

*Postcolonial Rewritings of Bram Stoker's Dracula:  
Mudrooroo's Vampire Trilogy*

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**Abstract.** Indigenous-Australian fiction has experimented with subgenres of the Fantastic in various ways to secure an empowering location from which to address post/colonial dispossession. In the mid-1990s, the Australian writer and critic Mudrooroo, formerly known as Colin Johnson, proposed Maban Reality as a genre denomination for fiction which introduces the reader to the powerful and empowering universe of the Aboriginal *maban* or shaman, also known as the Dreaming. Mudrooroo's coining of Maban Reality was a way of establishing an Australian variant of Magic Realism which defied a European epistemology of the universe, engaging and enabling Dreamtime spirituality as a solid pillar of Aboriginal reality. Mudrooroo had already experimented with a postcolonial reversal of the Gothic, a dark version of the Fantastic, in the first of his Tasmanian quintet, *Dr Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* (1983), but left its gloomy resignation to a dire Indigenous fate under colonial rule behind for the upbeat *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* (1993). Yet, as the result of a deep personal crisis—believed not to have an Aboriginal bloodline, in the mid-1990s he was barred from the tribal affiliation he had long claimed—Mudrooroo resorted to the gloominess of the postcolonial Gothic again in a vampire trilogy to reflect on the devastating impact of colonisation on Australian identity at large. This essay comments on the ways in which he has reflected on the present state of Australianness by rewriting Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.

**Key words:** postcolonialism; Indigeneity; Mudrooroo; Colin Johnson; the Fantastic; the Gothic; vampire fiction.

### **Introduction: the Fantastic, the Gothic, the Vampire**

Postcolonial literatures have insistently attempted to come to grips with the uneasy coexistence of indigenous and settler/invader cultures and epistemologies, and writers have adapted western

form to create a critical literary interface adapting their own, often oral traditions. The genre of the Fantastic, “a mode of fiction in which the possible and the impossible are confounded so as to leave the reader (and often the narrator and/or central character) with no consistent explanation for the story’s strange events” (see Works Cited: “fantastic”), has been receptive to postcolonial writers. They have often resorted to, and rewritten various subgenres of the Fantastic, such as Magic Realism, the Gothic and vampire fiction, to give voice to the confluence of two manifestly different realities. Elleke Boehmer points out that indigenous writers adapt white literary conventions with the purpose of alienating, Othering, and displace mainstream readership, and so create space for indigenous cultures. In South-American literature, the incorporation of elements from a non-Western universe into everyday reality coined the genre of Magic Realism. In an Orientalist vein, the genre of Magic Realism takes over a colonial style of writing and “mimics the colonial’s explorer’s reliance on fantasy and exaggeration to describe new worlds,” but also uses the illusory to propose imaginary yet conceivable worlds that “expose the extremities of the neo-colonial condition” (1995: 242). Not surprisingly, the term Magic Realism has also been applied to instances of Indigenous Australian fiction that mobilise the mythical Aboriginal universe through so-called “dreamtime narrative” (Ashcroft et.al. 2009), and authors such as Alexis Wright (*Plains of Promise* 1997; *Carpentaria* 2006; *The Swan Book* 2013), Kim Scott (*Benang* 1999; *That Deadman Dance* 2010) and Sam Watson (*The Kadaitcha Sung* 1990) have produced their own, particular modulations of it.

The question whether Magic Realism is an appropriate label for contemporary Indigenous-Australian fiction engaging with the fantastic is debatable inasmuch the use of the term ‘magic’ may point towards the Indigenous re-incorporation of the Dreaming into a Western norm of objectified and quantifiable reality (Renes 2002). Recently, Alexis Wright spoke of Aboriginal Reality as an alternative denomination of genre.<sup>1</sup> But already in the mid-1990s the Australian writer and critic Colin Johnson, writing as Mudrooroo, proposed Maban Reality as a genre denomination for fiction which introduces the reader to the powerful and empowering universe of the Aboriginal *maban* (shaman), so as to assert an enabling form of Indigeneity (1997: 97-8). Mudrooroo had already experimented with another form of the Fantastic, a gloomy, postcolonial reversal of the Gothic, in the first of his Tasmanian quintet, *Dr Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* (1983), which sees white colonisation as the invasion of ‘pale ghosts’ that take over and destroy Indigenous society. Yet, he traded its resignation to a dire Indigenous fate under colonial rule for the upbeat *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* (1993), whose optimism for an enfranchised Indigenous future relies on pitting the Dreaming universe against a vampiric manifestation of colonialism. At the turn of the century and in a deep personal crisis—believed not to have an Indigenous bloodline, in the mid-1990s he had been refused belonging by the people he had claimed tribal affiliation to—Mudrooroo returned to full-fledged Gothic again in a vampire trilogy which reflected on the devastating impact of colonisation on Australian identity from the vantage point of, and beyond his own, personal distress. The vampire is a literary figure that spoke intensely to the Imperial-Victorian mind by raising anxiety about the proliferation of racial impurity through the notion of vampiric contamination of the blood, and therefore a trope easily exportable and adaptable to the post/colonial context; in Mudrooroo’s trilogy, the colonial vampire “bites back” at the Imperial centre as well as the Indigenous margins through the indiscriminate mingling of blood. This essay comments on the ways Mudrooroo reflects on Australianness by rewriting Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* in a singular manifestation of the Antipodean Fantastic.

