

## Transnational Impulses as Simulation in Colin Johnson's (Mudrooroo's) Fiction Clare Archer-Lean

### Introduction

Mudrooroo is a black Australian writer who has ostensibly been focused on responding to particular national concerns, namely stories of first contact between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and the need to restore Indigenous primacy to the creative rendering of that encounter. And yet the creative construction of this encounter in Mudrooroo's writing is presented through a series of exorbitances; a string of across, through or beyond positions which exceed any source, so much so as to reveal the nationalist origin to be illusory. Post-colonial nationalist literature is always a paradoxical search for the originary, a desire to find an essence from the past that will reveal and define the nation in the present. As Ken Gelder has argued using J.M Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello*, while European literatures are activities in depth, writing for themselves, colonial national literatures attempt to 'reveal' the newly constructed nation to others.<sup>1</sup> In fact, all literature is simulation, a representation not the real. But the newly emerging national literature of the colonial state has much to prove. In the case of Australia – national myths and the early national literatures echoing such myths – were, in turn, drawn from colonial dystopian and utopian fantasies.<sup>2</sup> These included the fantasy of a land full of opportunity and involved a desire to continue the connection to the imperial motherland yet assert a new, vibrant and cohesive identity that belied the reality of Indigenous dispossession. In the process, early nationalist literatures can fail to acknowledge the illusory nature of the national myths that inform them and can make opaque their simulation and construction of identity.

In Mudrooroo's works, transnational excess (in fact excesses of many forms) disrupt any presumption of originary nationalist clarity in a number of ways: these include recasting key figures in Australian colonialist and consequently nationalist literatures as consciously misrepresenting themselves; flooding the work with inter-textual allusions from diverse sources; and revelling in a form of magic realist play that is necessarily inconclusive and confounding mimetic logic. There are obvious problems with these excesses. In the postmodern disruption of colonialist and nationalist metanarratives the works destabilise Indigenous regional specificity through a *bricolage* of pan-Indigenous citations. This paper will explore Mudrooroo's *Master* series in terms of its location on the line between post-modern disruption of nationalist monoliths and the 'no place' this evokes.

### Textual Context to the Series

The *Master* Series is a grouping of five novels. It arguably begins with the realist historical fiction *Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World*<sup>3</sup> – a text told from the perspective of Wooreddy, Trugernanni's husband as he anthropologically critiques the shocking invasion of the Europeans in Tasmania. This novel repositions the historical

<sup>1</sup> Ken Gelder, 'Proximate Reading: Australian Literature in Transnational Reading Frameworks', *JASAL: Special Issue: Common Readers and Cultural Critics* (2010) April 22, 2012  
<http://www.nla.gov.au/openpublish/index.php/jasal/issue/view/139/showToc>

<sup>2</sup> Roslyn Weaver, *Apocalypse in Australian Fiction and Film* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company Inc. Publishers, 2012) 33-42.

<sup>3</sup> Mudrooroo, *Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* (South Yarra, Vic: Hyland House, 1987).

figure George Augustus Robinson who was Chief Protector of the Aborigines in Tasmania and Victoria 1839-1849. Robinson is a figure who has appeared in many Australian literary works, including writings by Robert Drewe, Gary Crew and Richard Flanagan. Robinson's prolific diaries have been seen as important historical insights into first contact Indigenous culture. In Mudrooroo's rendering, the figure is exposed as self-serving, incompetent and lascivious, but simultaneously self-representing as benevolent and scholarly.

The second book *Master of the Ghost Dreaming*<sup>4</sup> (often seen as the actual first in the *Master* series) rewrites the first story in what Mudrooroo termed maban realism. For the author, maban realism is akin to other forms of magic realism, but is informed by his conception of an Australian Indigenous world view.<sup>5</sup> The implications of his particular use of magic realism in this series will be discussed further below. It is in *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* that we see the first movement from a specific attempt to redress and respond to a prior nationalist literary agenda and history to a more transnational turn. The biographical preface to Mudrooroo's own website, is entitled *The Global Nomad*, here the author is quoted as saying:

'When I was writing *Wooreddy*, I still considered my ego not large enough to tackle Australia' – which elicits the question: 'And now do you consider it large enough?' 'After doing my *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* series, I consider it bigger than Australia, as big as the universe,' he replies with a grin, which makes one doubt his words until one realises the extent of his travels.<sup>6</sup>

It is clear from *Master of Ghost Dreaming* on; Mudrooroo is seeking to extend the scope of the creative project beyond national lines. The novels in the series are, from here, increasingly exorbitant in the mix of genre styles, extremity of event and use of citations. First there is the use of a style akin to South American magic realism with its conflation of temporalities and deployment of magic as nominally accepted within the real, juxtaposed with multifarious Indigenous and global citations. The textual space is one where nation is non-specific, temporality is cyclical and repetitive, tone is anti-colonial and space is pan-Indigenous, not regionally specific to country.

