sovereignty of representation is enacted. It is of course no accident that Thomas King and Mudrooroo, both of whom have varying degrees of clarity in personal identity, attempt to free Indigenous identity from fixed representation. Geo-specific tribal
identity is never ‘revealed’ and uncovered in their suggestion of a pan-Indigenous and symbolic written form.33

(III) Trickster repetitions: King’s Buffalo Bill and John Wayne versus Mudrooroo’s Dracula and the missionary

Thus, Vizenor’s and Shanley’s approach illuminates some of both Mudrooroo’s and King’s thematic choices. In *Green Grass, Running Water* King creates a subversive and timeless ‘now’ by repeating historical acts of colonialism and defeat through a patterning of disruptive trickster acts of creation. One such example is the repetition of ‘Buffalo Bill’ in the novel *Green Grass, Running Water*. Buffalo Bill Cody’s ‘Wild West’ show travelled through North America and Europe in the late 1800s re-enacting ‘scenes’ of wild Indian lifestyles for the voyeuristic pleasure of white spectators. This show served as a precedent for the racist images of the frontier in Hollwood westerns34 — another deconstructed theme in King’s stories. Many of the Indigenous ‘actors’ in these ‘Buffalo Bill’ shows were actually leaders of subversive activity and had suffered greatly at the hands of white invasion. For example, Sitting Bull, the first central leader of the Sioux in the face of broken treaties and the encroachment of the gold rush of 1875, spent five years with Buffalo Bill’s show.35 Another great leader, Black Elk, who fought at the battle of Little Bighorn and who survived the massacre at Wounded Knee, also travelled with the show.36

King re-enacts Buffalo Bill’s re-enactments, which were in fact exploitations

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33 In this context pan-Indigenous cannot mean ‘speaking for all’. The specific implications of this term within the context of this thesis will be explored in the final chapter of this thesis.
35 NIES, Judith. 1996, 282 and 293.
of Indian chiefs and caricatures of Indigenous people. The author does this by creating a contemporary Buffalo Bill, actually Buffalo Bill Bursum, who owns a television store — the television being the central vehicle for image-creation in western society today. Buffalo Bill Bursum employs Lionel, a man from the reservation, paralleling the original Bill’s ‘employees’. Bill’s most joyous moment is when he attempts to construct a map of North America out of the televisions he sells by piling them one on top of the other against the far wall of his store. Not only is the crooked stack of two hundred television sets an awesome advertising opportunity in Bill’s mind but it also signifies power for him:

> It was stupendous. It was more powerful than he had thought. It was having the universe there on the wall, being able to see everything, being in control.37

Bursum chooses to play ‘cowboy and Indian’ westerns depicting Indian defeat on this ‘map’. King is tying together many images with this portrayal of Buffalo Bill Bursum staring in wonder at his creation. The author is projecting the white desire to control land, signified by the map. The image of the map is not exclusively European. Many Indigenous groups created and lived by their own maps; sand paintings are a good example of this practice. But in a contemporary context the mapping of land connotes legalised, authorised, ‘paper’ ownership.38 In addition the maps of North America today cut directly through tribal groupings thousands of years old. For Bursum the map has affiliations with Machievelli’s *The Prince* and notions of the governance of the state and power.39 King links this interpretation of the map with Indigenous issues by having Bursum play Hollywood Westerns. This ‘map’ depicts specific representations of Indigeneity, in particular the image of the ‘savage’.

39 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 140-1.
Thus the author not only posits white desire to control land, but also unveils the myths developed to justify such a desire.

This impetus to control is thwarted by the introduction of Coyote and the four old Indians — each of which embodies trickster’s timelessness by telling their own intersecting stories encompassing such far-reaching referents as Native creation ‘myths’, genesis, and canonical North American literature. The four Indians and coyote ‘sing’ subversion into the image portrayed — changing the ending of the film to portray Indian ‘survivance’:

The Lone Ranger’s voice was soft and rhythmic, running below the blaring of the bugle and the thundering of the horses’ hooves. Then Ishmael joined in and then Robinson Crusoe and then Hawkeye.

“Come on Coyote,” said the Lone Ranger. “You can help, too.”

“I had nothing to do with it,” says Coyote. “I believe I was in Houston.” [...] 

There at full charge, hundreds of soldiers in bright blue uniforms with gold buttons and sashes and stripes, blue-eyed and rosy-cheeked, came over the last rise.

And disappeared.

Just like that.

“What the hell,” said [Buffalo Bill] Bursum, and he stabbed at the remote.

Everywhere was color. [...] 

“Thought it was supposed to be black and white,” said Eli.40

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40 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 356-7 and 359.
I have quoted sections from this scene at length because doing so allows for a fuller conception of King’s formation of trickster discourse. Coyote’s elision of responsibility is reflected in his comment, ‘I had nothing to do with it’. This moment, when juxtaposed with Coyote’s powers of magical creation and transformation, produces the ambiguity implicit in the formulation of trickster discourse discussed above. Trickster is responsible for act of creation while at the same time disclaiming responsibility. The original Hollywood western film is a classic example of what Vizenor would call Native absence or simulation, a mythic image perpetuating racist stereotypes. As trickster is in part ‘creative’ and ‘liberative’, a song, an act of creativity disrupts this image. Coyote’s singing, along with that of the four Indians, restages the end of the film with subversive presence.

The liberative function of the trickster narrative is shown at the end of the film when dominant societal norms are subverted. In King’s text, John Wayne is left, without reinforcements, while his soldiers mysteriously disappear and are then easily defeated by the Indian warriors. It is significant that at this moment King describes Wayne as being not a victim but ‘stupidly’ in ‘disbelief’ and urinating in his pants. This act inserts a bawdy reference to bodily functions, which is common to trickster stories. As Jay Miller says of the Salish tribes’ trickster figure, ‘his activities are filled with the full range of earthy and physiological processes, especially lust, gluttony and greed’. This facet of trickster tales is equally evident in William Bright’s comprehensive anthology of ‘coyote stories’. Bright significantly places the tales under categories such as ‘Coyote the Glutton’ and ‘Coyote the Lecher’ and

42 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 358.
includes such tales by Leslie Marmon Silko as ‘What Stinks?’ The trickster-style bawdiness at this point inserts slapstick subversion rather than victorious inversion. Thus while the Indian characters in the new film are sung into being by Coyote and four Indians as victorious, this is not supposed to be a replacing of image with true-image. It is a humorous trickster utterance of inherent presence and rejection of societal convention that has vitally unfunny significance to both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous characters watching the film on Bursum’s ‘map’ in the shop.

In the excerpt quoted above, Eli, the Native professor, says ‘I thought it was supposed to be black and white’. The film has been remade in ‘swirling’ colours and any notion of black and white clear truths and oppositions is refuted. The reformatting of the film is an analogy for Native ‘continuance’ through trickster ambiguity; the colours and shapes are swirling and powerful but not distinct. This dissertation argues that in King’s work oppressive societal norms are abrogated, but they are not simply replaced with another fixed representation. This is suggested through the symbolic implications of the infusion of colour over the binarised ‘black and white’ format and by the fact that this new ending to the film occurs through the magic of singing and Coyote’s disruptive presence. The four Indians see their work as continuing, constantly referring to other ‘fixing’ that is required, and ‘mistakes’ of the past. In summary, there is no beginning and ending to these tales; they are written to suggest moments of process and action rather than moments of final correction and resolution. There is an unceasing reiteration of Native issues, which need constant attention.

This position is affirmed in King’s latest novel *Truth and Bright Water*. In this book the same Buffalo Bill reappears as a man who has lost all of his land at the man-made ‘parliament lake’ due to the bursting of the dam caused by Coyote at the end of *Green Grass, Running Water*. Bursum has not only lost ‘land’, he has also given away the ‘selling of images’, having sold his television store to an unsure Lionel, Buffalo Bill’s Indigenous employee.45 This suggests a spiralling of textual and extra-textual activities. First there is the societal norm to be subverted — the original Buffalo Bill and his racist images of Indigenous people. This is accompanied by an allusion to the original traditional trickster through the inclusion of the Coyote figure. This mythical figure and this historical creator of negative myths are merged intra-textually with trickster discourse (metaphoric or actual), in the form of the four ironically named Indians (Hawkeye, Lone Ranger, Ishmael, and Robinson Crusoe) and their song. The interpretation of the four Indians as emblems of trickster discourse lies in their satirical link to Indian ‘simulations’, (the Lone Ranger as parodic proxy for Tonto for example), while they simultaneously suggest creative and subversive identities. These include First Nations’ ‘Creation women’ and First Nations’ historical freedom fighters. In addition, in true trickster form, their attempts to ‘fix’ are completely unfixed. With the resurrection of a now land-less Buffalo Bill Bursum in *Truth and Bright Water*, these emblems repeat themselves in order that an inter-textual movement occurs. Like elements of the traditional trickster tale, the text speaks to and disrupts elements outside itself as well as referring to and distorting elements within its internal structure. And it is this movement that I will be discussing at greater length in the final section of this chapter.

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45 KING, Thomas. 1999a, 87.
This spiralling interaction also occurs in Mudrooroo’s work. For example — as has been commented on repeatedly in this thesis — the increasing ‘incorporation’ of Gothicism in Mudrooroo’s ‘Master of the Ghost Dreaming’ series signifies more than imitation. In the very latest novel of this series, *The Promised Land* (2000), both Fada and Amelia return and this time they are linked. The vampiric Eliza Fraser (Amelia in Mudrooroo’s novels) haunts the dreams of Fada’s new young wife, Lucy. Fada himself is a re-invocation of the missionary, known also as George Augustus Robinson, from the first novel in this four-book series. These dream visitations culminate in a vampiric initiation; Amelia seduces Lucy in a blood sharing ceremony:

> The imprisoned girl writhed, but not to be free. At the extent of her vision, at her loins, was a thin tawny animal lapping away [...] she did not at first cognise the lips at her throat turning into hard teeth, two of which were as sharp as needles. This she knew suddenly, as they bit down.46

This scene is clearly undercut with humour because of the ambiguity it entails. The almost pornographic blend of lesbianism, bestiality and Gothicism is actually occurring between two well-known figures drawn from the historical and literary canon of the English-speaking world. As has been noted in this thesis, Eliza Fraser is a significant ‘first contact’ figure in Australian history.47 The girl she seduces is an inter-textual repetition of Lucy from Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*. Mudrooroo then creates this inter-textuality by describing Lucy’s history in the stormy village of North Riding and by detailing her night wanderings and intimacy with her friend Mina.48 Mudrooroo subverts the tragic end to Stoker’s Lucy’s life, a death that has been critiqued as a patriarchal Victorian response to the female character’s overt

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46 MUDROOROO. *The Promised Land*. Pymble, NSW: Angus and Robertson, 2000, 8.
47 For more on the significance of Eliza Fraser on the Australian psyche and cultural identity development see: Kay SCHAFFER. *In the Wake of First Contact: The Eliza Fraser Stories*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
sexuality. In Mudrooroo’s fiction, instead of being brutally beheaded, the girl is married off to George Augustus Robinson (known as the missionary, Fada, of the earlier novels in Mudrooroo’s Master of the Ghost Dreaming series as well as being a ‘real’ figure in Tasmanian missionary history). In this new context Lucy is transported to ‘The Promised Land’ and pursues a lesbian relationship with a female vampire.

Like King’s refutation of ‘black and white’ positionings, Mudrooroo confuses the binaries of Mina and Lucy. In Bram Stoker’s text, Lucy is drawn in stark relief to the sexless Mina, and while Mudrooroo follows the external ‘facts’ of the portrayal of these two women as binary opposites, he inserts ambiguity into the portrayal. In The Promised Land, while it is still Mina’s role to protect Lucy’s chastity in North Riding, her role as sleeping partner holds less protective and supervisory attributes and strong lesbian undertones are introduced. In fact, in Mudrooroo’s version of this tale, it is the memory of Mina’s embrace that entices Lucy into a sexual and ultimately vampiric relationship with Amelia. This ambigusing and sexualising of the largely absent Mina seems to infuse the text with trickster patterning, in that the good and bad entity is not clearly divided or locatable in the coupling of these two girls. The intensely physical nature of the relationship also mirrors the emphasis on the sexual in trickster tales discussed above.

49 Cranny-Francis suggests that blood-sharing and letting stand as symbols of sexuality, and more particularly, sexual initiation in Dracula. Thus Lucy’s acts of vampiric consumption can only be countered by the ‘gang’ piercing of her body by men. In this moment of returned male power Lucy can resume her visage of innocence and sweetness. CRANNY-FRANCIS, Anne. Sexual politics and political repression in Bram Stoker’s Dracula. In: Clive BLOOM, et al., eds. Nineteenth Century Suspense: From Poe to Conan Doyle. London: Macmillan, 1988, 68.
52 MUDROOROO. 2000, 11.
In Mudrooroo’s telling this ambiguity continues with the focus on the female Lucy rather than upon the male Harker, as in Bram Stoker’s version. In addition, Lucy is located in early Western Australia, rather than Eastern and Western Europe, with a ‘new’ husband, Augustus Robinson. These two re-told figures — the one literary and the other historical — are united in a locale which neither actually inhabited in their original textual existences. To further tangle the web, the dingo in the scene quoted above is the animal embodiment of George, the Indigenous narrator of Mudrooroo’s previous two novels, and, as we learn at the end of the prequel to this text, the illegitimate son of the aforesaid Augustus Robinson. Cycles and repetitions of character and plot, and thus of time, pervade Mudrooroo’s constructions. This can be seen in the non-linear repetition of the Detective Jackamara Holmes in *Wild Cat Screaming* and *The Kwinkan* and the Wild Cat’s repeated ‘rewriting’ of himself and his story in all the books of the Wild Cat series.

The dingo emblem seems to mirror some of King’s depictions of the trickster, Coyote, in *Green Grass, Running Water, One Good Story, That One* and *A Coyote Columbus Story*. This is a figure that operates to both create balance and calamity. For example, in King’s children’s book, *A Coyote Columbus Story*, Coyote is responsible for the creation of the world including the plants, animals and television commercials. He/she is also inadvertently responsible for bringing the hostile and exploitative presence of Christopher Columbus to the land. Like King’s coyote, George the boy/dingo embodies this duality. In previous novels, in both his human and animal form, George is largely involved in quests to protect and preserve his Indigenous clan and African mentor, Wadawaka, yet he is simultaneously the servant

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and overtly sexual ‘pup’ of the European Vampire, Eliza. George is coeally lecherous, blood-lusting, innocent, and searching. He is part of the tribe and yet he subverts it. Therefore, any attempt to untangle reality from this collage of subversions and allusions is fruitless. This is what makes the notion of trickster discourse so interesting for the purposes of studying this author. As Christian has said:

Trickster and clown stories and performances are characterized by their impromptu nature. In other words the characters are well known, but each time the stories are told or performed the scene and plot may change, leaving open the possibilities for endless numbers of performances and tales.54

‘Endless possibilities’ evade representativeness. George seems to encapsulate some of the ambiguity and duality which characterises ‘trickster figures’, and it is clear that Mudrooroo is gesturing towards the post-modern ambiguities such figures imply. It must be noted, however, that Mudrooroo does not depict George and his other metamorphosing characters as reality-changing or creation figures. Although they destroy the church and steal the ship in Master of the Ghost Dreaming these characters are involved more in battle and ceremony than they are in magic and re-creation per se. In contrast, King’s Coyote, repeated in many of his texts, has many anthropomorphic qualities, but is never visualised in human form and animal form in the same book, as is George. The similarity between these two authors is not so much the nature of their individual tricksters, as these are obviously delineated by each author’s geographical and cultural differences,55 but the literary formation of elements of trickster story telling and trickster discourse.

55 For example, it is possible to argue that Mudrooroo does not describe figures who have power to change reality because of his own identity conundrums, or alternatively he may see such processes as outside his cultural experience.
(iv) Fluidity and the emblem of water

The writings of both Mudrooroo and King evoke ideas of liminality and movement. This can be seen as a drawing on oral traditions and tribal tricksters. There are specific traditional tribal trickster narratives which explore trickster’s movement between worlds on water; for example Harry Robinson’s Okanagan flood stories — in which Coyote is chased by water, and tricked by ‘god’.\(^{56}\) David Unaipon’s Crow also makes significant water journeys.\(^{57}\) The critic and author Paula Gunn Allen has described such transgressive movement as vital to traditional tribal story telling:

> our traditions have always been about liminality, about voyages between this world and the many other realms of being, perhaps crossing boundaries is the first and foremost basis of our tradition and the key to human freedom.\(^{58}\)

The writings of King and Mudrooroo are, however, precisely that — written — and therefore cannot quite evince the same liminality and orality of the tribal narrative. Instead the authors commonly use the repeated presence of a conspicuous symbol — water. To cite just one prominent example, fluidity is present in the titles of King’s three major novels: *Medicine River, Green Grass, Running Water*, and *Truth and Bright Water* [my emphasis]. Water, as a symbol, allows for the trickster duality of meaning, which I have emphasised through this chapter. It captures the metaphoric enunciation of the trickster in many ways. Joseph Campbell has discussed the trickster as being ‘outside the system’:

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\(^{57}\) See UNAIPON, David. *Legendary Tales of the Australian Aborigines*. Unpublished manuscript and typescript (held in Mitchell Library, Sydney), 1924–1925.