## Vampiric fins-de-siècle

Mudrooroo's vampire trilogy—*The Undying*, 1998; *Underground*, 1999; *The Promised Land*, 2000—describes the escape of a small fragmented mob of Tasmanians from Flinders Island, the mission-reserve where they barely survived in the 'care' of the English parvenu Sir George Augustus Robinson, a self-serving protector of the Aborigines. Their vexed journey, led by their chief and shaman Jangamuttuk and piloted by the tribally-adopted African Wadawaka, takes them into a hellish Australian mainland haunted by a white female vampire who bodes a dire future for these disenfranchised survivors of Tasmania's colonisation. The trilogy undoes the traditional binary constructions that *Master* simply reversed in the search for Indigenous empowerment. Rather than denoting an inversion of roles, the colonial vampiress haunts, terrorizes and destroys all identity, taking it into the realm of deconstruction and non-representation. This obviously harks back to the haunting destruction of Mudrooroo's identity in his own fin-de-siècle, the advent of the third millennium. Indeed, it would be difficult to deny the author's personal stake in the development of the vampire plot. But while this inscription could be taken as a mere misogynist reconfiguration of his postcolonising writing project (see Maureen Clark 2006), a more complex reading may reveal the vampire figure to push beyond class, race and gender binaries, which would allow taking Aboriginality out of the reductive terms of biological determination.

No doubt the figure of the trilogy's female protagonist, the vampiress Amelia, is a contemporary re-inscription of Count Dracula, who first came to life in Bram Stoker's famous instance of Victorian Gothic. Its first publication in 1897 coincided with the decline of Empire at the end of the Victorian era, and precedes Mudrooroo's first volume of his vampire trilogy by exactly a hundred years. Not surprisingly, the sense of Gothic doom that pervades the vampire set is the product of another disappointing fin-de-siècle which saw the reductive onslaught of conservative politics on Aboriginal affairs and the concomitant personal attacks on, and disenfranchisement of Indigenous of high public profile whose biological origins were considered unclear. Thus, it is not surprising that, at exactly a century's remove, Mudrooroo should exploit the similarities between 19<sup>th</sup> century Social Darwinism and 20<sup>th</sup> century assimilation to configure an uncanny rewrite of the Count. Dracula is, after all, a character who exemplifies the Victorian concern with the pureness of blood and biological origins, and Amelia picks up on the infectious notion of colonising the land-as-body in Stoker's original from an Antipodean mirror perspective which reinscribes the Victorian purity-of-blood issue postcolonially as Aboriginal 'authenticity'.

Stephen Arata describes Count Dracula's invasion of London and its citizens as a Gothic form of "reverse colonisation" by putting the novel into the historical context of Victorian and Imperial decline at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Significantly, Stoker locates the geographical setting of Count Dracula's home, Transylvania, in an inaccessible part of Rumania, a country which embodied the meeting of East and West and materialised as the locus of Imperial strife. Here, western powers had long fought out their expansive impulses and Rumania was known, therefore, "as part of the vexed 'Eastern question'" (1990: 627). This troubling issue also included the process of territorial disintegration known as balkanisation, and it is not coincidental that the origins of the vampire can be located in the Balkan Peninsula. From Serbia disturbing tales reached Western Europe in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century that roused "widespread interest and

imaginative treatment of vampirism,” appealing intensely to the popular imagination (see Works Cited: “vampire”). Balkanisation could not be contained, spilled over its own borders and led to the First World War, which was triggered off by the assassination of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian kingdom by a Serbian nationalist in Sarajevo in 1914. The Imperial-colonial aspect of the vampire is profiled in its origins in territorial loss and fragmentation, and the uncanny anxiety this generates is underlined in its necessity to rest in “native earth.” The impossible repression of the lasting trauma territorial loss and fragmentation generate can be understood to be reflected in the “undead” creature’s haunting powers (see Works Cited: “vampire”).

Stoker’s *Dracula* emulates Western invasive behaviour in the journey of the solicitor’s clerk Jonathan Harker to Transylvania, but this consumed orientalist is soon at a loss by his penetration of the unknown, as Arata argues. Count Dracula, however, is configured as his dark mirror image, a skilled “occidentalizer” (Arata plays on Edward Said’s definition of Orientalism [1978] here) who *does* successfully invade Britain, and invokes the distant brutality of colonial violence in the Metropole. Indeed, *Dracula*’s Gothic fantasy of reverse colonisation acts out geopolitical fears about the Other’s capacity to strike back as well as cultural guilt for the annihilation of Other civilisations: “In Count Dracula, Victorian readers could recognize their culture’s imperial ideology mirrored back as a kind of monstrosity ... as a form of bad faith” (Arata 1990: 634). In *Wooreddy* and *Master*, this bad faith allows Mudrooroo to script the act of Imperial colonisation itself as monstrous from the perspective of the Aborigines. Such Imperial haunting is taken to unsuspected Gothic extremes in his vampire set.