In *Master of the Ghost Dreaming*, Wooreddy is renamed Jungamuttuk and Truggernanni is renamed Ludjee. In fact, all the works are preoccupied with themes of naming and renaming and re-starting and repeating story. This preoccupation can be seen as evidence for the author's deliberate attempt to exceed the national space and to reframe the literary act as a simulation not mimesis. In *Master of the Ghost Dreaming*, Ludjee and Jangamuttuk have a son, George, who the text suggests, is probably the biological son of George Augustus Robinson. The Indigenous characters travel on dreaming companions, totems, in their attempt to create a ceremony of healing and combat the colonial invasion of Australia at a mythic level, and they succeed in so far as they use totemic powers to shift environmental forces and destroy Robinson's church. In *Master of the Ghost Dreaming*, Wadawaka is also introduced, and it is this African seafaring character that assists in

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<sup>4</sup> Mudrooroo, *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* (Pymble, N.S.W: Angus and Robertson, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> Mudrooroo, *Milli Milli Wangka* (South Yarra, VIC: Hyland House, 1997) 91.

<sup>6</sup> Author Unknown, 'The Global Nomad' *Mudrooroo.com Official Author Complex* at <http://mudrooroo.com/biographical/>

Jangamuttuk, Ludjee, George and their companions' escape from Robinson's mission-style internship and death.<sup>7</sup>

The next work in the series, *The Undying*<sup>8</sup>, is another first book of sorts, in that it is the first of what is sometimes called the Vampire Trilogy, the three books that complete the series. In these novels the magic realist style is fused with another genre, further adding to a sense of a fiction that is deliberating attempting to exceed boundaries. The final three novels use many tropes of Gothicism, such as monstrous creatures, violence and titillation.<sup>9</sup> These later books are dominated by the vampiric character, Amelia Fraser. This character is referencing the real historical, ship wrecked character, Eliza Fraser, who preoccupied Australian national art, literature and film from the 1830s to the 1990s.<sup>10</sup> Mudrooroo reconfigures her as the epitome of consumption, a vampire, making explicit both the violence and theft of the colonial endeavour and also of colonisation as a clash of representations and cultural stories. Amelia enslaves several Indigenous characters, including her insipid servant Galbol Wegdna (variously renamed by himself and Amelia as Spirit Master, Singer of Whales, Moma Cooper, Purritta Munda, People Killer, Renfield, Renfiel, the ferryman and Renfi). This ancillary character is interesting as an emblem that unites the author's thematic preoccupation firstly with naming as simulating identity<sup>11</sup> and secondly with multiple citations. Galbol Wegdna's naming blends Indigenous motifs (of language and naming protocols), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and classical myth. The final three novels are all narrated in first person by George (and at times Amelia). George is now a shape-shifting Dingo and central protagonist, who is bound to Amelia by blood sharing, servile desire and fear. In *The Undying* Indigenous totems are no longer corporeally separate as the characters become shape shifters, evoking another genre convention, that of the trickster story.

*Underground*,<sup>12</sup> the third novel sees Wadawaka captured by Amelia and George his attempted rescuer. In this novel, like *The Undying*, Jangamuttuk, Ludjee and their companions meet local Indigenous groups and repeat ceremonies to cleanse the world of the colonial invasion and of Amelia's monstrous *Moma* presence. The final book, *The Promised Land*<sup>13</sup> shifts the narrative to the gold rush fields. The characters seem to be immortal and timeless, rehearsing and repeating the story continually in a way that elides resolution. They are constantly on a ship floating indefinitely away from any specific sense of nation and history.

An important marker, then, of the textual tissue created by Mudrooroo is a collage of 'stories' from global referents. This is not simply answering back to colonial text, but a

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<sup>7</sup> Maureen Clark, *Mudrooroo: a likely story: identity and belonging in postcolonial Australia* (Oxford: Peter Lang Publishers, 2007) 201.