The mind structures a lifestyle, and the fool or trickster represents another whole range of possibilities. He doesn’t respect the values that you’ve set up for yourself, and smashes them.59

This quality of being both inside and outside is important in King’s and Mudrooroo’s depiction of water and the movement and transgression it suggests.

In *Medicine River* water appears as a central element in the three major moments of Will’s maturation and integration into the Medicine River community. The first involves his unwilling and nervous participation in parental duties. Will journeys with the character Harlen Bigbear (a symbol of the community trickster) to the house of Martha Oldcrow, a medicine woman, to purchase a gift for the new child of Will’s girlfriend. The men have to walk a mile down a ridge and then wade naked through the river to get to Martha’s house:

In the end, we took our clothes off, tied them up in a ball and threw them across. The water was green and murky and freezing. [...]  

“You boys come all this way to go swimming?”

“Afternoon, Granny,” said Harlen. “No, we didn’t come to swim. Came to see you about a present for a little girl.”

“You get lost or something? [...] Council fixed that [road] two months back.”60

Water is the trial to overcome. It is a barrier, a hurdle to vault in order to reach the trickster’s goal of an authentic gift for Will to obtain for the child. The fact that it is actually an *unnecessary* trial creates a humorous parallel between Harlen and the disruptive and ambiguously-motivated tribal trickster.

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The other two events concerning water are of similar significance in Will’s life. The first involves a dare from Harlen’s brother to jump from a high bridge into the swirling waters of the river. This act embodies male thrill-seeking as well as loss of control and fluid liminal spaces between life and death for Harlen and Will. Although both men renege at the last minute, this event serves as a precursor to the men’s final engagement with the river. It rejects strong social mores of machismo male activities, allowing their masculinity a more amorphous connotation. The refusal to jump also acts as part of an intra-textual pattern, akin to the one discussed above in relation to the character Bill Bursum. A leap from a bridge is repeated at the ‘close’ of King’s latest novel, *Truth and Bright Water*, with tragic repercussions: the death of the narrator’s two closest friends, his dog Soldier and his cousin Lum. Both these latter characters have trickster-like qualities; they are dangerous yet protective; healing yet lunatic. The ‘loss’ (their bodies are never found) of these confidantes to water symbolises a maturation and integration into the community for the narrator, Tecumseh, paralleling the stages of Will’s life in *Medicine River*. It is only after these deaths that the narrator is able to express himself to his mother and aunt and to have them respond.

For Will the final event in the novel *Medicine River*, involving the intensely significant symbol of water, is less cataclysmic. This final event involves the purchase of a traditional canoe at a yard sale. The canoe ride on the river is a disaster, Harlen and Will are thrown into the rapids and the canoe is smashed into an embankment. This storyline is interspersed with Will’s memory of his mother and his guilt over not being present when she died:
I thought about my mother and James and me, laughing and walking through the mud and the water to shore. James was with her when she died. I should have been there, too.

The river swirled around us, sucking at our feet, flashing at our legs as we went. Harlen began singing a forty-niner, beating out the rhythm on the gun-wales. And we brought the canoe back through the dark water and into the light.61

As unfortunate as the interaction with the river is in actual terms, it also serves as both a cleansing ceremony and as a signifier of the journey involved in the ambiguities of life.

*Green Grass, Running Water* begins and ends with water; not only in the story of ‘I’ but in the bursting of the dam at the novel’s close. Each of the creation stories the four Indians tell involves diving and floating for the central woman. Inexplicable pools of water form in characters’ shoes and under car tyres. The narrative in *Truth and Bright Water* is similarly kept flowing and floating by motifs of water. The water at the opening is a live thing:

The river begins in ice.

Grey-green and frozen with silt, the Shield shifts and breaks out of the mountains in cataracts and cascades, fierce and alive. It plunges into chasms and dives under rock shelves, but as the river leaves the foothills and snakes across the belly of the prairies, the water warms and deepens, and splits the land in two.62

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62 King, Thomas. 1999a, 1.
This paragraph uses water to portray solidity and movement, protection (the river is named the Shield) and destructive power, freedom and boundaries. Many of the moments of ‘trickery’ centre upon this river. This is the place the narrator, Tecumseh, must move across to visit his Grandmother on the reserve — water is the dangerous in between space, lying in the middle of the majority Non-Indigenous town and majority Indigenous Reserve. But this space in-between, this fluid, unrestricted, undemarcated space is also the location of ceremony, implicit in the trickster’s process. The trickster character in this text is, of course, Monroe Swimmer, his name indicating the importance of fluidity in trickster formation. Monroe selects the river as the site for his redemption of Native voice by attaching red ribbons to the skulls of Indian children which he removes from the museum, and then throwing them into the currents. As stated above, the deaths of two central characters occur in the river; the suicide of Tecumseh’s cousin, Lum and the death of his companion, the dog, Soldier.

In Mudrooroo’s latest ‘series’ of interlinked novels, water, and more particularly voyaging on water, become central. In the precursor to this series, *Doctor Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World*, Wooreddy’s central battle is to overcome his fear of the sea and the loss of control it embodies. This being accomplished, the novel ends with Wooreddy’s sea voyage to the island Wybaleena. In subsequent novels of this series the sea becomes the means to escape, with the Indigenous inhabitants of the island abandoning it on a stolen vessel of the crown. In the next novel, *The Undying*, this theme continues with the new narrator Jangamuttuk’s (the re-named Wooreddy’s) adopted son learning the tricks of

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63 KING, Thomas. 1999a, 252.
64 KING, Thomas. 1999a, 258.
seamanship. The water is what propels the events in this series, allowing for deaths and rebirths in a continual, almost *Odyssey*-like process of journeying.

Water is implicated in vital trickster aspects of Mudrooroo’s narrative, yet like King’s work, it is also a significant place of death. In a tragic turn at the close of *Underground* the stolen schooner is sunk with all the community of Wybaleena lost, save only the African convict Wadawaka and the narrator George:

> It was then, when all were looking forward to the end of our voyage, it was then and I swear on it, though it must surely have been a hallucination, that the cliffs came together with a resounding crack. The bow of our vessel, and all my mob with it, was completely crushed.\(^{65}\)

At one level this stands as an emblem of genocide – a people displaced and entrapped by unfamiliar land and an emblem of the crown, the ship. Thus, death on water can be seen as a post-modern mimesis for colonisation. The death of Ludjee in water at the hands of the vampiric Amelia is another clear example of this. But while Ludjee’s death at the hands of the blood-thirsty, all-consuming vampire is symbolic of genocide and battle, a postcolonial protest, it also becomes more diffuse. The water imbues her death with paradoxical impermanence, for Ludjee magically reappears in *The Promised Land*, chiding Amelia for believing that a powerful shamanic woman, with a manta-ray as a totem dreaming partner, could ‘die’ in water.\(^{66}\) It is just after this event that George learns that Fada is his natural father. Parallel to this rude awakening is a bizarre moment of inter-textuality, which leads towards (and revels in) the continuation of water voyaging. Wadawaka abandons George to join the ship the *Pequod*, in order to search out the great white whale,

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\(^{65}\) MUDROOROO. 1999, 168.

\(^{66}\) MUDROOROO. 2000, 180.
Repeatedly, in Mudrooroo’s novels, it is the water that forecloses on the reader’s anticipation of the story’s end.

This moment of inter-textuality alluded to in the previous paragraph, in which Herman Melville’s work makes an unusual appearance, marks an obvious link with King’s own rewriting of *Moby Dick*:

> […] Moby-Jane swims over to the ship and punches a large hole in its bottom.

> There, says Moby-Jane. That should take care of that.

> That was very clever of you, says Changing Woman as she watches the ship sink. What happens to Ahab?

> We do this every year, says Moby-Jane. He’ll be back. He always comes back.

Through his revision of this canonical text, King demonstrates the universalising concepts implicit in the original Melville story by replacing them with the very different Black, female whale who keeps ‘coming back’ in circular migration. In Mudrooroo’s latest novel, *The Promised Land*, the story of Moby Dick is once again imbricated with postcolonial subversion. Not unlike King’s post-modern repetition of Moby Dick as Moby-Jane, the great Black lesbian whale, Mudrooroo’s retelling involves a simultaneous satire and abrogation of empire, but not necessarily patriarchy. In *The Promised Land* Wadawaka’s identification of Moby Dick as female has less to do with feminine affirmation and more to do with a kind of fear of female power, suggested by the horrific and murderous figure of the vampire Amelia:

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68 This same passage has been discussed in a different context at the end of Chapter Two of this thesis.
69 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 221.
‘They call her Moby Dick, believing that only a male could wreak such havoc, whereas I dubbed her *The Empire.*’

‘So we’re into symbols now, are we?’ Amelia retorted, even stamping her foot. ‘I expect that captain saw in her, in that Moby Dick, more than a monster who had eaten his leg. […]

‘He did rave and rant and ranted so much that I guess he did see her as a symbol of his loss.’

In both cases the watery tale is repeated with a simultaneous and self-conscious tale-telling and circularity. Amelia’s mocking of ‘symbols’ is not accidental, but rather part of a larger humorous satire of the universality of symbols themselves. This is what makes the symbolic use of water so interesting, because for both authors it acts as a kind of symbolic *anti-symbol*; a site of intentional ambiguity. In addition, what I am pointing towards with this exploration of the symbolic and thematic prominence of water in both authors’ recent writings is two main observations. The first is that water furthers the trickster quality of the narrative, given the actual dominance of water stories and journeying in tribal trickster narratives. The second is the way in which both authors use images of water in order to evoke the sense of meaning *in process*, in transit, journeying. The presence of water allows for amorphousness and unclear representation because — at any given moment — the journey can become an endless turning of the tides.

*(v) Non-sequential ‘progress’ in supra-textual movement*

King and Mudrooroo constantly revisit history and literature. However, they also revisit each of their own separate soundings of eclectic histories and texts, an intra-textuality or even supra-textuality. This is how both writers’ brands of ‘trickster
discourse’ function at a structural level. As said above, Vizenor states that the trickster is not a representative of Native culture; instead he is both a creature of ‘creative and liberative stories’ and a teaser of ‘creation, totemic conversion, and even of their own continuance in literature’.71 Vizenor’s comment seems to be in response to early anthropological studies that identified the trickster as a static figure in the story and ignored the larger place of discourse. Anne Doueihi has noted that Western scholarship invented ‘the problem’ of the trickster figure by creating a distinction between subject and discourse:

Trickster’s nature is characterised by Western scholarship as problematic because it is complex and contradictory. A malevolent figure who tricks others but often only succeeds in deceiving himself, a scatological and obscene breaker of taboos, an asocial and amusing prankster, Trickster is distinctly separable from, while nevertheless related to, the figure of a benefactor who brings language, culture, and social order to mankind and the world.72

In like fashion, Mudrooroo and King conflate the distinction between form and meta-narrative. They then concentrate upon the figure or story of the trickster in order to satirise early anthropologists such as Franz Boas and later Paul Radin and the representation of trickster stories or individual myths as a stage in cultural evolution. Such foci were arguably Jungian attempts to trace a ‘progression’ from uncivilised to civilised.73 As a contrast, in the works of King and Mudrooroo all chronological progress is avoided. If anything, the focus is inverted: any individual specific and/or tribal figure is subsumed by the authors’ attention to discursive construction and a

71 VIZENOR, Gerald. 1998, 1-2
73 DOUIEHI, Anne. 1984, 286-7.
collage of stories. It is important to emphasise that I do not believe that King and Mudrooroo are ‘representing’ or reconstructing mythological, anthropological, or (more importantly) tribal and cultural facts. Rather the discourse of the tribal is suggested through the embodiment of contemporary trickster theory. In the case of the works of Mudrooroo, as for King, an examination of form — and of themes relating to form in their novels — allows the reader to explore a supra-textual, ‘trickster type’ of organising principle. Put simply, in the work of both authors there is a simultaneous disruption, creation, recuperation, and fusion of narratives.

Repetition and ambiguity echo aspects of storytelling traditions; as Laura Donaldson says, ‘the fundamental truth of oral traditions [...] that every story elicits another story’. I would like to conclude this chapter with this suggestion of orality, or of the eliciting of continuous stories. This orality, and even voice, is not specific. These authors do not lay claim to a particular tribal story or area in their fiction. Instead they discuss a much more general condition using ambiguity in order to avoid the fixed type of representation developed by non-Indigenous writers in the past. It is possible, through the evocation of the continuous, non-specific Indigenous themed story, that both authors suggest a fictional pan-Indigeneity. This concept will be discussed further in the next chapter, but as Thomas King says:

I think a lot of people think of pan-Indianness as a diminution of “Indian”, but I think of it as simply a reality of contemporary life. Native culture has never been static even though Western literature would like to picture it that way.

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74 DONALDSON, Laura E. Noah meets Old Coyote or Singing in the rain: Intertextuality in Thomas King’s Green Grass, Running Water. Studies in Native American Literature. 7(2), Summer 1995, 29.
75 KING, Thomas quoted in Jace WEAVER. 1997, 150.
In this conceptualisation King’s and Mudrooroo’s writing of trickster discourse becomes not about geographical issues but about energies and methods and the crossover in between.

The notion of a supra-textual movement within the texts of King and Mudrooroo has already been alluded to throughout this thesis. For example, in Chapter Four I discussed a concept of ‘lost men’, or characters portrayed as being in some way disassociated from their own milieu. The memory flashbacks of Wild Cat in the *Wild Cat* series and of Will in King’s *Medicine River* provide a context for their present situations. They also enable both characters to attempt to understand themselves, to locate a past and place for the self. Structurally, however, the swing between the re-membering narrative and the detached description of the present, forms a pendulous oscillation. The connections between the two are not always obvious as these fluctuations disrupt the sense of a linear narrative and the notion of resolution.

The form of both novelists’ work is constructed in such a way as to make ideas of fixed meaning or closure redundant. The narratives move in circles, not lines, more like an oral narrative than a western novel. As Marlene Goldman has pointed out, the notion of the circle is inherent to the structure of *Green Grass, Running Water*, ‘ending as it does on page 360’. Goldman notes that midway in the novel, (page 180), Lionel falls asleep in front of the television, light falling on him like water, foreshadowing the novel’s conclusion:

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Thus, midway through its own circular journey, the text looks across its horizontal axis and catches a glimpse of events that take place at the end (or should I say beginning) of its narrative orbit.\textsuperscript{77} 

It is necessary to closely examine the 'endings' and 'beginnings' (for want of better words) of the books in each author’s collection. The fact that one of Mudrooroo's most recent novels, \textit{The Undying}, is self-labelled as "Book II" in a series is also part of this refusal to view texts as isolated and self-contained.\textsuperscript{78} But there is also a kind of doublethink involved in such labelling. The fact that King’s and Mudrooroo's works are continuously, and in the case of Mudrooroo's text, self-consciously, sequencing itself does not, ironically, make it a sequence. While there is an abrogation of the finale there is also an abdication of buying into linear progression. Structurally this involves a move away from acceptance of traditionally dominant European modes of storytelling praxis. The endings and beginnings are vital to the way in which both authors construct an intrinsically connected body of work.

While \textit{Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World} in many ways ends with the epitome of closure, with Wooreddy's death and the vanishing of the world, it is not allowed to remain at that moment of stasis. At one level this apocalyptic vision, accompanied as it is by the symbolic imagery of the Aboriginal flag, opens up the way for the creation of the new world of maban reality existent in \textit{Master of the Ghost Dreaming}. All of \textit{Master of the Ghost Dreaming}, \textit{The Undying} and \textit{Underground} begin with a part of a ceremony or song cycle, and finish with a promise of more tales to come. This choice of ending in \textit{Master of the Ghost

\textsuperscript{77} GOLDMAN, Marlene. 1999, 37.

\textsuperscript{78} Mudrooroo has referred to the construction of a series as allowing for the formation of a lengthy novel in spite of publishing word limitations. See MUDROOROO, What ever happened to the Great Australian Novel. unpublished paper presented at ASAL conference, Toowoomba, QLD, 5 July 1998.
Dreaming has been condemned for being trite. But it is important to closely examine its textual structure:

As for our band of intrepid voyagers, their further adventures on the way to and in their promised land await to be chronicled, and will be the subject of further volumes.

Mudrooroo firmly establishes the idea of the novel as a self-conscious telling of a story, a performative act, by making the reader once more aware of the presence of the storyteller or chronicler. This first person narration is more than simply as-it-happens or reminiscent. It is part of a celebration of oral culture’s conceptualisation of time and space which allows the opening up of opportunities for alternative realities within the text’s content, as well as the introduction of the idea of a narrator who exists both inside and outside the story. Story-telling is distinct from narration, as the Davidson quote above indicates; each telling of the tale suggests another. So, irony is inherent in the decision to label Mudrooroo’s latest novel ‘the last’ of the Master of the Ghost Dreaming Series. The title of this text, The Promised Land, circularly harks back to the ‘final’ passage in Master of the Ghost Dreaming, ‘their further adventures on the way to and in their promised land await to be chronicled’.