In Stoker’s boundary-crossing travel narrative “[v]ampires are generated by racial enervation and the decline of empire, not vice versa [so that] the appearance of vampires becomes the sign of profound trouble,” Stephen Arata writes. “For Stoker, the Gothic and the travel narrative problematize, separately and together, the very boundaries on which British Imperial hegemony depended: between civilised and primitive, colonizer and colonized, victimizer (either imperialist or vampire) and victim” (1990: 626-29). Similarly, the trilogy’s Indigenes are troubled by a white vampire who preferably haunts tenuous racial boundaries such as exemplified in Wadawaka, an Aboriginalised African expert sailor, and George, a European-Indigenous half-caste. By using the vampire, Mudrooroo’s trilogy depicts the continuation of the songline of the mob’s leader, Jangamuttuk, as a Gothic journey into the liminal area of the colonial uncanny, so as to interrogate Imperial notions of race, class and gender in the crucible of life and death.

## **The vampire trilogy and race**

George the half-caste is named after his biological father, the Protector, but has been adopted by Jangamuttuk. His hybrid status, youthful inexperience and lack of inscription into Aboriginal manhood make him most susceptible to the transformative potential of Amelia’s infectious bite—as he says in *The Undying*, “Worse, far worse, at least for me, an old granny ghost touched me with her teeth and followed after us. She gave me dreams that were not my dreams. And that is part of my story” (Mudrooroo 1998: 2). Thus, the vampiric infection that will change him physically and spiritually is a simple extension of the Social-Darwinist notion of stronger and weaker blood that translates the colonial condition of white domination into nature—genetics. In this view, George is lost for the Indigenous cause because his biological father’s blood will take over his mother Ludjee’s, wife to Jangamuttuk; this is metaphorically represented by vampiric

contamination, which itself stands for colonisation as an infectious disease (cf. Pearson 2003: 190). Indeed, Indigenes literally fell prey to imported European illnesses which often decimated populations, and this, together with the racist notion of weak blood, fed back into the “doomed race” paradigm which dictated that the Aborigines were condemned to extinction in the face of western civilisation. Nature’s immutable law of ‘survival of the fittest’ would then justify the policy of the Stolen Generations by which half-caste children were separated from their Aboriginal kin and fostered out to white parents. This usually meant the traumatic and at times irreparable loss of their Aboriginal identity, and from an Indigenous point of view, these children were effectively ‘Othered’ into specimens of white civilisation.

In order to express how, in such an assimilative policy, cultural deracination is effected and justified along biological lines, Mudrooroo inverts the vampiric metaphor:

... if blood is a sign of racial identity, then Dracula effectively deracinates his victims  
... In turn, they receive a new racial identity, one that marks them as literally ‘Other’  
... Miscegenation leads, not to the mixing of races, but to the biological and political annihilation of the weaker race by the stronger. (Arata 1990: 630)

Amelia acts similarly in imposing the scathing effects of white colonisation onto the Indigenes, and not surprisingly, from a narrative perspective she takes over focalisation time and again in the trilogy. George’s story starts out as an Indigenous yarn at a campfire (Mudrooroo: 1998: 1), but as the vampiric infection progresses, Amelia invades his mind and takes over the telling. Thus, Maureen Clark observes that “the trilogy’s other first-person narrator, Amelia ‘punctures’ George’s account at regular intervals” (2006: 129), and this effectively deflates/deconstructs the possibilities of the popular genre of Indigenous auto/biography as a means to recover an ‘authentic’ sense of Aboriginality. This is underscored by the fact that George is “the undying” (Mudrooroo 1998: 1). As he “exists in the liminal space of the un-dead,” his inscription in the genre of ‘*life-writing*’ is therefore ambiguous, if not out of place (Pearson 2003: 190).

As if to underline the inexorability of white domination, throughout the trilogy George mostly appears in his Dreamtime-animal shape, a dingo turned into Amelia’s obedient, “faithful ... doggy” (Mudrooroo 1999: 103) and under whose psychic control he is unable to change back to his human shape. As colonial control is also configured through the sexual, Amelia uses him as a toy in her sexual exploits: engaged in cunnilingus, he literally turns into her “lapdog” (Mudrooroo 2000: 32) and symbolises Amelia’s genital area. This also harks back to the “animal companion with open jaws and snapping teeth” of classical art, which might accompany a beautiful woman and “represented her deadly genital trap and evil intent” (Creed 1993: 108). Lastly, as ‘Dingo’ he is made an obedient pet to the unlikely family unit of Wadawaka and Amelia, the *moma/mummy*<sup>ii</sup> ghost, under the protection of a large womb-like cavern. The latter is, indeed, an Australian realm of the dead that, with its immense guardian dog/dingo, underground river and ferryman, resembles the underworld of classical Greek mythology.