<sup>8</sup> Mudrooroo, *The Undying* (Pymble, N.S.W: Angus & Robertson, 1998).

<sup>9</sup> See Gerry Turcotte, 'Vampiric Decolonization: Fanon, 'Terrorism' and Mudrooroo's Vampire Trilogy' in A Lopez (ed), *Postcolonial Whiteness: A Critical Reader on Race and Empire* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Eliza Fraser was famously shipwrecked on what is now known as Fraser Island off the coast of Queensland in 1836. Her story of survival amongst the Badtjala people became a colonial and then national preoccupation in Australian history, art, literature and film, see Kay Schaffer, *In the Wake of First Contact: The Eliza Fraser Stories* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> Clark, *Mudrooroo* 215.

<sup>12</sup> Mudrooroo, *Underground* (Pymble, N.S.W: Angus & Robertson, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Mudrooroo, *The Promised Land* (Pymble, N.S.W: Angus & Robertson, 2000).

fusion of narratives into a new spectral and floating transnational Australian consciousness. There are African markers, European canonical texts, and Classical texts. There is also allusion to Native North American texts, through the trickster figure and specific writings by Native American authors such as Gerald Vizenor. And while, the work is fundamentally transnational there are specific Australian historical and political incidents retold.

### Dis-placing Nation

The ever-widening spheres of place in Mudrooroo's fiction are evoked primarily by citation of significant historical, literary and ethnographic texts. The magic realist assemblage contests the veracity of national literatures and histories, exposing the threat such works pose as a horrific all-consuming monolith. Mudrooroo's *Master* series meets and evades the genre conventions of magical realism in interesting ways. Mudrooroo is using a genre that deploys ambiguity, ambiguously. His use of magic realism exposes the way in which such national histories and literatures are simulations, not mimetic representations. In positioning representations of nation as *both* dangerous and simulated, the *Master* series offers no replacement 'real' but rather suggests such representations are simulacra which bear no relation to reality whatsoever.<sup>14</sup> The excessive and ironic nature of the magic realist form suggests post-modern approaches to national 'truths.' The diverse local and transnational allusions construct a textually self-referential and hyperbolic relation to place which eliciting a disquieting of national presumptions. The textual pastiche of stories and places in the *Master* series presents an overtly textual world beyond national boundaries.<sup>15</sup>

To suggest national representations of identity are simulations, or not 'real,' is to move the *Master* series out of debates over cultural accuracy and into the post-modern (which is concerned to show that 'truth' is never free of power distortions, whilst what is 'real' is always open to discussion and debate). Ontological explorations into selfhood have always been inflected with transience and the spectral in Mudrooroo's oeuvre. In a recent article he states:

We are not fixed static entities inhabiting a fixed static world or universe, but dynamic beings evolving along with as part of the universal flux. My identity is not real<sup>16</sup> but imaginary assembled by the mind.<sup>17</sup>

This is a deliberate call to existentialist understandings.<sup>18</sup> The sense of identity – whether personal or national – as not real but rather a product of the social imagination in an unsettled world, also brings to mind Baudrillard's notion of the simulacra. Baudrillard's sense of the simulacra is introduced through Borges tale of the Empire that grew alongside its own to-

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<sup>14</sup> See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations from Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986).

<sup>15</sup> It is acknowledged that the author has made contrary essentialist claims, see Mudrooroo, *Milli Milli Wangka*.

<sup>16</sup> In this same article, Mudrooroo *assembles and imagines* the death of his sister, Betty Polglaze.

<sup>17</sup> Mudrooroo, 'Portrait of the Artist as Sick Old Villain "Me Yes I Am He the Villain": Reflections of a Bloke from Outside' *JASAL* 11.2 (2012) April 22, 2012 [http://asaliterature.com/?page\\_id=63](http://asaliterature.com/?page_id=63)

<sup>18</sup> Of course, the comment by the author is not only an existential concept of identity, which would incorporate conceptions of freedom of thought as connected to real world concerns. It can be read as a refusal to acknowledge some of the constructions of self-identity that he, himself, may have colluded in. The focus here is on light it sheds on Mudrooroo's transnational literary impetus.

scale representative map, until the territory disappeared and only fragments of the map remained:

The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory – precession of simulacra – it is the map that engenders the territory.<sup>19</sup>