In addition, this most recent text ends on the eve of another great sea journey aboard the leviathan ship, metaphorically named ‘Empire’. It also leaves many questions unanswered, such as where are Wadawaka and Amelia, and who are the Indigenous performers Queen Victoria refers to in Mudrooroo’s mock repetition of her diary at the end of the novel? Either Mudrooroo is suggesting that there is more to come, or that this is a satire of conventional closure and an illustration of the way in which

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significant and powerful Aboriginal stories become reduced to shadows in official histories. These possibilities are all evident in the section from ‘Her Majesty’s diary’ at the novel’s close:

Under the supervision of Sir George was a group of the native inhabitants who [...] put on a lively show for us. What is called a corroboree, I believe.82 The white reader is perhaps signified in this most recent text by Queen Victoria herself, and the text becomes ‘a lively show’ that cannot be held as ‘authentic’ representation, and more importantly in which the protagonists are aware of their textual performance. Similar possibilities are evident in King’s work.

As First Nations’ author and critic, Gerry William, argues, the point at which Will actually becomes a part of one the photographs he is taking is the fulcrum around which the rest of King’s novel, Medicine River, rotates. It is the moment where King shows the way in which the narrator is never independent of the story.83 This technique is carried to an extreme in Green Grass, Running Water. The beginning and ending of this text is absolutely fundamental to its continuous and non-static nature. The precursor to the story, the introduction of the four Indians, and Coyote and his dream, establishes that this is self-consciously a storytelling event. Time seems to be occurring all at once. The story begins with “So — In the beginning, there was nothing. Just the water.”84 There is then, the cognitive assumption that this will be a creation story. But western preconceptions about what a creation story is are continually dissolved in the water that flows through this text:

“Where did all that water come from? Shouts that GOD.

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82 MUDROOROO. 2000, 232.
84 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 1.
“Take it easy,” says Coyote “Sit down. Relax. Watch some television.”

But there is water everywhere, says that GOD.

“Hmmm,,” says Coyote. “So there is.”

King repeatedly interpellates traditional elements of creation myths with contemporary icons. Why so? Such interpellation acts to undermine the classification of authentic culture and myths of Indigeneity being ossified into pre-history. In this way he rejects the entire teleological and diachronic conceptualisation of time and narrative structure. The passage above, the 'beginning' of the novel, is inscribed with the discourse of "in the beginning". In western terms, this is a Genesis trope, which signifies that which pre-empts all else. Concurrently, however, this beginning, in which there was nothing but water, is a result, an effect. This is indicated by the passage's last sentence, a response to Coyote's observation of all the water, “That’s true,” I says. “And here's how it happened.”

It is significant that the novel finishes at this same point. Dee Horne has pointed to the way in which such open-endedness illustrates King's assertion of multiplicity of meaning in life and text. Such strategic repetitions allow for continuous movement in the texts, and assert that although a story may have finished it is not finished with and complete; it is to be re-told and re-imagined in light of what precedes and follows it. Green Grass, Running Water is by no means a separate story to Medicine River. Characters reappear in cameo roles or new versions of themselves. This is made evident by the appearance of Will from Medicine River, as the photographer of Latisha's Indians and Dogs pictures in the Dead Dog Cafe in

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85 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 3.
86 KING, Thomas. 1993a, 3.
87 HORNE, Dee. To know the difference : mimicry, satire, and Thomas King's Green Grass, Running Water. Essays on Canadian Writing. 56, Fall 1995, 270.

But it would be a mistake to see all this continuous movement between the texts as sequential; an unending progression of interlinked literary developments. This is because notions of sequence and progression are negated again and again in the work of Thomas King and Mudrooroo. As stated above, Mudrooroo's choice to label *The Undying* as part of a series is a satirical one. As in another, though unofficial, grouping of Mudrooroo's texts, the Wildcat series, there is not so much a progressive movement but a rewriting and revisiting of literary territory. This element is, perhaps, one of the strongest parallels these authors’ textual structures share with the ‘traditional’ form of the trickster tale. Anthropologists frequently finish with the contradictions embodied in the trickster within a particular tribal group’s formations of tales and myths. For example, John Bierhorst tries to explain such contradictions and continual changes by noting the competing versions of tales offered between clans within a specific area. But Bierhorst concludes this discussion with the words of an anthropologist writing nearly one hundred years before him. He cites Franz Boaz, who struggled with the non-linear nature of such myths, on the complexities and contradictions inherent in the trickster tale:

> It would seem [...] that mythological worlds have been built up, only to be shattered again, and that new worlds were built from the fragments.  

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88 KING, Thomas. 1999a, 81-7.  
While anthropological observations often misinterpreted trickster tales, this comment identifies an interesting trickster aspect. And Mudrooroo’s and King’s writings develop in much the same way.

This non-linear process of narration is also inscribed in the themes of Thomas King's work, *Green Grass, Running Water*, which is marked by its special play with the term ‘progressive’. The concept of 'progression' as a positive term within western society is one that the author parodies quite mercilessly. One of Lionel's "three mistakes", the removal of his tonsils, is attributed to his mother's **progressiveness** by his Aunt Norma (32). Alberta has two men in her life to prevent it from **progressing** through ‘well defined stages’ (46). The obviously destructive dam is being built in the name of **progress** (122). The white woman Karen, who exoticises her Blackfoot lover as the 'Mysterious Warrior', comments on how **progressive** her father is for paying for Eli and herself to fly to the Sun Dance (225). These are just a few of many wordplays around this term. By peppering the text with this word King undermines the concept of progress and advancement, which is foundational to the colonial ideology of superiority. More than this, by refuting linearity within his literary structure, King is attempting to fashion a story-telling form, which draws on the circularity and repetition of oral cultures.

These notions of repetition and art in the re-telling are intrinsic to *Green Grass, Running Water* with its beginning/ending continuum and the four attempts to tell the "In the beginning" story correctly. These stories too, are re-visited in different forms in King's collection of short stories *One Good Story, That One*. For example, in *Green Grass, Running Water*, when Babo attempts to re-tell one of the stories the Indians told her about four ducks to the young policeman, there is interaction not only
with the repeated story, but with ‘The One About Coyote Going West’ from King's short story collection, which in turn intersects with the storyteller, Lionel James, in Medicine River, who tells Will a story about Coyote going over to the west coast.\(^9\)

Thus there is an oscillation between texts that is suggestive of a circular, even spiralling structure. This spiralling effect elides, at one level, the constraints of western genre definitions. But in the spiralling action there is woven a celebration which construes the concept of oppositional Indigenous/non-Indigenous space as meaningless.

This spiralling movement is a creative rather than a reactive act. It demonstrates, too, an important element of trickster discourse, that is, there is no separation between figure and discourse itself. As Doueihi has noted:

> The features traditionally ascribed to the Trickster — contradictoriness, complexity, deceptiveness, trickery — are all the features of the story itself

[...] If Trickster stories tell us anything, it is about the difference between and the undecidability of, discourse and story, referential and rhetorical values, signifier and signified.\(^9\)

The conceptualisation of history, truth and meaning in the telling is intrinsic to oral literature.\(^9\) The collected texts of both Thomas King and Mudrooroo not only interconnect with one another, but also spiral backwards and forwards in and out of each other, undermining cemented meaning as well as linear movement. This is made most blatant when George, in The Undying, states:


\(^9\) DOUEIHI, Anne. 1984, 308.

These thoughts of mine circled about a core of emotion which hardened and changed during the voyage and the journey became more real to me than its phantasised end. Perhaps my father too came to realise this, that the end did not matter as much as the verses of the songline which extended out and beyond this plane of being."93

The ambiguity within the trickster figure is re-played in King’s and Mudrooroo’s novels which, in turn, enliven traditional concepts of representation. As trickster is neither purely disruptive nor creative, so too is this literature neither purely disrupting colonial textuality and presence nor attempting to purely create or represent Indigenous presence. In a sense, the use of trickster motifs allow for a textualisation of the ‘messiness’ and ‘liminality‘94 which identity in the twentieth century came to embody. In addition, the usefulness of the terms ‘trickster’ and ‘discourse’ together allow for a focus on language in a reading of both King’s and Mudrooroo’s novels. Written language tricks, and written language structures can be viewed through the critical framework of trickster discourse to suggest orality. This is because trickster is the language, as Doueihi asserts, or the ‘mind trickster’ as Vizenor terms it, never fixing meaning or representation because it is continually being enunciated and re-enunciated. The way in which King and Mudrooroo attempt to enact these ideas is through a tangling of the extra-textual ‘truths’ they invest in intertextual interplay and intra-textual discourse in order to create a pastiche of ambiguous images. The thematic use of water in both authors’ oeuvre also works to suggest migrancy, movement and impermanence. This impermanence is more than post-modern because it also suggests continuity. The emphasis on movement and

93 MUDROOROO. 1998b, 19.
94 BABCOCK ABRAHAMS, Barbara quoted in William J. HYNES and William J. Doty, eds. 1993, 8.
circular orality is enacted within the structure of the texts with the references to other elements within the larger *oeuvre* of each authors’ works. The strategic repetition of the trickster and trickster discourse allows for the ‘world’ to be rebuilt endlessly.
Chapter Six

‘Rethinking Tactics’: Reinterpreting Place

This final chapter continues the discussion of interplaying stories begun in the previous chapter. It does this through an exploration of ‘created worlds’ or ‘alternative textual spaces’ in the work of both Thomas King and Mudrooroo. As has been asserted throughout this thesis, the writing of King and Mudrooroo challenges the representation of a simplified and singular image of the indigene. Therefore the fiction abounds with complex and contradictory images and silences to prevent a reader from an easily digestible and cathartic ‘pinning down’ of Indigenous identity or experience. The authors create an intricate and celebratory evocation of identity and time but also, importantly, of place. In Mudrooroo’s novel *Wild Cat Screaming* the character of Jackamara Holmes discusses representation and revolt with the eponymous character. Jackamara states that ‘Maybe we should rethink our tactics’.1 This remark lies at the heart of this chapter’s discussion of King’s and Mudrooroo’s creation of, what might be best termed, ‘alternative’ realities. Both authors are involved in processes of ‘extending the universe’2 or creating ‘maban reality’.3 The concepts implicit in these ideas (such as the conflation of times and deployment of magic as nominally accepted within the real) are not new. Both writers’ texts can be read as containing moments of magic realism. Mudrooroo’s own term ‘maban reality’ is obviously making clear gestures towards the technique of magic realism. In light of this, in this chapter I propose to employ strategies from magic realist theory and develop them according to what I identify as King’s and Mudrooroo’s patchworking of a sense of place and continuity, in order to complete my discussion.

1 MUDROOROO. *Wildcat Screaming*. Pymble, NSW: Angus and Robertson, 1995, 137.
of ideas of re-presentation and meta-discursive regimes in the work of Thomas King and Mudrooroo.

This sense of continuity is expressed in both authors’ iterations from a wide range of culturally diverse Indigenous locales in North America and Australasia. The textual space, through its multifarious Indigenous referents and stretching of the real, results in an exciting renegotiation of re-presentations of Indigenous peoples. It suggests a non-specific, pan-Indigenous sentiment. However, this does not reduce the significance of issues of space and land that are integral and complex signifiers on the Indigenous political scene. Land as a political and tangible entity is definitely present in King’s and Mudrooroo’s notions of place, but it is not contained by cultural and political specificities that are limited to the land of, say, a particular people, tribe or clan. Both authors assert the commonality of connection to land for Indigenous peoples across Australia and North America respectively through a magic realist syncreticity and a collage of tales. ‘Place’ is storied into a pan-Indigenous celebration in King’s and Mudrooroo’s work.

(i) Magic Realism: Re-imagining place

The fluid positioning of space and reality is not a new literary tactic. In fact Mudrooroo’s theoretical definition of his writing strategy draws, in part, on established literary styles originating out of Latin America and the Caribbean. Mudrooroo describes magic realism as having ‘firm grounding in the earth or country, together with an acceptance of the supernatural as part of every day reality’. He evokes a postmodern theme of ‘questioning reality’ in order to further elaborate his own writing projects, as well as those of Aboriginal writers such as Sam Watson.

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4 MUDROOROO. 1997, 97
5 MUDROOROO. 1997, 96-98
King, too, discusses the importance of magic in his storytelling, of providing ‘alternative’ views of reality:

I think magic just opens up the possibilities of the world [...] magic for me is no more than the ability to imagine that anything could happen. And [...] as long as what you make happen is within the context of the novel, and as long as you can get people to believe in that universe then anything is possible.6

And magic realism is, in many ways, a deployment of the tradition of the storyteller in a mythologised world where all things are possible.

A world of storytelling, where all things are possible, is vital for two authors interested in avoiding representativeness. If all things are possible, no one ‘thing’, or singular and fixed representation, is credible. This is perhaps one of the most useful elements of magic realism as an interpretive strategy: it does not focus on closure, the entire textual enactment being seen to operate through the interaction between two, often polarised but simultaneous versions of reality. This interplay will be expanded upon below. In addition to the avoidance of closure, the other useful element of magic realism is that critics have read the magic realist space, as a ‘postcolonial’ counter discourse.7 To some extent this ‘countering’ exists in the tension between ‘fantasy’ and ‘realism’ which is implicit in the term itself and in its historical development. A contested space between genres signifies an ambiguity that complicates notions of power. Each of these genres remains ‘suspended’ in a ‘continuous dialectic’.8 There is no question that both King’s and Mudrooroo’s texts are structured through competing narratives. The countering of particular literary

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8 SLEMON, Stephen. 1988a.
colonial/national and religious discourses has already been detailed in Chapters Two and Three of this thesis. It is also significant that the debated and debating narratives from Indigenous and non-Indigenous origins do not occur between sites that are uniformly and simplistically definable as being either 'fantasy' or 'realism'.

As discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis, the way in which transformation of discourse occurs is not simply through competition or opposing motif, the interaction is more complex, more incorporative. For example, in King’s *Green Grass, Running Water* First Woman (later re-named the Lone Ranger) is also the Eve in the Garden of Eden and leaves this paradise, not because of original sin, but because God is a ‘grouchy neighbour’. There are no clearly locatable binaries between the scientific and rational ‘reality’ and the imagined and created ‘fantasy’ here.

In fact, the contested space is often constructed out of a dialectic between equally 'fantastic' or 'real' motifs, depending on the perspective of the reader. As First Nations writer, Peter Blue Cloud, commented in response to William Bright’s request for information on the ‘mythic coyote’, “You sure Coyote is a myth?” This raises questions about the definition of King’s narrative styles. Can the section referred to above, concerning the First Woman/Eve/Lone Ranger figure, interspersed as it is with pieces of narratives concerning the lives of contemporary Native people on a Canadian reserve, be defined as a distinctively ‘fantastic’ element of the narrative

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9 See Chapter Two of this dissertation for further explication of the use of the word, ‘incorporation’, here.

10 First Woman is a Navajo creation deity, see, HIRSCHFELDER, Arlene B. and Paulette MOLIN. *Encyclopedia Of Native American Religion*. New York: Facts on File. 2000, 60.


scattered with conversely realist and contemporary elements? I argue that this is not so. These two elements are merged in a decidedly amorphous blending of narratives. In other words, in the same way that Biblical narrative is blended with First Nations’ creation story, the newly created narrative is merged with stories of contemporary life. This is carried out by the actual conversing between characters from these two narratives and also through repetition. For example, Noah, AA Gabriel, and the Lone Ranger all appear in the more magical interactions of the creation goddesses/storytellers. These are repeated in the more contemporary sections to create an organically unified narrative. The sections of the story played out on the reserve and town also feature flood, Immaculate Conception and the magic distortion of old Cowboy and Indian film plots. Some of these occurrences are obviously satirising the Christian tradition; repetition of this tradition merged with multiple stories from Indigenous origins also creates a new narrative and expression of identity.

Mudrooroo dissolves the distinctions between the ‘real’ and the ‘fantastic’ in his ‘maban reality’ novels by using these interplays to construct the subversive narrative. In the Master of the Ghost Dreaming series the battles continue, in mid-air, between giant goannas and a major First Contact historical figure turned vampire. There is no oscillation here between a clearly locatable scientific reality and its opposite, a concept of fantasy. Because of this, magic realism’s most useful analytical entry point into King’s and Mudrooroo’s creations of new worlds lies in the ability to define narrative as equally real and fantastic rather than narrative being either exclusively one or the other, or the real versus the fantastic. It is not so much that these textual worlds are fantastic and escapist; instead, magic realism allows an

13 The role of the Eliza Fraser narrative in Mudrooroo’s work has been dealt with in detail in Chapter Two.
identifying of such realms as ‘alternative’. Therefore the narrative style forces the reader to accept such ‘incredible’ happenings as momentarily ordinary.\textsuperscript{14}

Jean-Pierre Durix defines magic realism as demonstrating a very hybrid sense of reality. For Durix, the moments of magic and of realism are not separated and distinct from one another. He uses the examples of African writers such as Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe who ‘adopt the two different (and, to a European, incompatible) systems of reasoning without feeling apparent strain’.\textsuperscript{15} However, this syncretism does not mean that there is resolution between the two concepts of magic and realism, nor does it imply that they are opposite. Instead, a continual interplay exists. In this way, magic realism allows for gaps or silences between the different articulations of ‘magic’ and of ‘realism’. In fact, the gaps themselves are most important. It is in these gaps — or ‘hollows’ as Wilson Harris has termed them\textsuperscript{16} — that magic becomes accepted and (for want of a better term) ‘natural’ within the real.

In Thomas King’s 1999 novel, \textit{Truth and Bright Water}, these gaps are presented symbolically. In this book one finds the symbol of the wide-open plains surrounding the Bright Water reserve and metropolitan community, along with the river-filled chasm that divides the two communities. The significance of the vast spaces is made particularly clear in the novel in a conversation between Tecumseh (the narrator) and his father:

“\textit{You know why tourists come out here?}” he says.