This underground family is yet another skilful instance of Mudrooroo’s ever-shifting, promiscuous use of characters, plot and genre, in which the Greek myth of the spring goddess Persephone, a fertility symbol of sorts, is reconfigured so as to enact a warped story of female empowerment and to comment on the state of Aboriginality. Persephone was also known as the

earth goddess Kore—indeed, the name of the vessel that carried Amelia to Australia and reminiscent of the earth Amelia needs to rest in—and as such abducted by Hades, the king of the underworld, to become his bride. The latter harks back to another Lord of Darkness, Count Dracula, who in Mudrooroo's trilogy weds Amelia by vampirising her. It also connects to Wadawaka, whose dark skin colour is subsumed under the darkness of her natural habitat and points towards a racial hybridising of sorts. In her unnatural underground madness, Amelia controls Wadawaka with sex and hallucinogenic mushrooms—perhaps a metaphor for the “numbing” (Mudrooroo 1999: 104) effects of White civilisation—so as to replace her previous “dark lord”, Dracula, and makes him the adoptive father to two Aboriginal babies. Belying the reproductive potential Persephone represents, these “two tiny *tykes*” (Mudrooroo 1999: 104) have been abducted to complete Amelia's nuclear family and feed on her blood. This introduces an anti-natural form of regeneration as they transform into vampires themselves.

Mudrooroo also emulates and rewrites the role of the upper gods Zeus and Demeter in the retrieval of their daughter from the underworld by scripting the magic intervention of the tribal leaders Jangamuttuk and Ludjee in Amelia's dark affairs. The loss of two important members of their clan—one their pilot and the other their only seed for the future—and the abduction of the two Indigenous children propel them to a descent into the cavern and a confrontation with un/death. Because their shamanic powers and firm identities make them more resistant to Amelia's wiles, their adoptive sons Wadawaka and George are returned to the realm of the living. Yet, a price is exacted for their Aboriginal power play: Ludjee and Jangamuttuk disappear from the narrative only to reappear for display at the London World Fair of 1850, and Amelia boils her vampiric offspring to death in retaliation for Wadawaka's elopement.

In a last promiscuous twist, Mudrooroo produces Amelia as an anagram of the mythological earth goddesses Lamiae, who killed and sucked the blood of children and young men and lived in caves (Clark 2006: 124). Additionally, he draws on the Greek myth of Lamia, a dark queen of the Classical Lybia, which was a racially indeterminate area at the northern limits of the “Dark Continent.”<sup>iii</sup> Lamia's two children were taken away after having an extramarital affair with Zeus, and in her maddening grief she turned into the child-killing monster that Amelia re-enacts. Thus, in a masterful stroke, Mudrooroo denounces the unnatural perfidiousness of the Stolen Generation policy, which—metaphorically speaking—sucked away the lifeblood of Indigenous Australia and constituted yet another step in the Social-Darwinist genocidal policy that defined Aboriginality in terms of biological authenticity.

Whereas Wadawaka is under Amelia's spell, he is immune to her bite because his “blood is as sea water to a thirsty man” (Mudrooroo 2000: 227), a quality shared with Ludjee, whose “blood is too strong for [Amelia]” (Mudrooroo 1998: 121). As a vampire, Amelia is connected to the earth and cannot overcome the freedom the sea represents for both. The power Amelia wields over him is therefore of a different kind, and links back to the strong sexual undercurrents in vampire fiction as epitomised in Count Dracula's tale. Stephen Arata holds that Stoker's fiction is concerned with imperial anxieties in which heroines represent the dangers that threaten modern life (Arata 1990: 625). In Stoker's original, once Lady Lucy is infected and transformed by the Count, she takes a “phallic correction” (Craft 1984: 124) by receiving a stake through her heart, from which, not surprisingly, she suffers an orgasmic death. This seems to suggest that no pleasure is greater than (little) death. In other words, the greatest pleasure of all is achieved in a coupling of the male and

female principle, the dissolution of the subject and the consequent deconstruction of identity. Mudrooroo plays on the fear of postcolonial dissolution through a white female protagonist who threatens the community tissue of 'primitive' Australians. Amelia also receives a phallic correction, but of a different kind; in what starts out as a violent rape at the hands of Wadawaka, Mudrooroo configures a scene of pornographic thrust in which she loses her virginity, suffers proverbial little death, and claims him as her new dark/black "master"; yet he refuses: "I am no master nor will I have a master over me" (Mudrooroo 1998: 187-9). This last comment causes Amelia to identify Wadawaka as John Summers, the first free black Englishman, whom her father counselled in the defence of his case; Summers had rebelled against the British 'philanthropists' who had fraudulently pocketed money destined to the Sierra Leone colony,<sup>iv</sup> for which he was framed, convicted and sent off to Australia (Mudrooroo 1998: 190). Wadawaka's pledge to freedom prefigures the disastrous *denouement* of their underground family. However, it also points forward to a scene of subdued romanticism at the end of *The Promised Land*, which is juxtaposed to the extramarital, 'illegitimate' sex under way between Sir George and the governor's wife.