In the post-colonial sense, this is clarified by Benedict Andersen, who locates the genealogy of national imaginings in the colonial processes of measuring and imagining itself via museum artefacts, census and maps. Such records and categorisations inform the artefacts, imaginings and simulation of national history and literature<sup>20</sup> to the exclusion of Aboriginal records, cultural categorisations, tribal language data and the like. Aboriginal epistemological approaches to land were/are quite different and not validated by the colonial process:

Aboriginal knowledge of country, from which a sense of place comes, constitutes particular stretches of land (including waterways) unified by a number of places set out along a track or number of tracks. These places may or may not be codified in the discourse of the *bugarrigarra* [Dreaming]. Larger or smaller stretches of country are held through complex guardianship by communities and individuals.<sup>21</sup>

Within colonial histories and literatures – as they do in Andersen’s illumination of museum artefacts, census and maps – key national tropes become the maps that precede the territory, forming the nation’s sense of itself and projection of itself to others. Early Australian censuses and maps constructed a ‘real’ that is absent of Indigenous presence. Other historical tropes such as Eliza Fraser as lost woman, among savages, become similar recurring simulations. These nationalist simulations are not neutral, rather they express ideas and values derived from, and justified by, the colonial system. The *Master* series subjects them to magic realist irony.

Magic realism is traditionally defined as a genre that forces the reader to accept ‘incredible’ happenings as momentarily ordinary.<sup>22</sup> But magic realism is also a genre that evokes contention. Within post-colonial frames, it risks losing its meaning as a synchronisation of forms when the Indigenous epistemology is deemed magical and the European realist and, by implication, superior.<sup>23</sup> Magic realism has been critiqued as an ‘anthropological’ vision of Indigenous cultures. It has been rejected as exoticism, a literary commodification of Indigenous cultures globally.<sup>24</sup> But as Takolander illuminates, the form, and Mudrooroo’s use of it, is inherently ironic. It is deliberately presenting the unreal as

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<sup>19</sup> Baudrillard 166.

<sup>20</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York: Verso, 1991) 181.

<sup>21</sup> Krim Benterrak, Stephen Muecke and Paddy Roe, *Reading the Country: Introduction to Nomadology* (Fremantle W.A, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1996) 274.

<sup>22</sup> Jean Durix, *Mimesis, Genres and Post-colonial: Deconstructing Magic Realism* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd 1998) 79.

<sup>23</sup> Alison Ravenscroft, ‘Dreaming of Others: *Carpentaria* and its Critics’, *Cultural Studies Review* 18.2 (2010) 196.

<sup>24</sup> Maria Takolander, ‘Magic Realism and Fakery: After Carpentier’s “Marvellous Real” and Mudrooroo’s “Maban Reality”’ *Antipodes* 24.2 (2010) 166.

real,<sup>25</sup> revelling in simulation, replicating the way we can only understand the value of ‘real’ through story, through maps. This has important post-modern effects for nationalist representations of place; as Takolander clarifies, ‘the mimetic basis for the nationalist project of ethnic representation, as a result of the ironic and rhetorical nature of the magic realist mode, is undermined.’<sup>26</sup> In the *Master* series the national project of representation is contested as simultaneously a voracious consumer of diversity and a simulation.

Structurally and thematically the works are excessive and hint at a continual simulation and rehearsal without origin. In fact, the *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* series negates expectations of a linear series. It can be considered as a group of five novels beginning with *Doctor Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* (1987),<sup>27</sup> of 4 novels beginning with *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* (1991), or more recently as a Vampire Trilogy<sup>28</sup> beginning with *The Undying* (1998). The series complicates any sense of an originary text, or of cause and effect. Excessive Gothic scenes and mimicry of Indigenous rituals are piled on top of one another with little explanation or connection. They do not reflect a clearly locatable pre-existent real in any way. The characters are immortal, timeless, and trans-human, rehearsing and repeating the story continually in a way that displaces dénouement. The events are excessive, with Star Wars-like sky battles occurring between totem shape-shifters armed with laser producing crystals.

Within this excessive and ironic use of the magic realist form, the *Master* series is preoccupied with two central nation-forming historical motifs. These two motifs have morphed continually in literature, art and history over the last 200 years. These are George Augustus Robinson<sup>29</sup> – a simulacrum of the myth of Indigenous auto-genocide in the colonial encounter, and Eliza Frazer<sup>30</sup> – a simulacrum of the myth of European purity and Indigenous savagery. Both figures recur across the series and demand their own distinction from other characters while consuming all.