\textsuperscript{14} DURIX, Jean-Pierre. 1998, 79.
\textsuperscript{15} DURIX, Jean-Pierre. 1998, 83.
\textsuperscript{16} HARRIS, Wilson quote in: Stephen SLEMON. Interview with Wilson Harris. \textit{Ariel}. 19(3), July 1988b, 47-56.
“Indians?”

“Nope.”

“Buffalo?”

“Hell, road kill is more exciting.”

“The mountains?”

“The space,” says my father. “They travel around the world to Bright Water because they’ve never seen space like this... And it scares the shit out of them.”¹⁷ [my emphasis]

The father’s identification of space as problematic for non-Indigenous tourists emphasises the subversive potential space can hold. And it is in this space that significant subversions occur. At this precise point the boy sees Rebecca, a mystical Cherokee girl, for the second time. She is standing in this ‘space’, ‘facing the wind’.¹⁸ Earlier in the text it is made clear that Rebecca is a child from the 1836 Trail of Tears, which involved the forced removal of 16 000 Cherokees from Georgia to Okalahoma, a six month trek causing the deaths of over 4 000 Cherokee people.¹⁹ King links Rebecca with these events by techniques such as describing her clothes and by having her point to fellow members of her caravan and name them as John Ross and “George Guess. He reads books.”²⁰ John Ross was the name of a Cherokee leader on the trail and George Gist was a Cherokee man who invented a Cherokee alphabet and used it to create one of the first Native American newspapers in 1828.²¹ In King’s text the mid 1800s merge with the end of the twentieth century and, indeed, with the time of creation, in that Rebecca is looking for her lost duck, the duck that helped create the world. Rebecca has a specific historical template in Rebecca

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¹⁸ KING, Thomas. 1999a, 107.
²⁰ KING, Thomas. 1999a, 102.
Neugin. Rebecca Neugin was three during the Trail of Tears and later recounted her experiences, one of which was the sadness at being forced to leave her pet duck behind when the soldiers came.²² Tecumseh does not only accept all of this as natural, but he appears to be unaware that there is anything significantly awry with a child appearing from 160 years past. He does not make the Trail of Tears connection himself; it is implicit in the narrative. Rebecca is literally able to exist because she appears in a locale that has been identified as ‘space’. It is not a concept like ‘outer space’; it is literally just the creative space between the various narratives.

Since it is founded on a continual interplay between different locales or times, this created space is never fixed. This non-fixity requires a re-evaluation of where we, as readers, situate borders and centres. Both authors reject the notion of clear borders around our perception of reality, and both also reject the necessity of centres in that perception. As has been discussed in Chapter One of this thesis, King and Mudrooroo repeatedly evoke images of borders, and also centres, in order to debunk them. This thematic preoccupation is part of my choice to read the works as partly magic realist utterances. Stephen Slemon, discussing the strategies of magic realism, has identified a major consequence of interplay as being ‘a preoccupation with images of both borders and centres, [which] work toward destabilizing their fixity.’²³ This kind of destabilizing of the border occurs not only in magic realist sections of the narrative but is symbolised in descriptions of place in both authors’ works. For example, in King’s *Truth and Bright Water*, the town named Truth is planned around a main road called Division Street. On each side there are particular shops which appear to evoke binarised dichotomies — almost a male / female split:


²³ SLEMON, Stephen. 1988a, 12.
my father’s shop [a mechanic’s] is on Division Street South along with Safeway, Tucker’s Sporting Goods, Deardorf’s real estate office, and the Coast to Coast store, while my mother’s shop [a beauty shop], Railman’s [the bar], Santucci’s grocery, and the Frontier theatre are all on Division Street North. Big business, sport and cars are geographically opposite to small business, beauty and culture. Such geographical divisions reflect the painful separation of the parents of Tecumseh, the protagonist and narrator of the novel. More than this, King is using town planning and geographic extremes to satirise the way in which gender is split in western, metropolitan society. Division Street is a constructed border, demonstrating that gender difference is a construct also. The way in which we talk about and represent things, divide and define things is again highlighted in King’s work. At other moments, too, in the novel, King elides the permanency of divisions and boundaries. Tecumseh learns on his one family holiday that the Canadian and United States border is, at certain points, situated in the middle of a lake. King highlights geographical facts to metaphorically demonstrate the landscape's ability to swallow up and wash away the significance of such borders, and shows the physical impossibility of policing and maintaining such tie-lines. It is implied that the meaning and importance of borders are mental constructs. The focus is on the meta-discursive border in order to destabilise constructed notions of identity.

There are many other such meta-discursive borders highlighted in the novel. The title of this novel, Truth and Bright Water, refers mimetically to two fictional

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24 KING, Thomas. 1999a, 30.
25 KING, Thomas. 1999a, 79.
towns on the US / Canada border located somewhere in the Alberta prairies. Only a winched, hanging bucket and the looming presence of an incomplete bridge link these two locations. Truth is the American town and Bright Water is the Canadian Indian reserve. The precarious nature of liminality or coexistence between these two locales is tragically and powerfully signified by the ‘deaths’ of the central character’s two closest confidants, his dog and his cousin. Lum, the cousin, is emblematic of the scars inflicted upon many Native American communities owing to the issues of internalised racism. He echoes the experience of ‘mother loss’ of other characters in other First Nations fiction, such as Tayo in Leslie Marmon Silko’s novel, Ceremony. Lum has moments of confusion and delusion and is the victim of the physical abuse of his violent father, these moments culminating in his leap off the bridge during the night. This is a double tragedy because the boy’s closest friend, his dog, Soldier, leaps after Lum and disappears also. But it is significant that Lum does not jump in a depressive suicide attempt, he literally races off the bridge, repeating the form of his frequent running training sessions:

“Here.” Lum smiles and hands me his stopwatch. “Time me.” He turns and faces Bright Water. “You know what I’m going to do when I hit the finish line?”

“Come on Lum.”

Lum starts across the planks, his arms against his side, his body leaning

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26 King is perhaps drawing on Leslie Marmon Silko’s use of the term ‘truth’. In her discussion of borders, particularly the racist oppression of the southern US border highway patrol men, Silko mentions a real town ‘Truth and Consequences’ on the US and Mexican border, which was close to the area in which some abuses of the border guards’ power occurred. SILKO, Leslie Marmon. The Border Patrol State. In: Majorie AGOSIN, ed. Map of Hope: Women's Writing on Human Rights: An International Literature Anthology. London: Penguin Books, 1999, 85-90. Also Ridington states that the towns that correspond to King’s imagined towns Truth and Bright Water are Sweet Grass, Montana and Coutts, Alberta. RIDINGTON, Robin. 2000, 89.

forward slightly at the hips. “I’m going to keep on going until I feel like
stopping!”

“Lum!”28

Although this is the most tragic occurrence in any of Thomas King’s texts (in that his
novels are usually humorous rather than bleak) the climax also sets up an interesting
relationship with the concept of boundaries. This event questions the boundaries
between life and death, often a thematic concern of magic realist novels, but it also
questions the boundaries around time. Lum races time, he jumps out of time and into
the mist, he refuses to stop at any ‘finishing line’. This breaking of the boundaries of
time is also achieved through Lum’s character’s connections with myth and history.
Because of his bad eye, Lum is connected with Apache beliefs about ‘coyote
sickness’. He is intrinsically connected to his cousin, Tecumseh. The two boys are
Tecumseh, ‘thinker, … story teller…minstrel’ and Lum, ‘runner and …warrior’. As
Robin Ridington has demonstrated, the dialectic dependence between Lum and
Tecumseh evokes the image of the creative oral tradition figures — the left and right-
handed twins.29 Lum is also connected to the historical figure of Geronimo.
Geronimo was said to have ‘coyote power, ghost power, and power over guns’ and
had a bad eye.30 These links show the way in which King’s narrative celebrates
story’s ability to move fluidly through time and space without regard for bordered
and restricted notions of both time and space.

Mudrooroo also examines the concept of boundaries and borders, although
this is not such a thematic presence as it is in the work of King. This is probably due
to the very different foundation of the Australian and North American nations.

29 RIDINGTON, Robin. 2000, 90.
30 RIDINGTON, Robin. 2000, 90.
Australia has no land borders with any other nation and has a European penal history. In terms of the inherent possibilities for magic realism to transcend ‘the real’ and to circumvent boundaries that are implicit in ‘the real’, Mudrooroo’s incarceration motif symbolises the ultimate containing and restricting of the self. Mudrooroo’s Wildcat series occurs primarily in or around Fremantle prison and, in each of the texts, the whole notion of imprisonment is warped while, at the same time, the author unveils its brutalities. In the first text, *Wild Cat Falling*, the as yet un-named protagonist returns to the prison in a cyclical-like meeting of beginning and end points. He returns with additional knowledge of his people and some sense of his own ‘dreaming’ owing to his interactions with his Uncle Wally. In *Wild Cat Screaming* he is able to use this knowledge to escape the prison walls; prison walls symbolising restrictive ways of knowing reality. He exists in a ‘dreaming’-like state, as Wildcat exclaims after existential ‘dreaming’ experiences: ‘Man, I can fly, and, perhaps, perhaps I can teach others to fly […] We’ll win through, all of us.’ This sentiment highlights a vital parallel between the works of Thomas King and Mudrooroo, the projection of inherent survival, or survivance as discussed in the last chapter. In this assertion of continuing and inherent survival, the whole notion of representation becomes problematised. If past representations of Indigenous people as ‘dying’ out, or savages to be exterminated, are repudiated because Indigenous people were already always there, there can be no argument for a special need to define them for posterity. In such an argument posterity is an idea based on the special need to definitively represent for ‘others’ satisfaction.

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31 It is warped because the prisoners actually control much of the activities within the prison. This is particularly so in *Wildcat Screaming*.
32 MUDROOROO. 1995, 142.
In *Wildcat Screaming* boundaries, symbolised through the prison walls and the institution and employees of the prison system, are inverted. The prisoners are able to move beyond the walls of the gaol to create what they call ‘a panopticon society’. They use the term ‘panopticon’ as a euphemism for a pyramid-selling money-making venture, ostensibly promoting prisoner rehabilitation. Because the prisoners are in control of the panopticon, rather than is traditionally the case\(^{33}\), the whole proposition of surveillance, punishment and ‘re-habilitation’ becomes laughable. This elision of boundaries is made complete in *Doin Wild Cat* when the boundaries around the reality of the truth of the prison experience dissolve altogether. As I have already discussed, Wild Cat returns to the now defunct prison to film a cinematographic portrayal of the book that he wrote about his experiences. Wild Cat is aware that the events are, indeed, fiction, are representations, and as such cannot be relied upon as ‘authentic’, despite his desire not to have his truth doctored:

> This vision is enough for me. I don’t trust what Al is doin to me script. Got to keep an eye on im, but then I wait for a cup of tea, an forget about it. So much as been changed that it ain’t a true story anymore, but it never ad bin.
> It’s just a book, just a filim like any other one, but if it’s like that, ow come I feel so bad about the changes made? \(^{34}\)

There is a tension expressed here between representation as truth-telling and thus a binding categorisation, and representation as an impossible means for telling the truth. In the end, it is the attempt that is advocated and, because re-presentation is

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always in process, the narrator exists in a liminal space, he is always in between positions.

The liminality of the narrator can also be expressed in terms of the spaces in between understandings, or more importantly, misunderstandings. The key point is that the narrator (who is not necessarily the protagonist of the novel) is so misinformed that literally anything can happen. Magic realist possibility is realised by the non-fixed and destabilised position of the narrator. For example, a significant element of both writers’ fictions involves the central character — the lost men referred to in Chapter Four — being destabilised by events around them because of multiple voices and the mis-distribution of information. In Mudrooroo’s Underground Jangamuttuk, the ‘father’, sends George into the bowels of the earth. It is a mission that George is unsure of and through which he must literally feel his way. A story, told by George retrospectively, is repeatedly thrown into the present tense by an evocation of confusion and disorientation caused by its non-sequential events. George asks questions, but they are relayed in a panicking rushed tone and there is none to respond to them:

Murder had been done and where was my father, Jangamuttuk? Where was Wadawaka? In a panic I rushed to find them.35

This storyteller seems to be curiously unaware of the significance of the events around him. This is particularly true of his relationship with the European female vampire, Amelia Fraser, especially in his submissions to her mesmerising allure. The fact that the narrator does not directly challenge non-realist happenings, or even

seems to be unaware or non-cognisant of them, allows the reader to in turn accept such events as magic realist rather than fantastic.

The Gothic qualities of Mudrooroo’s fiction that create a mysterious, unspeakable narrative have been discussed at length in Chapter Three of this thesis. Adam Shoemaker has pointed out ‘that what appears to be is not necessarily so’ in Mudrooroo’s *The Kwinkan.* The text plots the interviewed narrator’s slackening grip on reality, in which his own identity and the relationships between the other characters become completely obfuscated. It remains unclear at the end of the text how many levels of espionage and counter-espionage the Aboriginal character Jackamara is involved in. This results in very real gaps, textual fissures and rifts in the narrative flow. Because we are not sure of the ‘answer’ to our questions as readers, the possible options are extended. For example, it is never explained how it is that Jackamara, apparently nearly flayed to death by the alluring Islander leader Carla, later becomes a honorary governor in her country. The reader is not able to demarcate hierarchies or clear power relations, thus such hierarchies are questioned.

The technique of leaving elements of plot and character unresolved also constructs an exposure of the power and oppression involved in the transcription of Aboriginal oral stories by non-Indigenous anthropologists. There is an inversion of this colonising position in that it is now a white narrator who has no authority over his story and is now excluded from certain knowledges. These rifts and fissures also allow space for, or at the very least set the scene for, the reader to accept the ‘magic’ present in the text. King’s and Mudrooroo’s writings attempt to embrace

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37 SHOEMAKER, Adam. 1993, 128.
In order to open up the possibilities within extended reality, similar devices of mystery are evident in King’s work. In his *Truth and Bright Water* the teenage narrator relays events, sometimes with his own interpretation of their meaning, but it is never certain what is occurring. One clear example of this is in the boy’s relationship to his mother and aunt. Tecumseh believes the tattooed letters on his aunt’s hand, AIM represent ‘American Indian Movement’. The narrative possibilities and the available variations in interpretation are symbolised in an ambiguous aspect of the tattoo. Aunt Cassie tattooed her own hand, using a mirror. So while words or images, as symbolised by the letters on Cassie’s hand, are fixed forever, tattooed, their interpretation is not a simple matter of reading. If the letters are viewed through the inflective power of a mirrored surface the meaning is changed. Such reinterpretation of this emblem through the mirror is joined by the suggestion throughout the text that the aunt may have, long ago, lost a girl child.

The symbol of the mirror is, of course always poignant in a magic realist elucidation, because the author who arguably created the prototypical magic realist text, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, plays with the image of the ‘speaking mirror’ in order to relay the dialectic process involved in such narratives. As Slemon has argued, this dialectic finds expression between the “‘codes of recognition” within the inherited language and those imagined codes […] that characterize a culture’s “original relations”’.  

38 SLEMON, Stephen. 1988a, 12.
writer, has referred to the process of imagining place as dealing in ‘broken mirrors’.  

In King’s text, the mirror reflects an overt political activism in response to the representational act of displaying the pain of losing a child. And the certainty that child loss is the intended meaning of the letters on Cassie’s hand is unclear, opaque, and uncertain, as it is implied that the letters might stand for the female name Mia — or they might not.  

These disordered and unexplained events are, however, not meaningless. As Robin Ridington has suggested, the events evoke a contextualised discourse that requires knowledge of the cultural milieu and even of the personal context of the author for deciphering. This works to disable reader accessibility and consumption of text as easily recognisable representation. In addition, this malleable formation escapes singular interpretation and sets the scene for possibly extended understandings of the real, for a timeless magic or Mudrooroo’s terms maban reality. The authors do not work on polemics that contrast disorder versus logic; they craftily remove order and re-insert it differently to create a new universe, a universe in which otherwise inconceivable or anachronistic dialogues become plausible.