The latter are, indeed, "two rogues that deserve each other," finding each other in their scheming for maximum colonial gain from the imminent gold rush (Mudrooroo 2000: 225). Significantly, their coupling is staged against the backdrop of "the modern world symbolised by the monstrous ship in the harbour," possibly Port Albert in Victoria, where the gold rush started in 1851 (Mudrooroo 2000: 200-22). The phallic "long bulk of the Great Britain, lamps gleaming ... along her monstrous length" has penetrated the Australian mainland" as great and as oppressive as the empire that built it" (Mudrooroo 2000: 219). Thus, the colonial project is explicitly configured as sexual exploit(ation):

"Great, great," [Sir George] groaned, his eyes clinging to the long length of the ship: He imagined the bows slicing through the waters and plunging deep within the waves. "All iron, all hard as iron and over three hundred and fifty feet in length," he moaned, plunging hard into her. "Deeper, deeper," Becky moaned in unison, bent over, and staring at the ship ... (Mudrooroo 2000: 229)

Their fetishist fascination with the 'Great Britain' reveals their real obsession: the vessel is their means of visiting the London World Fair of 1850, where Sir George plans to display the handful of remaining Tasmanians as well as an enormous gold slab. The latter should secure funding and protection for the exploitation of the rich gold find at a future mission compound under his and Rebecca's joint care.

The luring gold nugget, an apt metaphor for the greed underlying the colonial project, has been baptised the Golden Fleece due to its uncommon resemblance to a sheepskin. This reference to Classical myth inscribes the gold find into the issue of legitimacy, as the Argonauts embarked on a quest for the Golden Fleece to place Jason as the rightful king on the throne of Iolcus in Thessaly, which was in dispute due to the plotting of one of the former king's wives. The claimants of the gold treasure are precisely two fraudulent parvenus who need the colonial enterprise to overcome class difference and enthrone themselves in the seat of Empire: "Sir George Augustus was one of those self-made knights who, with the Reform Act of 1832, had risen from the enfranchised lower classes. Though he had yet to create a suitably noble

genealogy to go with his advancement.” Rebecca Crawley, on the other hand, “using brazen invention together with her beauty and sharp intelligence, had glossed over her own origins, which were lower than [sic] those of the knight” (Mudrooroo 2000: 10-11). This female trickster is suggestively reminiscent of the socially-upward mobile anti-heroine Rebecca Crawley in William Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* (1847-8), a satire set in the same period as Mudrooroo’s trilogy which deals with the class stratification of Victorian England. Obviously not the rightful owners of the gold, these tricksters have dispossessed the Indigenous of their natural resources. Not surprisingly, Sir George concocts a story to justify and file his exploitation claim after his police force has perpetrated some local ethnic cleansing: “There has already been a battle between two savage tribes, one of which held Indigenous title to the land, and they have been so decimated that the area is as bare of inhabitants as it is of vegetation. It is truly a *terra nullius* and is under my control” (Mudrooroo 2000: 197), which is indeed an argument with deep postcolonial resonances of illegitimacy.

### **Feminising the vampire, blurring gender**

Sir George and Rebecca jointly embark upon the project of furthering their advancement by returning to the Metropole and displaying their newfound wealth. Strategically located as a postscript, finalising the fictional triptych, an extract from Her Majesty’s Diary evidences that the Queen is greatly attracted by the Golden Fleece, “which bodes well for the future of the colony” (Mudrooroo 2000: 233). This interest raises doubts over the Queen’s colonial authority, as the Golden Fleece is stolen property and the issue of paternal legitimacy embedded in the myth automatically disenfranchises a lady’s rule. Furthermore, it conjures up an uncanny connection with Amelia, whom the queen describes as a “strong wom[a]n of the empire” (Mudrooroo 2000: 232). By placing these musings at the end of *The Promised Land*, Mudrooroo suggests that as Head of the British Empire, Queen Victoria is the incarnation of Victorious Empire, the Supreme V/Empire or dominant Dark Lady who sucks the colonies dry from their wealth as she propagates white civilisation. Thus, this textual manoeuvre, which harks back to Harker’s celebratory afterword in *Dracula*, apparently suggests Amelia’s final victory/Victoria over Australia.