Amelia, for example, insists she will ‘remain a virgin until...[her] ceasing’<sup>31</sup> but consumes and enslaves Indigenous and European characters throughout the texts. Amelia’s words are hyper-ironic, a deliberate construction of an illusion of innocence – or an absence of ‘experience’ – that her actions belie. In this way, she is allegorically a form of national artistic introspection that is both dangerously xenophobic and assimilationist while fraudulently masking its own simulated state. It is significant that the vampiric Amelia is an artist, choosing to locate the inception of her story in Victorian London, where she is producing cards depicting romanticised and erotic female forms. She seems to entice her Dracula-like master through her artistic imaging of the female body; he is attracted to the corruptibility her artistic representations evince. But Amelia recognises her art to be artifice and fraud in discussing her use of her sister Eliza as unknowing model:

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<sup>25</sup> Takolander, 165.

<sup>26</sup> Takolander, 167.

<sup>27</sup> Mudrooroo, *Doctor Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World*.

<sup>28</sup> Maureen Clark, ‘Terror as White Female in Mudrooroo’s Vampire Trilogy’ *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 41.2 (2006) 121.

<sup>29</sup> Robinson is a figure referencing the historical Chief Protector of the Aborigines in Tasmania in the early 1800s.

<sup>30</sup> See above, footnote 13.

<sup>31</sup> Mudrooroo, *The Undying* 66.

Although on occasion her pose was somewhat indecorous, especially when sleep claimed her, my swift sketches did away with such ungainliness. She was unaware of the uses I made of her ...<sup>32</sup>

Amelia, arguably, stands for fiction itself, an imaginary representation of the simulacrum without substantive origin at the heart of any national literature. She substitutes her sister Eliza Fraser – an historical figure who came to simulate a first contact ‘real’ for artists throughout Australian history.<sup>33</sup> And she scripts herself into the narrative frames of *Vanity Fair* and *Dracula* as well as the history of George Augustus Robinson. Amelia is always a simulation, empty of origin, carrying her earth with her, attempting to consume and assimilate all she encounters, an allegory of nation and literature: the map that has become the real.

Amelia’s allegorical status also deconstructs colonial imaginings (and erasure) of Indigenous story. Her construction is as the vampiric /erotic shipwrecked European woman feeding on Indigenous characters such as George and Gunatinga. Both become servants to Amelia, the former is the son of protagonists Jangamuttuk and Ludjee (and the biological son of the character George Augustus Robinson) who shape shifts into a Dingo. Gunatinga is a pitiable and continually renamed character, searching for power through accidents that he interprets as omens. Amelia’s dominion over these two, along with other male characters, and her hyper-sexualisation and violence conjure the trope of the vagina détente. This portrayal, while deeply sexist<sup>34</sup> is, in post-colonial terms, doubly allegorical, signifying the European simulation of Indigenous people through images from European Gothic fears and desires. Indigenous communities in the texts are blamed for Amelia’s acts of savagery and punished by further European acts of savagery. For example, the violent and boorish, local, colonial commander, Captain Torrens stumbles on the remnants of Amelia’s murderous consumption of a ship’s crew. He attributes the acts of ‘savagery’ to the local Indigenous people and conducts his own horrific retribution.<sup>35</sup> In this way, Amelia as vampiric spectre demonstrates how the simulation of Indigenous savagery in first contact history, a history foundational to nation, replaced the real. To further complicate the narrative excesses, Captain Torrens is secretly a shape shifting Gothic were-bear. Such excesses in plot and character are reinforced through the strategic use of citations. These citations are textual simulations of earlier textual simulations: both of Indigenous and transnational stories.

### **The role of the transnational**

Transnational citations characterise Mudrooroo’s work. Bruce Bennet defines Mudrooroo’s poem *Dalwurra: Black Bittern* as international and syncretic in its movement from Western Australia to Singapore, India, Scotland and England.<sup>36</sup> Both India and, more recently, Nepal are obviously crucial sites of creative inspiration for the author. In *The Undying* the heavy use of the term ‘shaman’ and of shape-shifting evokes a new transnational influence, the First

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<sup>32</sup> Mudrooroo, *Undying* 71.

<sup>33</sup> See nineteenth century historian John Curtis and twentieth century Australian writers and artists such as Patrick White and Sydney Nolan among others.

<sup>34</sup> See Clark, ‘Terror’ 121-38.

<sup>35</sup> Mudrooroo, *Undying* 86-9.