(ii) Non-specific places: patchworking a pan-Indigenous place

An important marker of the textual ‘universe’ created by King and Mudrooroo is a sense of time occurring all at once, as has been repeatedly asserted in this dissertation. King and Mudrooroo’s incorporation of a wide range of historical and contemporary textual elements from predominantly western and colonising cultures, particularly discussed in Chapters Two and Three of this thesis, is part of this process. This responsive and, more importantly, incorporative element of the authors’ works is

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40 KING, Thomas. 1999a, 54-5.
42 The ability of the magic realist novel to realise this potential is a theme taken up in several of Salman Rushdie’s essays, see particularly: *Outside the Whale*. In: Salman RUSHDIE. 1991.
also vital to their discussion of re-presentation, in that the writing refutes past colonising representations of the indigene. At this point I would like to discuss another vital element of the treatment of re-presentation and that is the collage of ‘stories’ or referents from Indigenous cultures. Mudrooroo’s and King’s writings are characterised by a refusal to situate a single representation of Indigenous peoples, a refusal to be, in effect, representative. So timelessness and survivance are evoked through the merging of the cultural productions of a number of different locales, centred thematically on Indigenous motifs. This process has been partly indicated above, in the discussions of the mythical and historical evocations of the character Lum, in Thomas King’s *Truth and Bright Water*. To locate all of the different sites on the map may be an impossible task, particularly considering Thomas King’s own theory concerning textual referents, namely that a white reader is deliberately excluded from some elements of the textual meaning. King himself suggests four vantage points from which to read Native fiction. One of these he terms ‘associational’ and lists its qualities as being focused on community — not the individual — and of being organised outside principles of conflict between cultures. King stresses that ‘associational’ literature is not structured by climaxes or resolutions. A significant quality of this style of fiction, says King, is that its reading by, or access to, non-Natives is limited and particular. While King does not specifically classify his own writing as associational, it is still evident that he includes absences and silences in his work. The example of Aunt Cassie’s tattoo in *Truth and Bright Water* referred to above is arguably a respectful treatment of Indigenous

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43 See section (i) of this chapter.
44 There are however reading notes to King’s text *Green Grass, Running Water* which provide a comprehensive excavation the many referents in this novel. See Flick, Jane. Reading Notes for *Green Grass, Running Water* (including list of works by Thomas King). *Canadian Literature*. 161/162, Summer/Autumn 1999, 140-172.
female pain through associations that may be read clearly by some groups and not by others.

Both authors engage in a validation of non-western conceptualisations of land and space by actually enlarging the specificity of that space — but only as seen within an Indigenous paradigm. And it is that paradigm itself which is so non-specific for the non-Indigenous reader. However, neither author ever devalues the enormous significance of specific cultural ties; in fact, both authors discuss the significance of such ties at numerous points. But they both suggest, in theoretical writing and through fictional works, that pan-Indigeneity is not mutually exclusive with specificity. Rather, they can be coterminous. King makes this clear in his introduction to the anthology of Native Canadian fiction, *All My Relations*:

“All my relations” is at first a reminder of who we are and of our relationship with both our family and our relatives. It also reminds us of the extended relationship we share with all human [with] all the animate and inanimate forms that can be seen or imagined [...] Within Native cultures, as with other cultures, this world of relationships is shared through language and literature [...] But, as Native storytellers have become bilingual [...] they have created both a more pan-Native audience as well as a non-Native audience.

To this end King and Mudrooroo arrange an array of images from what might be termed Indigenous cultural sites. In all of King and Mudrooroo’s novels a sort of ‘polyphonic’ quality enables a textual formation to occur through dialogue between a number of different referents, characters and authorial positions.

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47 Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of polyphony is an interesting theory through which to view this multiple compilation of different Indigenous stories. Bakhtin has argued that through a process of polyphony or many voices, particularly evident in classic novels such as the work of Dostoevsky, a transcendence
This multi-layered, polyphonic quality is enabled through some significant textual references and inclusions. This quality is obviously evident in the discursive interactions and tensions which occur between the many different characters in these texts. Even in those of Mudrooroo’s texts that relay events through the first person, there is no sense that this storyteller occupies a privileged understanding of the narrative. In fact, often the opposite is true. In turn, textual references seem to draw on a wide variety of ‘Indigenous’ stories, and are an important element in the discussion of the ‘space’ which Mudrooroo and Thomas King similarly evoke for the reader. The collage-like quality to their work, in terms of culturally-Indigenous referents, appears to be a mapping of a textual landscape which thematically and geographically encompasses pan-Indian and pan-Aboriginal empowerment.

At one level these inclusions operate to keep the stories living and evolving, re-empowering through repetition. Mudrooroo has argued that the recording of traditional Australian Indigenous stories has often taken place; or rather, has been relegated to the realm of simplified myths for children, and he has sought to use some of these stories in his own adult writing.\textsuperscript{48} Mudrooroo has also discussed the possibility of elevating the importance of Aboriginal song cycles within Australian culture. He points out that ‘myths and legends’ are terms loaded with inferior connotations, but that such labels can be positively re-imagined in terms of a foundational canon or nationalist narratives for Australian culture, as a whole, in

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item of classification or of single truths is made possible. Such novels feature voices from many sources but give them equal weighting, creating a dialectic rather than a monologic space. See: Gary Saul MORSON and Caryl EMERSON. \textit{Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics}. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990, 465.
\item MUDROOROO. 1997, 98.
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much the same way that ancient Greek and Roman stories form the basis of much of British cultural production.49

Mudrooroo refers to the ethnographer, T.G.H Strehlow, to emphasise his point. Strehlow is an important choice for Mudrooroo because, unlike the Berndts, some of the most famous recorders of traditional Indigenous oral literature, Strehlow appears to attribute major literary worth to the song cycles that he records:

[...] the imagery found here [in the songcycles of the Arrente people of Central Australia] does harmonize with the outward shape and inward spirit of our continent.50

It is clear that Mudrooroo often deploys Aboriginal orature selected from Strehlow’s collections. To cite one instance, the Bandicoot in The Bandicoot Ancestor Song of Ilbalintja, digging through the earth, wounded and ostracised by the great ancestor spirit and inscribed with spiritual importance, is reminiscent of the ‘shaman’ Bandicoot in Mudrooroo’s novel, Underground. This is evident through a comparison of the two following passages:

Rich yellow soil!

Impenetrable hollow.

Red and orange soil!

Impenetrable hollow.

Plain studded with white woods!

Impenetrable hollow.

...Crooking their little claws they are raking grass together;

With balled paws they are raking grass together.

49 MUDROOROO. 1997, 21-3.
50 STREHLOW, T.G.H quoted in MUDROOROO. 1997, 32.
They are snoring now —
Half-asleep they are snoring now.

[and in Mudrooroo’s text]

There’s nothing like burrowing down into the soft warm earth or slashing
your way through a hard hot one. Just imagine my front claws loosening up
the dirt and the hind ones pushing it behind me. I go down and down until I
get tired and then curl up into a tight ball far from the light to dream on about
what is far below where the stones glow.  

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The textual parallel between these two pieces lies in the sequential patterning of soil,
digging, and sleep, in a highly spiritualised and evocative context. The tone is made
analogous by the use of the words ‘Rich […] soil’ then ‘Impenetrable hollow’ in the
first piece, and ‘soft warm earth’ and ‘hard hot one’ [earth] in the latter. It is also
clear that Mudrooroo is aware of this song cycle because he includes this section in
his theoretical work, _Milli Milli Wangka_. This is not the only example in which
Mudrooroo’s work appears to collide with another published version of traditional
Aboriginal literature. For example, the ‘mischievous’ figure of the crow features in
both Mudrooroo’s _Doctor Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the
World_ and in _The Undying_. In the former text it is Waau, a name meaning ‘crow’,
who facilitates Wooreddy’s greatest moment of epiphany. It is Waau who tells
Wooreddy:

‘Everything comes in twos, but behind them stands only one.’ […]

Wooreddy began to feel a terrible dread rising in him. It seemed that all that
he had believed, the scheme that had supported his life, had been but part of

51 This echo is not exact as the two pieces are entirely different forms. But there are positive
reminiscents of the earlier songcycle in Mudrooroo’s creation of the Bandicoot. See _The Bandicoot
Ancestor Song of Ilbalintja_, as recorded in MUDROOROO. 1997, 31-37; and MUDROOROO. 1999,
61.
the truth. Things were not the simple black and white he had imagined them to be.\textsuperscript{52}

It is vital that it is ‘crow’ who highlights meaning beyond black and white simplicity for Wooreddy. Unaipon’s crow is a figure whose attempts at game playing and trickery end up in creating many positive elements of the physical world.\textsuperscript{53} He is both good and bad, making mistakes frequently.\textsuperscript{54} Mudrooroo’s adaptation of this textual referent follows a similar pattern.

Mudrooroo’s text arguably draws on the South Australian Indigenous tales that Unaipon related, and fuses them with Central Australian Arrente stories as well as Tasmanian stories.\textsuperscript{55} The Tasmanian element is present with the inclusion of the characters, Jangamuttuk and Ludjee, reincarnations of Wooreddy and Truggernanni, who are vital to Indigenous stories of first contact in Tasmania. This patchworking operates to create an imagined space, a space that suggests non-representativeness because it stands for the multiplicity in identity rather than simplicity and singular interpretation of identity. Pan-Indigeneity shows the impossibility of finding one image to stand for the all.

This notion is supported by the presence of a multiplicity of other, more specifically locatable emblems of traditional stories within Mudrooroo’s fiction. One of the most prominent inter-textual references comes from Dick Roughsey’s


\textsuperscript{53} The crow is a significant figure because “The Mischievous Crow” is the longest and most complicated of the stories collected and recorded by David Unaipon, one of the earliest published Aboriginal writers. UNAIPON, David. Legendary tales of the Australian Aborigines. Edited by Stephen Muecke and Adam Shoemaker. Carlton, VIC: Melbourne University Press, 2001.

\textsuperscript{54} UNAIPON, David. 2001.

\textsuperscript{55} The Arrente element is discussed above in the comparisons of Strehlow’s recording of Arrente bandicoot song cycles with Mudrooroo’s work.
children’s stories. Roughsey’s first story, *The Giant Devil Dingo*, was published in 1973.\(^{56}\) The figure, Giant Devil Dingo, appears in Mudrooroo’s 1999 book *Underground*, and also as a poem published in an Australian journal. This poem rewrites *Giant Devil Dingo* in a doctored Aboriginal English style version, ‘Giant Debil Dingo’.\(^{57}\)

Another children’s book, *The Quinkans*, was published in 1978 as a collaborative effort between Roughsey and Percy Trezise. In his novel, it is unclear whether Mudrooroo is using an alternative version of the (Qu)Kwinkan tale or is adjusting the published version of the tribal story himself. Similar features exist in the stories but they are differently ordered. Mudrooroo’s story, told by the character Jackamara by a campfire, has elongated thin creatures, Kwinkans, with large, deformed and impotent phalluses.\(^{58}\) Roughsey’s children’s tale also has elongated Quinkans who also live in the ‘cracks of the rocks’, and Quinkans with misshapen ‘tails’ between their legs. But these two features belong to opposing types of Quinkans, the Timara and the Imjim respectively. Roughsey’s work suggests that these two creatures are not clear binaries of good and evil, in that the Timara do like to play tricks on people but do not condone the Imjim habit of stealing children.\(^{59}\) Mudrooroo takes this suggestion further by combining the features in one creature. By presenting the phallus as a clear and predominant feature of the tale, Mudrooroo also rejects the tendency to sanitise Indigenous myths and to disavow limiting the readership to children. This highlighting of the phallus also operates to satirise the

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\(^{58}\) MUDROOROO. *The Kwinkan*. Pymble, NSW: Angus and Robertson, 1993c, 8.

limiting of Aboriginal myth to children's fables. Mudrooroo’s story is additionally sexualised and gendered by the eerie presence of the Gyinggi woman. In Roughsey’s story it is the Imjim who turn children into Imjims. Conversely in Mudrooroo’s story it is the seductive, and horrific Gyinggi woman who transforms men into Kwinkans. What differentiates Mudrooroo’s appropriations from anthropological appropriations is that rather than reducing, simplifying or sanitising and making artefacts of traditional stories, the author collages, politicises, and promotes the living, creative element of such tales.

It is important, however, to critically examine this presence of the Gyinggi woman in Mudrooroo’s re-presentations because she is such strong image of the power of Aboriginal myth. Under a feminist analysis this evocation can be perceived as another example of Mudrooroo scripting female sexuality with fear and horror. This is a plausible argument, particularly because of the repeated nature of this motif. It runs from the author’s 1978 work, Long Live Sandawara, with the simplified description of the teenager Rita, whose boyfriend bears posterior burns from Rita’s nymphomaniac attacks in the kitchen, through to the surreally Gothic depiction of Amelia Fraser in the author’s most recent novels, the Master of the Ghost Dreaming series. Amelia performs violent fellatio in acts of vampiric emasculation:

Using one of my fangs delicately, I slit the front of his trousers and take his strong and virile member in my mouth […] He gives a great bellow of pain and rage as my teeth meet together […] I suck away his strength and it is the most wonderful experience I have yet had.\textsuperscript{61}

The frequency of such passages throughout Mudrooroo’s work allows for the writings to be read through feminist interpretations of the Gyinggi woman as a repetition of patriarchal fear of female power. Again, it must be noted that while I am well aware of such readings, it is also interesting that reproduction of this nightmare image is a direct contrast to the way in which women were viewed in earlier non-Indigenous imaging of the indigene. For example, in Xavier Herbert’s Poor Fellow, My Country, Aboriginal women do not suck strength in sexual intercourse; they revive it, and ritualised mutilation of genitals is committed by Aboriginal men. Such images are locked into semiotic fields that reduce their function to mythic women who energise male identity. In Mudrooroo’s text the ‘mythic’ woman is sometimes made white, in the case of Amelia, and always subverts rather than sustains white male identity.

The Gyinggi woman in The Kwinkan is primarily an evocation of the potency of Aboriginal myth. This story stands as the central metaphor of the entire text. Her presence is the vehicle for the destabilising of the pre-eminence of the European world. The un-named white narrator continually refers to his body as wasting away:

Now too thin, too thin. You know power inflates, loss of power deflates. It’s a poison draining the flesh from the bones, just like that Gyinggi woman Jackamara went on about.

This image operates on twin levels. The 'dis-ease' works both because the narrator is shown to be initially — and stupidly — doubtful of feminine power, but also that this 'curse' is emblematic of the white Australian discomfort surrounding the necessary

62 For example, see descriptions of Nanango, Jeremy Delancy’s Aboriginal wife, as symbol of his connection with land or the disturbing sacrifice of Savitra in HERBERT, Xavier. Poor Fellow, My Country. Sydney: Collins Fontana Books. 1975, 1294 and 1436 respectively.
63 MUDROOROO. 1993c, 18.
loss of an assumed superiority in recent international relations. The main problem for the narrator is one of misunderstanding events around him. This white un-named narrator’s subjectivity becomes uncertain and unclear due to his own lies and his attempts at political and economic machination. He is operating according to western, Euro-centric assumptions of racial superiority and capitalist consumerism, and he symbolises their inefficiency and redundancy. The cognitive framework the white narrator draws on to understand his environment, including the Australian outback and the unnamed South Pacific country, is shown to be drastically inadequate.

In *The Kwinkan* Mudrooroo reinscribes the landscape so that it is possible for Aboriginal stories to hold supreme potency and power. This is something the narrator stutteringly admits:

> [...] such a man taken or lured by those women is sucked dry. He becomes a *Kwinkan*, thin and elongated, living in the rocks and crevasses, afraid to face the light of day and other men. He loses his nerve, just as I’ve lost my nerve...

... Well, stories are stories and Jacky had a fund of them, and most of them meaningless, that’s what I thought then [...].

The supernatural or maban reality evoked by the *Kwinkan* story at the beginning of the novel loads the narrator’s interactions with the sophisticated, mocking and predatory Carla and Miss Tamada with metaphorical significance. By including the Gyinggi woman Mudrooroo is able to subvert the narrator’s patriarchal assumptions.

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64 Epili Hau’ofa has also effectively used fiction to satirise Western dealings with the Pacific. HAUOFA, Epeli. *Tales of the Tikongs*. Auckland, NZ: Penguin Books, 1983. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) actually issues guides and runs seminars on the necessity of self-effacing techniques in dealings with Asia and the South Pacific. These are initiatives to combat the crisis assumed supremacy brings to international trade negotiations. QUANCHI, Max. Personal interview with Clare Archer-Lean. Carseldine, QLD, 3 April 2002.

65 MUDROOROO. 1993c, 6.
of male superiority into a wider metaphor of power inherent in the white Australian ethos. Mudrooroo has commented on the anomaly of the Australian male, particularly in Queensland:

One of the things [...] living in Queensland for a couple of years I really had problems understanding the Queensland male character.66

Read this way, the emasculating effect on the narrator is less of an exploration of men’s fear of female sexuality and rather a creation of an alternative reality in which white males cannot assert authority over anything, not even their own words or physical being.

Thomas King’s work is not plagued by such considerations of gender. But he does set up a similar patchworking of Indigenous motifs to create a pan-Indigenous and empowered textual space or place. Particular images embody this textual process within King’s narrative. It is vital, for example, that the river in Truth and Bright Water is named the ‘Shield’. Ridington has referred to Plains Indian shields as ‘immensely important and multivocal symbols’. He expands on this, saying:

A warrior paints his shield with designs representing his visionary encounters with supernatural helpers. Shields are icons that actualise the power of stories… [they] bring stories to life … [and] facilitate communication across the divides of languages and traditions.67

This image of the shield is important because First Nations peoples' connection to the land or place is through a process of *storying* it. Kimberley Blaeser states that:

Native people understand that the landscape itself is storied, that it is peopled with our past and the imprints of the spiritual. The natural and what is often

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67 RIDINGTON, Robin. 2000, 90.
called the supernatural are understood as being woven together in the essence of place, both realms a natural part of our experience. And this weaving is explored in story.⁶⁸

The place King writes about in *Truth and Bright Water* is, in one sense, imaginary, in that the names of the town and the reserve are fictional. The place is also an imaginary space because it is a pastiche but, as Blaeser asserts, the storyteller is able to map out space for specific purposes. She suggests that the function of story, in relation to place, is to ‘create or carry on a sense of place’.⁶⁹ Additionally, she points towards the changing position of land and other images of nature:

> The change in mind and spirit they [many Native authors] seek through their natural encounters and their writing they seem to understand as a necessary step in the move toward more responsible care-taking, which might then assure continued survival.⁷⁰

According to this schema, creatures such as animals move from their traditional 'storied' role of fulfilling physical and moral requirements for the people to perform a different function: to relate what she identifies as the current use of storied landscapes and mindscapes for ‘personal and societal healing’.⁷¹ She clearly advocates a pan-Indigenous development of these discussions of place since her article includes poems she has written about such diverse regions as the Canadian prairies and the Californian desert. Similarly, Salman Rushdie has described his own narration of *Midnight’s Children* as being ‘fragmented’ because of the impossibility of relaying an authentic place through the process of memory.⁷² In Rushdie's dialectic this is not

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⁶⁹ BLAESER, Kimberly. 1999, 97.
⁷⁰ BLAESER, Kimberly. 1999, 96.
⁷¹ BLAESER, Kimberly. 1999, 96.
a negative process. As Paula Gunn Allen points out, this process can, indeed, be a positive one, one of re-membering, a recuperative and celebratory act of survivance. In other words, the fragments can be compiled in order to construct a new picture of place.