The comparison has further uncanny connections which reach out from the past to the present, as Mudrooroo also scripts Amelia as Eliza Frazer’s sister, “a controversial figure in Australia’s mythologies of nationhood” (Clark 2006: 127). Kay Schaffer’s in-depth study of the character observes that she is believed to be “the first white female shipwreck victim facing ‘the Indigenous’ in a remote and uncharted area of Australia” (Schaffer 1995: xiii), and was allegedly sexually abused by them. However, her biography is fraught with tantalising ambiguities, and, according to Maureen Clark, “conflicting and contradictory. Some lean towards representing the Aboriginal people as her rapists and enslavers. Others see her in a much different light as a temptress and wanton colonial woman” (2006: 127). Not surprisingly, Amelia functions—more than a sister—as Eliza’s empowered uncanny alter ego:

I was Amelia Fraser and I had a sister, Eliza. Now that life is finished with and I have entered into some, far different state of existence. I am something else, and perhaps it is better than what I would have become. Before I was as other girls.

Now I am perhaps far worse than females such as my sister Eliza ... . (Mudrooroo 1998: 66)

As naming and renaming play such an important role in Mudrooroo's fiction, the link between Eliza and another, contemporary Elizabeth should not be missed. Thus, one might apply Gerry Turcotte's words on Eliza Fraser to the present Queen of Britain and Australia, "go[ing] from mother of empire to symbol of female moral degradation" (Turcotte 2003: 143). If we may read Elizabeth II as a supreme female sign of postcolonial depravity, the V/Empire is indeed no Master but a Mistress who obviously bodes no well for the colony's future.

Throughout the trilogy Amelia is projected as a depraved, shifty, uncanny character beyond the grasp of the ordinary, frightening and monstrous. Mudrooroo's configuration of Amelia not only responds to the subliminal racial anxiety in Stoker's original but also the sexual ambiguities projected through the count, which thrive on trespassing the limits of Victorian gender discourse. Analysing the homoeroticism subjacent in *Dracula*, Christopher Craft shows how the Victorian obsession with blurring gender definitions is configured as a monstrous threat to the heterosexual norm. Craft draws on 19<sup>th</sup> century theories of sexual inversion, which describe the homosexual as a male body with a female soul/desire, to analyse the specific casting of the vampire threat and the figure of woman as the mediator in male same-sex desire:

This insistent ideology of heterosexual mediation and its corollary anxiety about independent female sexuality return us to *Dracula* ... where a mobile and hungering woman is represented as a monstrous usurper of masculine function, and where ... all erotic contacts between males, whether directly libidinal or thoroughly sublimated, are fulfilled through a mediating female ... Sexual inversion and Stoker's account of vampirism ... are symmetrical metaphors sharing a fundamental ambivalence. (1984: 115)

Foremost in this monstrous configuration of ambiguous sexuality—male/female, active/passive—is the:

Vampire Mouth, the central and recurring image of the novel ... As the primary site of erotic experience in *Dracula*, this mouth equivocates, giving the lie to the easy separation of the masculine and feminine. Luring at first with an inviting orifice, a promise of red softness, but delivering instead a piercing bone, the vampire mouth fuses and confuses ... the gender-based categories of the penetrating and the receptive. (1984: 109)

This soft yet toothed mouth invokes Barbara Creed's description of "the mythical *vagina dentata* which threatens to devour, to castrate via incorporation" (1993: 157) and not surprisingly, Count Dracula engages in the "systematic creation of *female* surrogates who enact his will and desire" (1984: 109, my emphasis) and propagate the vampiric infection.

In configuring Amelia as *Dracula*'s offspring, Mudrooroo follows the misogynistic lines laid down in Stoker's original but also reworks this inscription of sexual ambivalence as the monstrous feminine with some significant twists; he configures a bisexual female vampire and

empowers her as the fundamental player on the colonial scene. Drawing on what Maureen Clark calls a “gross, female stereotype Mudrooroo reproduces in all manner of ways how men have authored the role of white women in the colonies and how well they have responded to the desires and ideals of the dominant group” (2006: 125). Class difference being the general backdrop to Australian colonisation, consisting of either deported convicts or impoverished British subjects in search of colonial gain, Amelia’s lower-class origins—as opposed to Dracula’s aristocratic origins—reveal a crushing connection between class and women’s oppression:

In London we were poor, not as poor as poor, but my father was a wretched law clerk, who mulled over depositions for a pitiful wage in the Law Serjeant’s Inn. His subservience stopped at day’s end when he came home to tyrannise us, his two daughters and our mother, a colourless woman who had had all the spunk driven out of her long ago by his cruelty, though I never saw him use his fists on her. He believed that he was a gentleman fallen on hard times and this prevented him, I suppose. (Mudrooroo 1998: 68)

Male domestic violence decodes her depraved behaviour as a form of gendered retaliation, but her lower-class origins also explain why it is never covered up with the soothing cloak of the count’s aristocratic decorum, whose deprivations remain elegantly implicit and undercoded in Stoker’s original (Pearson 2003: 195).