<sup>36</sup> Bruce Bennett, *An Australian Compass: Essays on Place and Direction in Australian Literature* (South Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press 1991) 1999, 22-3.

Nations American trickster mythology. The trickster motif is referenced in the epigraph to *Underground*, the second volume of the vampire trilogy:

We danced roundabout ... dressed in our breechcloths and academic sashes with all the animals and ghosts under the redwood trees ... the footdogs laughed and barked from the rim. Gerald Vizenor.<sup>37</sup>

Mudrooroo prefaces this citation with a prequel to the text: 'No reality where none intended.'<sup>38</sup> Juxtaposition of these two statements suggests that Mudrooroo perceives the act of writing as a kind of trickery, a confounding of expectations and a preoccupation with the connection between nationalist literature, colonisation and simulacrum. The reference is significant also because Gerald Vizenor is a Native North American writer and a theorist, who discusses American literary representation of Indians as tragic 'simulations.'<sup>39</sup> Mudrooroo's citation indicates a further evocation of post-modern simulation in identity forming processes. These intertextual allusions reveal the way nations are always simulations produced through stories, and the novels strategically juxtapose diverse stories to produce new understandings.

One important intertextual allusion in the *Master* series is the continual morphing and shape-shifting of an 'African' signifier, Wadawaka, who tells African oral stories, and brings knowledge of other silenced histories. Wadawaka is a transnational referent and shifts in signification continually. He is not a 'real' presence: at various points an escaped African American slave, a traveller, the 'black gentleman' highwayman John Summers and whaler Queequeg through the *Moby Dick* allusion.<sup>40</sup> Like Amelia, Wadawaka's shape shifting transgresses boundaries between historical and literary referents. While the 'highwayman,' black Englishman John Summers, is not an actual historical figure, he represents African bushrangers in Australia's colonial past. This is combined with the works' thematic incongruences; he is both a sexual predator of, and is psychically enslaved by, Amelia.

Throughout the vampire trilogy classical citations pervade but in the second novel, *Underground*, these become exorbitant. This is partly a satirical response to the historical George Augustus Robinson's proclivity for renaming his Indigenous 'wards' after classical figures 'since he considered some of us still pagans, he gleefully gave those ones heathen names: Jason, Hector, Hercules.'<sup>41</sup> But it is also part of the author's hyperbolic pastiche of citations. The primary narrator, George, likens his journey to that of Jason or Ulysses in its ceaselessness.<sup>42</sup> Amelia, who intercepts George's narration with her own, likens herself at different times to Kore (Persephone) in her sense of her voluptuous sexuality, her immortality, her underground inhabitancy and her need for sarcophagus.<sup>43</sup> Amelia later cites the story of Medea, who takes retribution for her husband Jason's betrayal and infidelity by murdering her own children. The citation then becomes enacted as inter-textual allusion when

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<sup>37</sup> Mudrooroo, *Underground* epigraph.

<sup>38</sup> Mudrooroo, *The Undying* preface.

<sup>39</sup> Gerald Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses: Native American Scenes of Absence and Presence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 1998) 6.

<sup>40</sup> Clark, 'Terror' 132.

<sup>41</sup> Mudrooroo, *Underground* 9.

<sup>42</sup> Mudrooroo, *Underground* 4.

<sup>43</sup> Mudrooroo, *Undying* 171 and Mudrooroo, *Underground* 82-3.

Amelia performs her own parallel act of ‘matricide’ in murdering the babies she has stolen. *Underground* also sees Wadawaka captured by Amelia and George (his attempted rescuer) in a complex re-gendering of *Orpheus and Eurydice*, with George evading the Giant Devil Dingo / Cerberus to search for his dearest mate, Wadawaka / Eurydice who is trapped in the underground domain of, not Hades but Amelia. These are not just transnational citations, but supranational, referents from beyond national specificity and temporality.