The reconstruction of an image of place from fragments allows for that place to be un-representative yet celebrating survivance at the same time. This is exactly the sort of construction of place that occurs in Thomas King’s novel, *Truth and Bright Water*. King has made it clear that this book is a pan-Indigenous novel, using this label himself. This may be the reason that King changes his technique slightly including themes of alcohol abuse, swearing, domestic violence and teenage suicide to vary and expand his narrative style. But the techniques of pastiching numerous stories in order to create an extended version of the universe are still present. The motif of the storied pastiche is embodied in the symbolic connotations of the name of the river, ‘the Shield’, but it is also evoked in the patchwork quilt sewed by Tecumseh’s mother Helen. The quilt embodies the entire changing and important mapping involved in such stories. The boy, Tecumseh, and his father believe that there are representations of the two of them in the quilt. There are also many strange objects sewn into it, like chicken feet, razors, hair and earrings. Thus, the quilt appears to be a self-conscious reflection of King’s own 'textualisation’ of place:

The geometric forms slowly softened and turned into freehand patterns that looked a lot like trees and mountains and people and animals, and before long, my father said you could see Truth in one corner of the quilt and Bright Water

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74 KING, Thomas. Personal interview. 1998.
in the other with the Shield flowing through the fabrics in tiny diamonds and fancy stitching.\textsuperscript{75} Again, there is an evocation of place through a particular narrative; in this case the act of story-making and thus place-creation occurs through Helen’s sewing. The same ‘pattern’ applies to King’s storytelling. The author’s tale of ‘Truth and Bright Water’ frames an act of storying place into being. It is extremely significant that the chapter, focusing on the amazing quilt, ends with the observation that the vestment, although it displayed sharp and dangerous things, was safe ‘as long as you were under the quilt and weren’t moving around on the top trying to get inside’.\textsuperscript{76} Whether this statement is a warning of the son to his father regarding his quizzing of his mother, or even a statement addressed at the literary reviewers and critics of First Nations literature, it is difficult to tell.

Perhaps it is relevant to all such audiences at the same time in the same, appropriate way. I believe it speaks very directly to the over-riding theme of this dissertation, the refusal by these authors to act as literary representatives. By this it is meant that the authors use motifs such as this quilt to suggest that while place is being storied or trickster is being celebrated, the reader should be warned against trying to use the novel to know Indigenous experience. King is clearly cautioning reader against ‘moving around on the top trying to get inside’.

The image of the patchwork quilt is vital for an analysis of King’s construction of pan-Indian themes in this novel. Like Mudrooroo, King collages images from across elements of Native North American culture. King is clearly

\textsuperscript{75} KING, Thomas. 1999a, 61.
\textsuperscript{76} KING, Thomas. 1999a, 62.
influenced by Indigenous narratives from across North America. He completed his
doctorate on oral literature and has been teaching Native literature at universities for
many years. He has been quoted as saying that Harry Robinson, a traditional
Okanagan storyteller, is one of his major influences. An examination of the
compilation of Robinson’s oral tales firmly supports this claim. The following two
extracts are taken from Robinson’s story of the First people and the beginning of
King’s *Green Grass, Running Water* respectively:

God made the sun.

I said he made the sun,

but he didn’t use a hammer or any knife or anything
to make the sun.

Just on his thought.

He just think should be sun so he could see.

He just think and it happened that way.

Then after that he could see.

All water.

Nothing but water.

[King's text is as follows.]

So.

In the beginning there was nothing. Just the water.

Coyote was there, but Coyote was asleep. That Coyote was asleep and that
Coyote was dreaming. When that Coyote is dreaming, anything can happen.

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78 ROOKE, Constance. Interview with Thomas King. *World Literature Written in English*. 30(2),
Autumn 1990, 75.
79 ROBINSON, Harry. *Write it on Your Heart: The Epic World of an Okanagan Storyteller*. Compiled
I can tell you that. \textsuperscript{80} The similarities here are clear. The four women in \textit{Green Grass Running Water} are also taken from traditional Indigenous stories. First Woman is a Navajo goddess with links to creation stories as well as to the tales of the earth diver making the world.\textsuperscript{81} First Woman was also a deity evoked in political negotiations for land and place between the United States Government and the Navajo in 1868. As a Navajo negotiator reiterated:

\begin{quote}
First Woman when she was created, gave us this piece of land and created it specially for us. […] I hope you will not ask me to go to any country except my own.\textsuperscript{82}
\end{quote}

Another interesting parallel between King's novels and particular cultural beliefs and practices of First Nations' peoples, is in the labelling of Coyote’s dream. The dream perceives himself to be a god. But he is corrected by Coyote and identified as a ‘contrary' dream of a dog. This may be a reference to the Plains’ Indians tradition of a 'contrary', someone who lives their life backwards.\textsuperscript{83} Traditional oral stories about women or animals falling from the sky in order to dive down and pluck up mud to create the world are repeated and recreated in King’s works. The plurality and multiplicity of these stories, along with the importance of their cultural and regional differences, are portrayed in King’s \textit{Truth and Bright Water}. This is especially so in the conversation between the girl child from the past and the central teenage character Tecumseh:

\begin{quote}
“Some people think a duck is a silly thing,” says the girl. “But it was a duck who helped to create the world.”
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{80} KING, Thomas. 1993a, 1.
\textsuperscript{81} HIRSCHFELDER, Arlene B. and Paulette MOLIN. 2000, 60.
\textsuperscript{82} BARBONCITO quoted in Judith NIES. 1996, 277.
\textsuperscript{83} FLICK, Jane. Reading notes for Thomas King’s \textit{Green Grass, Running Water}. In Canadian Literature. 161/162, Summer/Autumn 1999, 144.
“Ducks are cool,” I tell her. “I have a dog and he’s pretty silly.”

“When the world was new and the woman fell out of the sky, it was a duck who dove down to the bottom of the ocean and brought up the mud for the dry land.”

“Great.”

“Some people think it was a muskrat or an otter.” The girl steps out of the shadows. In the shade she looks fine, but in the light, she looks strange, pale almost translucent. “But it wasn’t.”

The woman who ‘falls out of the sky’ in this quotation connects with other creation stories which King recreates in Green Grass, Running Water. As discussed above, this is couched in terms of the Seneca story of the creation of Turtle Island. The dog, ‘Soldier’, is also an important figure. It is significant that the dog is named ‘Soldier’ in terms of the inclusion of Indigenous narratives since the ‘dog soldiers’ were an important part of resistance movements during the late 1800s. This symbolic name is also explained intra-textually when the narrator’s father, Elvin, tells his son of the ‘dog soldiers’ the ‘bravest men in the tribe [...] who stayed behind and protected the people from attack’. These references to significant events in First Nations’ histories of resistance are common in King’s work and also give his narratives a constant atmosphere — not only of timelessness — but of time-span.

Indeed, these references from traditional First Nations’ oral narratives and ‘mythologies’ (for want of a better word) are accompanied by other Indigenous-sourced references. As has been discussed above, the girl Rebecca is a significant

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84 KING, Thomas. 1999a, 102.
85 FLICK, Jane. 1999, 147.
86 Young men refusing to join the reservation system, would form bands with men from other tribes, most notably the ‘Cheyenne dog soldiers’. NIES, Judith. 1996, 276.
87 KING, Thomas. 1999a, 185.
and quasi-mystical presence. Her experience of dispossession allows for clear connections with the 1838 ‘Trail of Tears’. Like Mudrooroo’s reappropriation of the figures of Trugernanni and Sandawara, King selects segments from many First Nations’ histories of resistance, and he achieves this primarily through a process of naming. There are thousands of examples of such naming parallels in King’s texts, but the most significant lies in his naming of his most recent central character as Tecumseh.

The notion of gaps between meanings is very significant in the choice of name. This is firstly because a name in King's lexicon is rarely used for the main character of this novel, who is typically referred to only as 'I'. Only on a few occasions is the teenage character of Truth and Bright Water referred to by his first name, and he is usually addressed according to his position in the community. This gap allows for an assertion of the community over the individual, something Jace Weaver has asserted is of prime importance in much First Nations fiction:

Native literature both reflects and shapes contemporary Native identity and community and that what distinguishes it and makes it a valuable resource is what I term in this study ‘communitism’ [...] a combination of the words ‘community’ and ‘activism’. The rarity of the use of Tecumseh’s actual first name illustrates this focus. This is because Tecumseh is primarily, ‘boy’ or ‘grandson’, or ‘nephew’, or ‘son’, or ‘cousin’ depending upon the person with whom Tecumseh is interacting.

88 RIDINGTON, Robin. 2000, 100.
The use of this name is also an empowering strategy. As Ridington has pointed out, the narrator’s name is a reference to the original Tecumseh, who was a warrior who promoted a unified resistance among Native peoples around the Easter states beyond the Ohio River in the early 1800s. Along with his brother, Tenskwatawa (who was a visionary and created a religious revitalisation movement), Tecumseh established a region of protection and sovereignty and made it open to Native people. He banned alcohol and European goods and religions. It was simultaneously an exclusive and pan-Indigenous movement that was only destroyed by brute force. The use of this name is also an empowering strategy because it acts as a reclaiming of appropriated culture. Charles Sherman, father of General William ‘Tecumseh’ Sherman, named his son Tecumseh because he admired the bravery of the original warrier. But the son later dishonoured this valuing of Native resistance. General William ‘Tecumseh’ Sherman was sent out to negotiate with the Navajo in 1868. It was his intent to remove the people from their lands and send them to Oklaloma reserves. Sherman continually stressed the necessity to eradicate Indigenous culture and King’s use of this name reinforces the issues of theft and appropriation symbolised in Munroe Swimmer’s activities in *Truth and Bright Water*. This specific form of countering appropriation is also a form of the supra-textual movement discussed in the last chapter as Tecumseh is the name of the Café patron’s, ‘Nelson’s’, childhood dog in *Green Grass, Running Water*.

The youth in *Truth and Bright Water* does not mimetically embody any of
these qualities of confrontation or leadership. But his youth suggests the possibility and evolving future of freedom. This is a re-presentation of such pan-Indigenous sovereignty, an assertion of land ‘rights’ and ownership, even within a confused teenager. Put another way, these histories are not over and they are not simply histories of non-Native victory. King’s texts suggest that events that have occurred since colonisation are still Native histories to own and to be re-empowered by. In fact, in King’s vision of place they are continually repeated: these references are happenings that changed the landscape and require recording and continual updating through retelling. All of these eclectic stories actually work to re-story place, in the same way in which Helen’s quilt is continually being added to, and becomes involved in the new process.

(iii) Pan-Indigeneity and the specific politics of land rights.

These eclectic collages of Indigenous referents are infused with common ideas about the importance of land connections. This last section of the chapter will outline some arguments and political actualities concerning land to emphasise the authors’ presentations of the ideas that political and actual relationships to land are contested discursively, and therefore in process. They cannot be represented in stagnant ‘truth’. In this final chapter I suggest that land is a vital metaphorical and descriptive presence for both authors, and that land and place hold a flowing iteration within the text.

King and Mudrooroo write about the presence of postcolonial magic realist expansions of space, and of the stretching of the local through the pastiche of varied Indigenous sourced stories. It is important, at this point, to value and connect this ‘pan-Indigeneity’ to concrete land issues. In other words, while King and Mudrooroo create spaces and discuss landlessness, this is not disconnected from the specific
politics of Indigeneity and land. As with their fluid and empowered re-presentation of loss (and the lost man discussed in Chapter Four), both authors create a fluid notion of land. The ‘lost man’ is not landless, and neither do the created worlds of King and Mudrooroo constitute a total replacement for landlessness.

King and Mudrooroo, as argued in more detail in previous chapters, have created characters that display the alienation of the contemporary Indigenous man from his culture and landscape. Urbanisation features heavily in discussions of Indigenous demographics in both the Canadian and Australian contexts. Large numbers of Indigenous people live for long periods away from, or even away from knowledge of, their traditional lands. The 1991 Australian census recorded that 28% of Aboriginal people lived in cities with a further 50% living in country towns.\(^95\) Today the rate of increased urban dwelling is accelerating. This does not, however, clearly indicate a disconnection from traditional lands. Traditional lands may, for example, be located within the metropolitan centre. In Canada the figure of Indigenous people who have ‘status’ and thus allocated reserve lands, but live in urban centres away from the researve, is approximately 40%.\(^96\) Again, this figure is deceptive as many of these people maintain regular contact with their reservation homes. Such urbanisation is in part the result of the forced removal from ‘land’ bases and the colonising processes of incarceration and institutionalisation. Land and the loss of land are vitally important for urban Indigenous peoples. It is conceivable that the alternative reality and space that King and Mudrooroo textually enact is a ‘space’

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\(^{96}\) MCMILLAN, Alan D., Native Peoples and Cultures of Canada. Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1995, 326.
which includes, but is not contained by, the specific referent of land rights.

This is a very contentious argument to make in relation to Indigenous politics and textual representation, yet it is by no means a case of dismissing the inherent significance of land. It is true that non-specificity can imply ‘landlessness’ which in turn evokes a whole gamut of images of dispossession and even illegitimacy in land rights disputes. Most conventional (and this is a word used with some hesitation) notions of Indigeneity in both Australasia and North America constantly invigorate the significance of specific land connections. In fact many elements of the politics of colonisation and the ensuing reconciliation processes are made intelligible through differential and contested notions of the land, such notions resting squarely upon the idea of 'continuous occupancy' as a pre-condition for Native title.

An understanding of some of the specifics of these politics can actually help to illuminate King’s and Mudrooroo’s decisions to ‘create’ and ‘deploy’ alternative worlds and spaces. It is arguable that the pre-eminence of, and focus upon the ‘maban’ or ‘extended’ worlds or universes which are constructed out of pan-Indigenous referents is partly a validation of the form (if not the content) of land as a concept in Indigenous politics. Native American critic, Paula Gunn Allen, has asserted that ‘we are the land’ is ‘an underlying concept that informs every Native American text.’

This issue of land contestation is, indeed, evident in all of the arenas of Indigenous politics in Canada. The definitions and classifications constructing First

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Nations peoples on the political stage operate through every level of the politics of land in Canada today. Categories such as status and non-status and even Métis are intelligible, not only through discourses of parentage and heritage, but necessarily through land and the land rights afforded by these categories. ‘Status Indians’ have the right to use the reserve (itself a category implicitly involved in the connection with and preservation of land) lands of their respective bands, and the available funds and rights of that band.98 ‘Non-Status Indians’ do not have these same rights. Despite the fact that the Métis were recognised as Aboriginal in the 1982 Constitutional Act they continue to fight and struggle for hunting and land rights.99

The position of the treaty is equally vital to First Nations people because of the implications of ownership, continued connections to the land and sovereignty that such treaties suggest. But for many non-Natives in Canada the concept of a treaty merely suggests a finalisation of the transferral of the land itself.100 Treaties then are differentially signified as signs of land rights and landlessness. Breakthroughs in the conceptualisation of Canadian First Nations peoples' position in the landscape came with the Penner Report of 1983 that made some allowances for self-government and land rights, but only for those First Nations people with formal legal status. Unfortunately, the positive possibilities that the Penner Report envisaged disintegrated in the bickering of the Canadian provincial governments, but it is important to note here that political empowerment and self-government were seen as being dependent on an economic and separate land base, only possessed by status

98 MCMILLAN, Alan D., 1995, 310.
100 MCMILLAN, Alan D., 1995, 316.
Indians. The moral ambiguities and significances suggested by land use are, therefore, a repeated referent on the political scene.

This pattern is repeated in the Australian context. One of the most serious myths and absences in the history of the British Empire existed in the assertion of *terra nullius* during the colonisation of Australia. This legal positioning of the Indigenous peoples of Australia as entirely absent meant that ‘treaty’ discourses are not prevalent in non-Indigenous documentation. Landlessness was ascribed to Indigenous people, who were deliberately represented as not using the land; therefore having no right to it. In fact, Australia is the only one of the advanced western democracies not to have signed any significant national treaty with its Indigenous inhabitants; a feature which distinguishes Australian race relations' history from that of New Zealand, Canada, the United States and even South Africa. The High Court Mabo decision of 1992 refuted the doctrine of *terra nullius*. It was not until over 200 years of colonisation had passed that the political and legal systems of Australia fully recognised Indigenous connections and rights to land.