Whereas in the Victorian original Gothic fear and revulsion are grounded on not naming the sexual act, the vampire trilogy articulates them through sexual explicitness, verging on porn and gore; this is “in ways which both mock and ironize the very issues of unrepresentability that have made Dracula so resonant for western culture and so productive of interpretation(s)” (Pearson 2003: 195). Amelia’s sexuality is depraved because of its ambivalence: she makes no distinction between young or old, white or black, rich or poor, man or woman, and confuses ‘little death’ all too often with death itself. Her sex is overpowering and cannibalistic, and aligns the consumption of blood with semen, which she glosses as “white blood” (Mudrooroo 1998: 68, 148). Amelia shows herself to be a boundary crosser without any restrictions of class, race or gender to suit her predatory needs. Indeed, not only does she invert stereotypes by cannibalizing civilised behaviour and bodies to feed and please herself, but also preys on the Indigenes, whose eucalyptus-tanged blood and semen she prefers. Many of these, whether young or old, she ‘sucks dry’ to death, and others she converts, such as George.

If there were still any doubts about the all-consuming polyvalence of Amelia’s sexuality, her relationship with Lady Lucy, Sir George’s upper-middleclass wife, drives this fundamental ambivalence fully home:

To emphasize her complete subjection, Mrs Fraser tied the girl’s hands and feet to the bedposts with scarves ... [Lucy] moaned as the woman’s lips and then other lips touched her skin. She had forgotten about the dingo. The imprisoned girl writhed, but not to be free. At the extent of her vision, at her loins, was the thin tawny animal lapping away with a long tong that, sweeping in and out of her, made her body squirm. The sensations were of such strength that she did not 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. She felt the blood spurting from her into a mouth clamped about her wound just as her body *spasmed* and *spasmed*. She gave a *piercing* scream and then went *limp*, content only to be fed on. (Mudrooroo 2000: 8, my emphasis)

The latter scene (con)fuses penetration, reception and ejaculation completely. Amelia's fangs usurp the penile function in piercing Lucy's neck, but this is responded to by an ejaculatory spurt of blood into Amelia's vaginal mouth from Lucy's body, which is signified as the penis itself. The vampire kiss makes it impossible to separate male from female, which, indeed, in their uncanny circulation through each other come together as a frightening yet liberating (little) death:

[Amelia] lowered her lips to [Lucy's] neck and seemed to bestow a long lasting kiss on her throat. This revived the girl passionately. She writhed and a scream began to emerge from her throat. This was quickly stopped by the woman who transferred her lips from throat to mouth and sucked in the agitation of the girl so that she grew as still as death. (Mudrooroo 2000: 213)

For all the depraved undertones in Amelia's sexual-cannibalistic behaviour, an image of tenuous hope is offered on the final pages of *The Promised Land*, which announce some kind of bonding between Wadawaka and Amelia that would embrace the binary realms of life and death, male and female, and black and white. For better or for worse—as the white presence in Australia cannot be undone—Wadawaka and Amelia's hybrid (re)union suggests a possible future for Australia:

She turned around and wrapped her arms about him. She was a pale streak of loveliness across the dark length of his body, seemingly embedded in it as a streak of silver ore ... "How could such as I imprison you with these thin bonds? The softness is in your mind and that is what appeals to me" "The whip hardens the body, but stripes the mind," the man said bitterly. "To have been a slave is to be maimed." "Well, well, well, I'm as much a slave to you as you are to me, for we own each other ... We are both free spirits and refuse to accept ownership of others." "Yes we have our liberty, though where we are going I will be below the white, and in other places my freedom would be a matter of documents. I have been owned and that is an experience not to be borne." "No thoughts of what is past and what you have suffered. We are above them and their attempts to hurt. In your darkness I find myself and, and—" "In your whiteness, I tremble, knowing you for what you are," he replied. "Do so, for I have not forgiven you," Amelia rejoined tartly. "Now, the night is passing and the land flows over us in all its glory. Let us return to my chamber so that I might make you tremble in another and more satisfying way." (Mudrooroo 2000: 227-8)

Wadawaka is an uncanny hybrid whose identity has floated "from black slave to black gentleman to black savage to whaler to highwayman and then back to John Summers." This causes Amelia to exclaim, "Who, I wonder, must he think he is?" (Mudrooroo 2000: 184) and indeed,

Wadawaka's blackness is inscribed in universalising terms. In a promiscuous literary cross-over to Herman Melville, at the end of *Underground* Wadawaka embarks on Captain Ahab's hunt of Moby Dick, an immense white, phallic sperm whale which Mudrooroo rewrites as a sexually ambiguous symbol of Empire:

Such a strange vessel; such a strange skipper. A Yankee who lived only to kill the white whale. They called her Moby Dick, believing that only a male could wreak such havoc, whereas I dubbed her *The Empire* ... [M]y fellows regaled me with stories that refused to accept the monster as a blind force of nature, but one filled with all the cunning of the so-called civilised; in short, the empire which rules our lives as surely as that Moby Dick ruled Ahab, sending him on a morbid chase across the seven seas. (Mudrooroo 2000: 172-3)