The general allusion to *Dracula* made in Amelia’s recollection of her transfiguration to vampiric state become specific when textual allusions to *Dracula* are added in the final book, *The Promised Land*. This novel opens with the noctambulism of a new character Lucy, being ameliorated by the thinly veiled homo-erotic support of her ‘chum’ Mina. This is until she marries a newly widowed George Augustus Robinson. This final novel also shifts the narrative to the gold rush fields; *Moby Dick* and *Vanity Fair*, among other texts, is woven in, with a revision of Becky Sharp<sup>44</sup> intertwined into the mix of characters and Wadawaka’s history being extended to incorporate time on the *Pequod* as part of Ahab’s obsessive quest in *Moby Dick*.<sup>45</sup> Such assemblage is a form of parataxis, juxtaposing English, American and classical literary texts with Australian historical tropes that have become literary. Ken Gelder draws on the reading practises of Wai Chee Dimock and Susan Stanford Friedman to illuminate such parataxis. He has described the impact of parataxis as rendering the different referents, and their connective tissues, as remote and proximate.<sup>46</sup> The different classical, literary, and historical referents are proximate and their assemblage shed light on each other, revealing Australian national discourse is not written in mimetic isolation but is always produced in relation to other texts.<sup>47</sup> But the excesses implicit in such assemblage mean there can be no mimetic logic of transmission of the Australian nation, as fixed or singularly ‘real’ – other than aesthetically, or discursively on the level of enacted fictive reality within the story of nationhood. The excessive combination can mean Australia is a kind of distant ‘trace woven into a larger, often incongruous transnational fabric.’<sup>48</sup>

To further reinforce this idea, the textual citations selected are not simply literary and transnational. The works are flooded with transregional Indigenous ethnographic records and story. They come from regions as diverse as South Australia, Central Australia, Northern Territory, Tasmania, and the Gulf of Carpentaria in Northern Queensland. The Tasmanian element, vital to European stories of first contact, is present with reincarnations of Wooreddy and Truggernanni.<sup>49</sup> For example, Mudrooroo selects ethnographic records such as those of T.G.H Strehlow who attributed major literary worth to the song cycles recorded. Strehlow’s transcription of Central Australian Aranda people’s *The Bandicoot Ancestor Song of Ilbalintja* features bandicoot digging through the earth, wounded and ostracised by the great ancestor spirit and inscribed with spiritual importance.<sup>50</sup> This bandicoot is simulated as the ‘shaman’ Bandicoot in Mudrooroo’s novel, *Underground*, a shaman who is similarly ostracised, blamed for Amelia’s corruption of the land by his community, yet able to assist

<sup>44</sup> Mudrooroo, *Promised Land* 9.

<sup>45</sup> Mudrooroo, *Promised Land* 220.

<sup>46</sup> Gelder 11.

<sup>47</sup> Gelder.

<sup>48</sup> Gelder 9.

<sup>49</sup> It is important to acknowledge the many spellings for Truganini. Mudrooroo’s use of Truggernanna is not one of the common spellings.

<sup>50</sup> Strehlow in Mudrooroo, *Milli Milli Wangka* 32.

Jangamuttuk and his allies with knowledge of the underground lairs Amelia inhabits. What is significant about the inclusion of many of these referents is that they appear to operate in two ways, similar to the historical European allusions to Eliza Fraser and George Augustus Robinson. Milyado, or Old Bandicoot is a restoration of Indigenous knowledge and worldview to a creative rendering of the colonial encounter, an act of proximity, in the same way that the re-construction of Eliza Frazer is an anti-colonial act. But this citation is also quite spectral and stammering. Milyado is at another level a plot device, providing information, but then destabilising his own surety:

Old Bandicoot's eyes mightn't be good anymore; but he doesn't need them when he's got the sun in the morning and the moon at night, except he can't see them and often he can't tell if its day or night – but forget all that, it's only a carry on, he's got a secret, you know. If he wants to, he can see all right; but why should he when he likes warm darkness.<sup>51</sup>

This is not only a characterising of elderly ramblings, as many characters are voiced through this combination of soliloquy and shifting logic. Old Bandicoot is both present, asserting Indigenous presence, yet not quite present. He is openly sharing knowledge, yet immediately retracting it, a displacement of assertive identity itself.