It has become clear that the ‘land’ as both a concept and a lived reality is something that has never been ceded by Aboriginal groups after centuries of genocide and dispossession. This ‘fact’ is recorded and relayed in the continued physical use and spiritual connections to the land (itself a significant requirement for most land

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102 LIPPMANN, Lorna. 1991, 168
claimants) but also in narratives, both written and oral about the land. In the words of Hobbles Danayarri:

Because I’m saying, we the one with the land. Sitting on the land, Aboriginal people. You got nothing, all you government […] Government been coverem up me. Coverem over […] But anyway, I can tell him. You’ll have to agree with us, agree with the people, people on the land. You gonna agree because Aboriginal people owning.

Tim Rowse has observed that the moral implications of this section of Hobbles Danayarri’s ‘Saga of Captain Cook’, recorded by Deborah Bird Rose, are as vital as the Mabo decision to the reimaginings of the land and its ownership in Australian consciousness.

Thus, land and connection to land have been and continue to be established and re-membered in story. The oral stories of Indigenous peoples across Canada and Australia are concerned with many didactic and cultural functions. Land and story can be perceived to exist in an almost circular relationship, land providing the framework for a culture’s stories and stories bringing the land into being. This integrated relationship can be seen in one of the most significant uses of story, that is, an explication of the land’s form and nature. For example, David Unaipon, one the earliest Aboriginal writers, uses text in his *Native Myths and Legends* to map the continent through narrative. The fact that these stories were stolen and re-released

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106 ROWSE, Tim. 1993, 2.
under a white editor’s name demonstrates the oppressive interplay between land and the textual imaginings of it in the colonial moment.107

The importance of reclaiming the story of the land has been emphasised by the Native American theorist and author, Leslie Marmon Silko. She points to the way in which storytelling has operated and continues to operate to form meaning for the world. Silko envisages story as a form of bringing the world into being, as it were, transgressing impediments in this process:

Languages forces meaning into existence. All barriers to language: distance, oceans, darkness, even time and death itself are transcended by language. We hear a story about a beloved ancestor from hundreds of years ago, but as we listen, we begin to feel an intimacy and an immediacy of that long ago moment so that our beloved ancestor is very much present with us during the storytelling.108

King and Mudrooroo also effect a conflation of time and space in their storytelling to text and re-text the world. It is this bridge between time, space and creation that makes their storytelling so central to notions of belonging to land and of land, earth, soil and country.

Both authors create a textual re-imagining of Indigenous connections with the land in their novels. This enaction can occur as an affirming of Indigenous connections to land and a dislocation of non-Indigenous colonial emblems on it. As has also been said previously, the character, Monroe Swimmer, in King’s novel,

Truth and Bright Water, paints the church on the prairies exactly the same colour as the grass. He therefore paints it out of existence:

There is no sign of Monroe, but you can see he has been at work with his paints and brushes. The entire east side of the church is gone. Or at least it looks gone. I don’t know how Monroe has done it, but he’s painted this side so that it blends in with the prairies and the sky [...].

In like fashion Mudrooroo’s characters Ludjee and Jangamuttuk conduct a ceremony using crystals to send a giant boulder rolling over Fada’s missionary church in Master of the Ghost Dreaming. Both acts involve elements from alternative realities to enact an erasure of Christianity from the landscape. But these acts occur at a level outside the specific politics of land rights. By this it is meant that Indigenous characters are not reinstated into this newly-vacated space. Ludjee and Jangamuttuk sail off with the rest of their community. Monroe Swimmer packs up his belongings and leaves town. However, this does not mean that the politics of land acquisition and management are not important to King’s and Mudrooroo’s textual encounters. It is just that text is not allowed to stand as the representative of the finalised success of this project. The producers of the story, (the master of the dreaming ceremonies in Mudrooroo’s novel and the painter in King’s novel), always ‘move on’. They can assist in creating spaces or re-politicising access to land but such characters/narrators function to tell story and story must occur as process rather than as fixed image in both authors’ works. Put simply, the producer of the image cannot then inhabit the image he/she conveys because to do so would be to fall into the traps of representativeness that the storyteller is working against. In addition, such mobility of the storyteller indicates the multiple levels from which to engage with the

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109 KING, Thomas. 1999a, 43.
implications and significations of ‘land’ and reality. The interactions with the land are continually moving on, in process, through the act of creation of images and tales.

To explain the interactions with the land as continually moving on, it is necessary to return again, to the actual politics of land rights. In Australia, disputes have raged, even between the advocates of land rights. Henry Reynolds, a historian renowned for his promotion of Indigenous rights and versions of history, has condemned the less orthodox approaches to the land rights dispute of some Indigenous activists. Reynolds has argued that the politics of land rights must be fought in the courts and should not be complicated by a moral economy, but rather fought in a legal/political arena. Activists such as Michael Mansell, Paul Coe and Bob Wetherall have maintained that Aboriginal people must assert sovereignty, external to the institutions of the Australian nation, forming a nation of Aboriginal peoples through appeal to international bodies.¹¹¹

While this is, in essence, a debate about approach and, of course, morality, it is an interesting altercation in the light of King’s and Mudrooro’s work because of the way in which it illustrates the diversity in the available discourses about ‘land’. Contested discourses are evident because of jarringly different conceptualisations of land and its function. Land rights and sovereignty can evoke notions of self-government on the land and return continually to the position of people themselves rather than simply deeds of ownership of people. King’s and Mudrooro’s texts are able to embody this jarring affect by making alternative or competing versions of the real coterminously available.

Land is perhaps one of the most concrete and emotionally evocative Indigenous issues. It is clear that both land and place have always been implicitly involved in the problem of translating (and commonly understanding) Indigenous social and political questions, both in the past and in the continuing politics of colonisation. As such, land and place are complex issues in the meta-discursive realm of representation. As noted above, the assumption concerning land use actually justifying land ownership was the defence for the myth of *terra nullius*. In the North American situation, colonisation involved not just cheating and theft of land and the dishonouring of treaty agreements. Colonisation was also a linguistic and cognitive process that falsely projected a universal understanding of land. As Paula Gunn Allen has theorised, the whole notion of land ownership itself can be seen as an illusion within the context of Native American conceptualisations of land:

> The idea that one can own a piece of land […] is actually incomprehensible, except as a **concept**. It is not really possible (perhaps “executable” would be more appropriate here) in human behaviour, because it implies a capacity to stop the automatic, natural flow of living [my emphasis].

Tecumseh, the Shawnee namesake of the central character of *Truth and Bright Water*, also advocated a notion of land occupation that ‘precluded individual ownership.’ Historically, and in contemporary theory, Indigenous relationships to land, in terms of knowledge and ownership, are in process, in *creation*. King and Mudrooroo create a pan-Indigenous, multi-layered space partly to accommodate the large population that is without the specifics of a land base, potentially the lost men discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis. They also employ a form that *incites* traditional Indigenous notions of the land and also validates the evolving politics of land use.

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King and Mudrooroo are not simply creating a polyphonic dialogue of voices in one historical moment, but a polyphonic cross section of times and spaces to create a universe of universes, pan-Indigenous, and as such empowered by its very undefinability. This technique is, at one level, breathtakingly postcolonial, using magic realism to politicise and free up notions of land and time. It also compiles events, texts, characters from many Indigenous stories, storying a new sense of place using ideas of place and land common to many Indigenous people and juxtaposing these with many Indigenous stories and histories within that context. This place refutes boundaries and evokes recuperative change through the endless definitions of place and the ‘real’ that the texts create. In doing this it affirms the specifics of land and treaty ‘rights’ while simultaneously asserting an imagined place. In creating many times and cultural referents at once the texts make gestures towards timelessness itself.
Conclusion/s

The central research questions this thesis set out to answer are:

In what ways do the apparently culturally diverse writers, Thomas King and Mudrooroo, similarly undermine past representations of Indigenous and colonial themes and do the authors’ writings display analogous attitudes to the textual act of representation itself?

The preceding chapters explored the authors’ re-presentations from several angles. This conclusion will not spend excessive time reiterating these chapter progressions. Instead the conclusions are ordered according to the authors’ parallel approaches to re-presentation, uncovered in various contexts and chapters in the thesis. These parallels include: notions of writing as protest; writing as inversion; writing beyond correction and conflict; the centralising of Indigenous presence; and, finally, the notion of re-presentation as an escape from the semiotic field of the indigene.

This thesis is premised upon the idea that representations of a culture, particularly a colonised and oppressed culture, are often seen as fixed, as operating within particular semiotic fields. These fields detail and define representations of identity for the political purposes of, firstly empire, and then nation. The politics of postcolonialism has involved a definite premising of responses to these stereotypical, imperialised and oppressive representations. This thesis is, at many levels, an

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exploration of responses to colonising images of Indigenous peoples in Australia and North America. It is an explication of texts’ response to texts.

This thesis illuminates two authors’ similar challenge to representations of and from the past. Implicit in the concept of the semiotic fields of representation — in this case the *semiotic field of the indigene* — is an assertion that the possible expressions and representations of that culture or identity are necessarily limited. If such semiotic fields are seen as immovable and intransmutable, then all potential responses to them must be viewed as primarily that — response. But in the writings of both Thomas King and Mudrooroo the boundaries of fixed representations are questioned. In fact the term ‘re-presentation’ is more applicable than that of ‘representation’ because the former evokes more accurately the notion of a repeated process. The stories that both authors tell operate not only to respond to colonising semiotic fields, but to subsume and incorporate such fields within a larger frame of repeated and multiple evocations of identity. The writings of both authors express a self-conscious awareness of their own position as story, not reality, combining a self-conscious textuality with an almost post-modern rehearsal of narrative to evoke re-presentation that evades prescriptive and constraining readings of identity. The effect of this slippery and tricky narrative play is an assertion of the community over the individual, and a community that can be best described as pan-Indigenous rather than specific.

The writings of Thomas King and Mudrooroo exhibit widely different content and techniques. At a most basic level, the novels covered in this thesis show Mudrooroo

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to be largely a writer of historical fiction and King to be a writer of magic realism. King uses humour, Mudrooroo uses Gothicism. King integrates past, present and mythic time in the one narrative, Mudrooroo incorporates the mythical and the fictional into the historic. Without being reductive, however, this thesis has revealed how such differences in genre and approach can be re-evaluated in the light of similarities in re-presentations of Indigenous and colonial themes and similar attitudes to the textual act of representation. Consequently, the thesis is focused on and arranged according to the similarities in Thomas King’s and Mudrooroo’s novels.

As will now be clear, Chapter One is a methodological introduction to some of the possible approaches employed in this thesis, and stands as a microcosm of many of the ideas discussed throughout the thesis. These include emphasis on notions of ‘border crossing’ and also on literary processes that are a re-framing of, rather than a reaction to, semiotic fields. Chapter Two develops these ideas, exploring how both authors re-present the image of the indigene in colonial, national, and imperial texts as representative of white desires and phobias. Chapter Three explicates King’s and Mudrooroo’s parallel subversive parody and incorporation of grand narratives — Christianity for King and Gothicism for Mudrooroo — to question fixed semiotic fields in the representation of identity. Chapter Four continues the hypothesis of non-prescriptive visions of identity in both authors’ writings via concentration upon the authors’ uncertain and multiple images of contemporary identity. Chapter Five explores the significance of the trickster, as both a figure in the narrative and as a form of discursive expression. This chapter examines the way in which King’s and Mudrooroo’s writings involve repetitions of story and morphing of shape and place, pointing out that both aspects are working to confound fixed notions of image and
identity. Chapter Six concludes the dissertation with a discussion of King’s and Mudrooroo’s use of magic realism and their common centralising of an Indigenous-themed or framed story. This story, and the sense of place it conveys is acknowledged to be a construct, but is politicised through the collaging of various Indigenous specificities, in terms of story, history, and geographical and political elements, to create pan-Indigenous celebration.

(i) Writing as protest

This thesis has shown that the writings of Thomas King and Mudrooroo must be viewed as particular kinds of protest. Both authors’ works are engaged in constant semantic battles with oppressive dichotomies, and despite the use of humour (particularly on King’s part) or sensationalism and sexuality (very much more so on Mudrooroo’s) the writings are fundamentally political. Both authors are actively engaged in creative protest, from their common form and use of literary devices to their similar content and themes. The form, incorporating as it does both magic realism and the use of trickster figures and discourse, is necessarily highly politicised writing. An element of the content, that is the rewriting of texts and images from the past, is necessarily imbibed with the notions of response and protest.

Both authors write to unpack specific myths. As discussed in Chapter Two, there is a common unpacking of specific historical and literary myths that operate to make up national identities. The myths that the authors commonly address include a creative deployment of the supposed and actual affinities between ‘Empire’s others’. This thesis demonstrates that for both authors a highlighting of the parallels and connections in the experience of various colonised groups does not equate to a colonially reductive and all-encompassing vision of the sameness of all ‘others’. In
fact such visions are the deliberate satirical target of both authors. Instead such parallels are drawn to demonstrate the homogeneity in the formation and continuation of oppressive constructs, despite national differences.

The contamination of borders is one of the strongest similarities between the writings of King and Mudrooroo, and the border around national identity is contaminated through both authors’ treatments of the affinities of the colonised. This process is furthered by the authors’ like repetition of narratives from the shipwreck and captivity narrative genre. Repetition of motifs such as Robinson Crusoe, the Eliza Fraser story and the Leatherstocking Sagas is used by King and Mudrooroo to resituate the hallmarks of the semiotic field of the indigene outside re-presentations of Indigenous identity and inside western fantasies and phobias. The boundaries around identity are destabilised as hierarchies are undermined. The authors apply the same technique to the narratives concerning miscegenation, and the past and present use of sexuality as currency on the colonial frontier. The colonial myths of the dying race and of Native/non-Native complicity are repeated in both authors’ works in a way that operates to destabilise their validity. Read cohesively, the combination of each of these colonial archetypes in the authors’ works accentuates the level of the protest statement. The collective subversion of these myths is written in a way that announces their very constructedness. The re-presentation emphasises the fact that the imperial mythologies, used to construct national identities and restrictive ‘truths’, are merely unstable stories and fictions.

Chapter Three continues discussion of King’s and Mudrooroo’s textual myths to include the authors’ similar identification of larger grand narratives. Like imperial
myths, grand narratives also work to ingrain the semiotic field of the indigene and its imperial, colonial and national project. Chapters Two and Three cover the authors’ parallel unmasking and dismantling of the use and abuse of the image of indigene for the west’s own purposes. Both authors use their fiction to demonstrate that the semiotic field of the indigene has been deployed in western narrative to invent the western self and to oppress Indigenous peoples. The discussion undertaken in the thesis makes it clear that both authors ascribe the same oppressive and silencing techniques and goals to most textual acts of the west, whether they are literary, historical, religious, or ideological.

Vital western emblems are re-constructed, to protest their original ‘naturalisation’ as positive. For Noah to be creatively resituated as breast-mad lunatic, or Eliza Fraser to be re-imagined as lascivious lesbian vampire is not simply a humorous absurdity. Exploration of such emblems makes it immediately apparent that there is a complexity to the writing. For example, the primacy of protest as conflict or opposition has to be revised as a reading assumption when the texts are read through notions of oral story telling praxis. As Chapter One highlights, in oral story telling, interaction between binarised forces is not central nor is a linear progression towards a climactic conflict.³ It is one of the central premises of this dissertation that both King’s and Mudrooroo’s writings attempt to emulate this element of the oral tradition, in so far as is possible in written texts. In addition, because the writings are not realism, there is no neat and clear protest message. Rather there is a sophisticated inversion and subversion of the oppressive

constructions that produce the indigene for western audiences. This transition in the analytical progression of the dissertation comes very early. In fact as soon as the acknowledgment of the vital presence of protest is made, the acknowledgment must be qualified by a specification of the form of protest.

(ii) Writing through inversion

The first stage in qualifying the form of protest, or even in defining a textual move beyond protest in both authors’ writings, is the exploration of the technique of textual inversion. Inversion of the assumptions working in the colonial interactions is an effective literary tool in dismantling negative representations. For example, Mudrooroo’s text Doctor Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World, is a perfect inversion of colonial representations of the other.4 Here the Indigenous protagonist views the invader as a ‘subject’ of and for study. Removing the semiotic figure of the indigene from the dissecting gaze of the coloniser and, instead, placing that coloniser under the inquiring eye of Doctor Wooreddy [my emphasis] textually enacts empowerment. There are similar such moments in King’s writing, such as in the short story, ‘Joe the Painter and the Deer Island Massacre’, where a pageant recreating ‘a massacre’ from the history of colonisation is played out for a primarily white audience by Indian actors. Joe, the white director of this play, is able to turn the tables on the expectations of the white audience by having the whites massacre the Indians in their sleep.5 As Margaret Atwood has pointed out:

[This] deadpan story could be seen as a kind of parody-in-miniature of Fenimore Cooper’s Leatherstocking tales […] It would not work nearly so

well as ambush if our minds had not already been lulled into somnolence by a
great deal of storytelling in which things were seen far otherwise.\textsuperscript{6}

King and Mudrooroo sometimes revisit images through a completely opposite re-
presentation. In this way, the authors provide, at certain points, a mirror image of
mainstream discursive practice.