Mudrooroo's work draws on other published versions of traditional Aboriginal literature. The 'mischievous crow' is a key story collected by South Australian Ngarrindjeri elder David Unaipon in the early twentieth century. It tells of a figure whose attempts at game playing and trickery end up creating many positive elements in the physical world.<sup>52</sup> He is both good and bad, making mistakes frequently.<sup>53</sup> Mudrooroo's adaptation of this textual referent follows a similar pattern, yet like Milyado is also continually engaging in ambiguous double talk, both evoking presence and hinting at his own entity as simulated representation within the *Master* series. There are also prominent inter-textual references from Dick Roughsey's children's stories. Roughsey's first story, *The Giant Devil Dingo*, was published in 1973.<sup>54</sup> The figure, Giant Devil Dingo, appears in Mudrooroo's *Undying* and *Underground*, evoked through the narrator's shape shifting to Dingo form. It is also reinforced by the seemingly random appearance of a specific 'Giant Devil Dingo' in *Underground*. This giant beast appears to menace George as he attempt to journey underground to save Wadawaka. Again there is the strong conjuring of Indigenous story to counter the colonial erasure combined with the destabilising sense that this Giant Devil Dingo is not grounded in country, but simulation from elsewhere, appearing at random within the complex fabric of the author's stream of associations. In fact, its appearance at the entrance to an underground world, elsewhere in the novel likened to Hades, conflates this Lardil story with a classical reference to Cerberus, the three-headed hellhound that guards Hades.

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<sup>51</sup> Mudrooroo, *Underground* 61.

<sup>52</sup> 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. See David Unaipon, *Legendary tales of the Australian Aborigines*, eds. Stephen Muecke and Adam Shoemaker (Carlton, VIC: Melbourne University Press, 2001).

<sup>53</sup> Unaipon.

<sup>54</sup> Marcie Muir, *A History of Australian Children's Book Illustration* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1982) 82.

### **If not nation, where?**

These references to recorded Indigenous stories are not simply a counter-discursive opposition to the presence of consumptive nationalist signifiers. It is a post-modern refusal to privilege white victory. But as with the transnational, North American, African, European and classical referents, they specifically draw on 'recorded' and published stories. They are abstracted and placed as one of many simulations in a transnational bricolage of stories. Here, they have currency to dispute nationalist and colonial imaginings yet they are dislocated from regional specificity. There are problems with this relocation of stories within a cosmos rather than a specific country or place. While the *Master* series is post-modern and does not claim to be representative, there is no recognisable 'real' place within the series at all.

In his critical writing, Mudrooroo has 'maban reality' as having 'firm grounding in the earth or country, together with an acceptance of the supernatural as part of everyday reality.'<sup>55</sup> But, this stance has some inconsistencies. The earth-in which Mudrooroo grounds and sets his writing is not regionally specific. The precursor to the series, *Dr Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* (1983) is certainly set in Tasmania and *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* (1991)<sup>56</sup> is mostly set on Bruny Island. But in *The Undying* (1998), *Underground* (1999) and *The Promised Land* (2000)<sup>57</sup> such specificity of place is obfuscated. In fact, much action occurs on that universal metaphor for transnational community, the ship. When on land, references to weather or compass direction west, gold rush activity, colonial settlement towns, or the Fraser shipwreck are incongruent, they lead nowhere. There are few specifically regional land marks or specific textual cues in setting to locate a regional connection. The writing, then, presents a paradox, evoking story grounded in land while abrogating mimetic and realist evocations of the specific nation or region. This is not new to magic realist novels, in fact the genre is characterised by the inconclusive. The ability of the magic realist novel to realise this potential is a theme taken up in several of Salman Rushdie's essays.<sup>58</sup> The magic realist genre is always marked by a fictional necessity to tell stories that are hampered by ambiguous distancing, a desire to violate mimetic logic and undermine *all* claims to narrative 'mastery.'

### **Conclusions**

*The Master* series is an assemblage of simulations beyond the specifics of an individual nation. The structure, characters and events with the series are all marked by excess and morph continually, subjecting the notion of origin and the 'real' to magic realist irony. In fact, the nation is imaginary, a simulation, and through the allegorical positioning of Amelia and Robinson the texts evoke the spectral horror implicit in past 'maps' that would erase and consume diversity. The works suggest that it is a delusion to think that we have 'pinned down' the physical and cultural boundaries of nationality in the maps and artefacts of colonisation. Mudrooroo's allusive and ironic *Master of the Ghost Dreaming Series* compiles Indigenous Australian with transcontinental stories and suggests that our imaginings – literary and historical – are maps that can replace the real in our relationships to place. The

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<sup>55</sup> Mudrooroo, *Milli Milli Wangka* 97.

<sup>56</sup> Mudrooroo, *Master of the Ghost Dreaming*.

<sup>57</sup> Mudrooroo, *The Promised Land*.

<sup>58</sup> Salman Rushdie, 'Outside the Whale', *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta Books, 1991).

effects of dislocating Indigenous story from regional specificity are disregarded in this postmodern pastiche of stories.