Straight inversion, however, is not the primary deconstructive technique
discussed in the thesis because of two problematic assumptions in relation to
representation of Indigenous figures. Firstly, is the notion that there is an inherent
rather than enforced and constructed silence or absence on the part of the Indigenous
emblem. King and Mudrooroo re-present on the basis that Indigenous figures and
emblems have always spoken and acted, from before first contact, from before
creation itself. The second problematic assumption for both authors is the concept
that new representations of Indigenous figures should be primarily interested in
addressing and redressing the ‘central’ colonial or contemporary white figure/s. I
have argued that the writings of both King and Mudrooroo have in common a
rejection of both these assumptions through a politicised writing that operates within
but also beyond straight inversion of white texts.

\textit{(iii) Writing beyond ‘conflict’ and ‘correction’}

The problem with inversion, as a literary strategy, is that it can operate to
validate the centrality of the coloniser. As Homi Bhabha has argued, the politically
meaningful text must be understood in terms of ‘hybridity’ rather than in terms of

\textsuperscript{6} ATWOOD, Margaret. A double-bladed knife: Subversive laughter in two stories by Thomas King. In
W.H. New (ed.) Native Writing and Canadian Writing. Vancouver: University of British Columbia
Press. 1990, 247.
adversarial social antagonism. While not specifically conducting a Bhabhaian reading of King’s and Mudrooroo’s writings, this concept of hybridity is important for this thesis. Hybridity for Bhabha is not a mere combination of traits from different origins, but rather is a means for reclaiming colonial representations through a process of negotiation. This thesis has developed this concept, in relation to King’s and Mudrooroo’s writings, by combining it with ideas of ‘border crossing’, trickster discourse and magic realism. What these critical conceptualisations share, and the elements that are emphasised in this thesis, is a focus on a creative interaction between images from various locales in preference to a dialectical opposing of these different images. Recognising border transgression in fictional writing, as Paula Gunn Allen visualises it, acknowledges the ‘need [for] a critical system sufficiently broad and accurate to allow the development of investigative and theoretical tools that will centrali[z]e the diverse communities and multiple voices presently marginali[z]ed.’

If King’s and Mudrooroo’s writings are read according to notions of the traditional trickster and contemporary trickster discourse, then boundaries are crossed and the marginalised are re-imagined as both diverse and central. The trickster cannot be interpreted according to dualities; he/she/it/the tale is both good and bad, he/she/it/the tale is subversive and disruptive but also ambiguous and unpredictable. Moreover, trickster discourse focuses on story as not merely a response to the

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8 BHABHA, Homi. 1994, 25.  
coloniser or representative of the colonised but as within a powerful imaginative realm that asserts celebratory and continuing presence.\textsuperscript{11} Magic realist interpretations of both authors’ fictions further these goals. This is because magic realism imagines creative output not as a dialogue between opposites of fantasy or myth (the colonised story) and realist rational narrative (the coloniser’s story) but as merging of the one within the other and the gaps in between the two.\textsuperscript{12} Therefore, Chapters Five and Six explicate concepts of trickster and magic realist fiction in order to emphasise the hypothesis that both Mudrooroo’s and King’s writings enact a repeated and fluid interaction between texts of different origins rather than an engagement locked in conflict.

This hypothesis is asserted early in the dissertation. Chapter One highlights the fact that the one dramatic piece Mudrooroo has written, the \textit{Mudrooroo/Müller Project}, is a play about a producing and performing a play.\textsuperscript{13} In such a work, the interactions between the textual sites of ‘coloniser’ and ‘colonised’ are rehearsed and continually re-contested. The actors cannot decide if the German play about the French revolution is a good medium to promote their political goals or not. The Indigenous characters are not locked in conflict with emblems of the west, but experiment with them, sometimes rejecting, sometimes embracing. Such rehearsal is framed by moments of magic realism through the presence of the Djangara.\textsuperscript{14} Similarly, King’s short story ‘Borders’ uses odd juxtapositions of western and

\textsuperscript{13} Not unlike King’s use of the pageant in ‘Joe the Painter and the Deer Island Massacre’.
Indigenous perspective to reject the primacy of conflict. The media’s assumptions bear no relationship to or comparability to the attitudes of the child narrator.\textsuperscript{15} While these might appear to be quite different textual techniques, the assumption is the same: that an outright confrontation and conflict between the western stereotyped vision and a cohesively imagined Indigenous ‘reality’ will operate to reinscribe limiting and potentially oppressive semiotic fields.

Both authors carry out correction to the images from/of the coloniser, rather than enact a didactic rendering of the image of the colonised. In quite astonishing ways, neither authors’ writings reveals the ‘real’, or ‘accurate’ depiction of Indigenous identity, despite being focused on a rejection of inaccurate depictions of Indigenous identity.

\textit{(iv) Centralising Indigenous presence}

But this does not mean that there are no intended Indigenous presences, characters, settings or other literary elements within the narratives of both authors. Far from it, as the works operate to infuse the text with multiple visions of Indigenous identity. As demonstrated in Chapters Two and Three of this dissertation, this occurs firstly through a process of incorporating the imperial myths and grand narratives of the west within a story than is focused upon Indigenous events and perspectives. The white reader is forced into a position of alterity as the largest and most foundational elements of western culture are reduced. The emblems of the west, in King’s and Mudrooroo’s writings, are a subsidiary or dependent element of a larger Indigenous themed story, rather than key antagonists on the opposing side of a semantic battle line. So not only is the west removed from the centre, but response to the coloniser’s

\textsuperscript{15} KING, Thomas, 1993b, 142-3.
oppressive semiotic framework is not centralised either. A vital common tactic of
King and Mudrooroo is that the emblems of the west become part of a larger story
that is dominated by celebratory, yet fluid, re-presentations of Indigenous emblems.

Making Indigenous emblems central and celebratory involves a reevaluation
of many terms. The connotations of being lost and being found are reevaluated, not
only in terms of who perceives whom as lost, and then found, but also how such
loaded terms can be re-imagined. For example, the term ‘loss’ has been redefined in
this thesis in order to read the complex textual process of both Thomas King’s and
Mudrooroo’s novels. Chapter Four explores the idea of loss in terms of both authors’
contemporary settings and characters, and loss is initially negative. King and
Mudrooroo include characters that have a complicated relationship with their own
identity and subjectivity to demonstrate the power of the same silencing and
oppressive mythologies and grand narratives discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter
Three of the dissertation.16 Loss, in this context, has a tripartite existence with
characters often losing a sense of themselves, their place and their community, and
also being at a loss for words. None of the central protagonists of either author is very
articulate. But this loss allows space for being found, and for a blurring of the
possibilities that the process of being found will take on. The continual reevaluation
of loss as a positive opening of possibilities occurs with many common key emblems
in the authors’ works. For example, the figure of the father is shown to be first
painfully absent, then a tenuously ‘created’ figure, and then abandoned altogether in
favour of a multiply expressed community. The same process, of painfully absent,

16 Margery Fee has pointed out that Mudrooroo’s writing demonstrates ‘both the dangers of
assimilation and the alternatives to it’. See FEE, Margery. The signifying writer and the ghost reader:
Mudrooroo’s Master of the Ghost Dreaming and Writing from the Fringe. Australian and New Zealand
then created, then multiple and communal, occurs with the relationship to and imagining of land in both authors’ works, thereby centralising the importance of Indigenous emblems to any concepts of land.

Moreover, this idea is introduced at a methodological level in Chapter One, with discussion of theorists like Louis Owens and Mudrooroo himself, both of whom position Indigeneity at the cultural centre of any national consciousness. The collage and centralising of texts of Indigenous origin have been imagined in terms of notions of place or creative space in the thesis. Place has a few symbolic resonances in this reading. Chapter Four acknowledges the way in which both authors associate healing and self-hood for the protagonists with connection to traditional land or nature. The writers avoid cementing their writings within the semiotic field of the indigene (as Goldie emphasises, clichés of connection to nature circumscribe such fields17) by combining such symbolism with a refusal to prescribe or specifically situate place. Place is imagined either through symbols of movement such as water or wind, or through a merging of several places and stories of place.

Structurally the collage is a vital analogy for understanding the writings of both Thomas King and Mudrooroo. In fact, expression of land through a process of loss, creation and most significantly multiple, unspecific collage is a vital observation in finding like textual processes in the writings of Thomas King and Mudrooroo. Both authors use a collage of Indigenous historical, mythical and fictional emblems in order to flood the text with an Indigenous presence. The locating of the many emblems and texts of Indigenous origin in both authors’ works is a necessary part of

17 GOLDIE, Terry. 1989, 19.
reading the authors’ rich tapestry and is carried out primarily in Chapter Six of this thesis.

(v) Re-presentation: escaping the fixed semiotic field?

The twin textual impulses of rejecting negative representation and resituating positive re-presentation have an effect on the way identity can be expressed. Identity becomes something that is not ossified but is evolving and changeable and thus uncontrollable. In King’s and Mudrooroo’s texts ‘loss’ frees up notions on the nature of identity. As a result, the absence of the specific element (specific land or specific father for example) engenders a more positive focus on evolving community. The community is made up of multiple depictions of identity, symbolised by both authors’ novels focus on role-playing and dressing-up.

An important finding of this thesis is the way in which the writings of Thomas King and Mudrooroo are able to examine the ‘constructedness’ of image while moving beyond ideas of ‘true’ and ‘false’ images. Thus, while the narrators’/protagonists’ stories may be involved in an effort to reclaim and define their origins and culture, no definable prognosis arises, because repetitions within the text and the self-conscious textuality of the narrative process result in the continual re-imagining of fleeting and elusive images.

Apart from the obvious inclusion of history and grand narratives as components of story, the Indigenous characters and narrators provide a key role in expressing the importance of re-presentation as story. There is a repeated presence of text makers and performance in both authors’ writing: photographers, authors, film script writers, story tellers, masters of ceremonies, clothes-as-costume all express the performed and
multiple nature of identity in the making of the story. Identification of these factors leads to a reading of King’s and Mudrooroo’s writings as meta-discursive narrative.\textsuperscript{18} In other words the authors are not concerned, primarily, with ‘reality’ as a tangible and definable sociological fact. Rather the novels are absorbed by reality as it is performed and constructed in language and story. Meta-discursive properties are also expressed in particular similarities in form, like the use of the counterpoint narrative and the unfixed narrator. The theme of self-conscious textuality, in the thesis, is continued through discussion of trickster discourse as imaginative not representative, and the highlighting of examples of repeated story-telling acts, repeated characters, and revisions of plot conclusions throughout the oeuvre of both authors’ writings. In addition to the fact that the narrators of both authors’ works are often producers of text themselves, the narrators are also destabilised by the ambiguities and lack of narratorial control available in the text. Such ambiguity forces the text to repudiate any authoritative stance on representation.

Structural ambiguity along with repetition and rejection of the sequential means that there is a tension and a balance between expelling the untruth without proving a new truth in both authors’ writings. The common process through which Thomas King’s and Mudrooroo’s writings tend to move is the examination of the societal norm to be subverted (a particular image from the semiotic field of the indigene) merged with an allusion to a trickster or process of tricking. The repetition of this process removes representative stability and reframes the narrative as a re-negotiated site, not a contested semantic battle. The end result is that of community being emphasised over the individual, the general and the complex being emphasised over

\textsuperscript{18} See WALTON, Percy. “Tell our own stories”: Politics and the fiction of Thomas King. World
the specific and detailed, celebration being emphasised over victim, and, importantly, of the dangers of representations themselves.

**(vi) Future directions**

As has been emphasised in the preface of this dissertation, the confines of time, space and manageability have necessitated the enforcing of some limits on this project. The limits in terms of primary source material include the poetry and many of the short stories of both authors, as well as analysis of their critical outputs. There are also many other ways in which the scope of this work might be extended further. Most obviously, in terms of a specific comparison of Thomas King and Mudrooroo, the study might be stretched to analyse some of the very real differences in both authors’ works. Another project might explore, for example, the almost oppositional deployment of humour and horror by Thomas King and Mudrooroo respectively. Similarly, further directions in research would be developed by a dissertation written on the ways in which the authors inscribe gender in very different ways.

In terms of a more sociological approach, analysis could productively move from the textual to the biography of the authors, particular given the focus on representation and identity in the dissertation’s hypothesis. The author as construct, similar to the indigene as construct, creates enormous possibilities for discussion of the real world implications of image and identity production in Australia and Canada, and both authors’ personal lives and career trajectories would provide a substantial research base for such a project. This thesis has deliberately avoided conflating the works with the authors themselves, in order to extricate discussion from the dangerous potential for critical gatekeeping such a discussion might engender.

*Literature Written in English. 30(2), Autumn 1990, 77-84.*
In terms of the relationship between subject matter and critical approach, this thesis has been largely original in its merging of postcolonial ideas with ideas drawn from the Indigenous critical writing community in order to analyse authors at a cross-cultural level. It would be productive to apply this same technique to many other authors who are utilising experimental, magic-realist type techniques. In the Australian context maban reality texts, as Mudrooroo defines them\textsuperscript{19}, or ‘techno’ writing, as Jackie Huggins has described them, make up an increasing percentage of the new textual formations coming out of the Aboriginal writing community.\textsuperscript{20} The same is true in the Canadian context. Works such as Sam Watson’s \textit{The Kadaitcha Sung}, Archie Weller’s \textit{The Land of the Golden Clouds} and Alexis Wright’s \textit{Plains of Promise} in Australia and Tomson Highway’s \textit{The Kiss of the Fur Queen} and Lee Maracle’s \textit{Ravensong} in Canada\textsuperscript{21} challenge both the conventions of realist narrative and the expectations of representations of the indigene, and more importantly Indigenous writing. A comprehensive study of this growing new approach to literature would be a fruitful area of research to complement this dissertation.

In terms of the theoretical approach itself, the writings of Thomas King and Mudrooroo both rely heavily on the techniques of bricolage and collage. The same is true of their critical writings. As Margery Fee has said:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}
Aboriginality, just like Australianity, is a construct, and Mudrooroo proposes to construct on Barthes’ principle of *bricolage*, putting together what he needs from whatever materials are at hand.22

This dissertation has only used a few of the many theoretical approaches that might be applied to these two authors. Other studies might profitably use more feminist analyses. Given the focus by both authors on power and discourse, Foucauldian readings might also engender some interesting results. Bahktian readings based upon the polytrophic nature of the novel and language play would further explicate notions of trickster discourse explored in this thesis.

These possible areas for further study not withstanding, this thesis offers an original contribution to the work in the areas of both Mudrooroo and Thomas King studies, and in terms of Australian/Canadian cross-cultural comparison. It also offers a new presentation of notions of representation and identity in fictional writing. The various stages involved in Thomas King’s and Mudrooroo’s common response to identity and representation in their novels and other fictional writings has been fully unpacked. To demarcate the stages in this process, or even evaluate the main facets of it, is an artificial act on the part of the reader. This is because part of the energising and exciting nature of both writers’ fiction comes from their ability to achieve many or all levels of this process in the one moment, sometimes in the one image. In the interests of concluding, a tentative categorisation of the authors’ writing process must, however, be attempted.

22 FEE, Margery. 1992, 19.
Reading of Thomas King’s and Mudrooroo’s similar creative writing processes can therefore be imagined in terms of four layers: the protest; the inversion; the reframing and celebration; and the emphasis on the created and continually re-created text. On the first level of reading, the authors commonly contest a pre-established semantic space, a space that has, and continues to, represent the indigene in oppressive ways. In order to protest this semiotic misappropriation of Indigenous identity, both authors invert the power relations originally invested within the semiotic field of the indigene. In King’s and Mudrooroo’s writings the Indigenous emblems become centralised rather than marginalised, constructing the framework and borders of the narrative, rather than performing peripheral roles within it. This newly created space operates to redefine assumptions central to the traditional semiotic field of the indigene. Terms such as loss and place are re-invented. But this is done in a way that de-centralises the primacy of ‘truth’ or authenticity in representation. In focusing on the power that texts have, and working to de-stabilise that power, both authors recognise the implicit dangers in replacing misrepresentations with new ones. Instead, the authors attempt to write fiction that celebrates the possibilities for text to be impermanent. This is carried out by two important techniques. Firstly, there is an important focus on self-conscious text production within the novels and other fictions. The works announce themselves as stories, to be repeated and reread, with events and characters that are transmutable, not ossified. Secondly, both authors use collage and blending of a variety of Indigenous based referents (historical emblems, components of space and place, sections of story, both mythic and contemporary, as well as newly created images) to suggest an unfixed, non-specific, potentially pan-Indigenous creative framework. This results in a rejection of representations (and certainly of the label of being a representative writer)
in favour of re-presentations. As Thomas King’s narrator in *Green Grass, Running Water* informs us ‘[t]here are no truths …Only stories’, or similarly, in the preface to *The Undying*, where the author states, ‘[n]o reality where none intended’. ²³

This does not mean that the authors are celebrating a cavalier approach to literature and re-presentation of identity. The inherent political nature of the literature means that it celebrates a continuing survival of Indigenous peoples and culture and a rejection of non-Indigenous centrality in deciding the fixed terms of that survival and expression of culture. In fact, to replace the semiotic field of the indigene with a new, prescriptive alternative would not only work to reaffirm the oppressive framework through its oppositional stance, it would also deny a fact that both Thomas King and Mudrooroo continually emphasise in their writings; images of Indigeneity have never been absent or completely silent.

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