Wadawaka's chase exemplifies a solidary concept of black resistance reminiscent of *Master's* pan-Aboriginality, as his fellow hunters are an Indigenous-American Indian, an African and a Polynesian respectively. They are equally intent on "slaying that great white monster which mocked us with her invulnerability" (Mudrooroo 2000: 174), which they eventually achieve at great cost. Thus, the text seems to suggest that limiting, biological definitions of blackness and Aboriginality should be forsaken and exchanged for cultural inscriptions based on shared experience. Wadawaka's quest lasts until the end of the trilogy, when, with Moby Dick killed, he is ready to confront the luring enemy at home; this is Amelia, "good and mad and just as bad a white beast" (Mudrooroo 2000: 171).

In apparent allusion to the terms of contemporary Reconciliation—the official attempt to acknowledge Australia's genocidal past, rewrite Australian History accordingly and overcome Aboriginal/mainstream conflict—the prospect of Wadawaka and Amelia's union seems fraught with difficulties due to Amelia's overpowering white presence. However, the land also becomes the unifying element between them, as "it flows over us in all its glory" and the bedroom awaits their love match. "[C]linging together so that they had to manoeuvre their united bulk through the narrow doorway," they pass George, the last survivor of the Tasmanian mob, who stays guard outside in his Dingo shape (Mudrooroo 2000: 228). Thus, Amelia and Wadawaka's shapeless, "united bulk" enters the narrow matrix of Australia and rewrites the invasive phallic "long bulk of the *Great Britain*" (Mudrooroo 2000: 219), moored in the harbour.

One might ask if this finale implies some kind of R/reconciliation between the Indigenous and the foreign element on Australian soil in contemporary terms, although Wadawaka's status as Indigenous Australian is as uncertain as Mudrooroo's is contested. Likewise, George's future prospects as only survivor with Aboriginal blood are befuddled by his inferior status as Amelia's lapdog (Turcotte 2005: 115). Then again, in the face of the contaminating, genocidal onslaught of white civilisation over the last two centuries, the blood question in Indigeneity is riddled with problems, as many Aborigines nowadays can only make tenuous claims to genetic ancestry and have to reformulate their Indigenous identity through cultural, lived experience. It is in this uncanny space of uncertainty that Mudrooroo inscribed his claim to Indigenous identity in the 1960s, as much by choice and appropriation as by interpellation.

## **Conclusion: the postcolonial Australian**

The Fantastic offers good writerly opportunities to pit the indigenous world against that of the coloniser, and to tease out the epistemological incommensurabilities that come to the fore in their encounter. Indigenous authors have engaged the Fantastic in its various manifestations to carve out a space for cultural difference and write up a world that the settler-coloniser tends to ignore or reject. Within this postcolonial agenda, Mudrooroo occupies an idiosyncratic niche due to his contested Indigenous identity, which informs his oeuvre. In his fictional reflections on Indigeneity, Mudrooroo has recurrently engaged the Fantastic through the vampire figure, drawing on its instability and ambiguity as a sign of racial, gender and class identity and spinning out the Gothic trope's postmodern possibilities to unpack these underlying binaries. In *Master of the Ghost Dreaming*, the character of Mada, wife to the Protector, is already introduced as a white predatory female symbolising the perfidious nature of the colonial project and the way the latter disfigures coloniser and colonised alike. Similarly, in the vampire trilogy Amelia is no clear-cut symbol of Imperial oppression but ambiguously shaped, and the trope offers Mudrooroo fertile ground to reflect on the volatile nature of identity at large.

In this sense Mudrooroo brings to the fore the race, gender and class tensions that are already prefigured but undercoded in Stoker's *Count Dracula*, and aptly writes them up to signify in the postcolonial context—in writing back the vampire bites back, not only to the Imperial centre but also at those at its margins who keep applying essentialist notions of identity. As it turns out, Amelia's 'native' connection to Antipodean soil, figured as feminine, changes/hybridises her as much as Wadawaka: "Within her, I gained the power to face the burning blast of the day and freedom from the tyranny of the sun. I was reborn in her depths" (Mudrooroo 2000: 226). Wadawaka's troubled Indigenous inscription—partly because it is 'only' cultural, partly due to the uncanny mirroring of the author in his character—is further motive to avoid reading Amelia as a straightforward Gothic metaphor of the pernicious impact of western civilisation on Aboriginal Australia.

Amelia's fundamental race, gender and class ambivalence constitutes her as a highly complex character which reads into the issue of (post)colonial (dis)possession in uncanny ways: it borders on political incorrectness and harks back to the unsteady, contested status that the author himself has acquired in Australia. Although Amelia does seem to acquire some acquiescence in her reconciliation with Wadawaka—perhaps a metaphor for the author's acceptance of his own, 'muddled' identity born out of the irreconcilable tensions of a postcolonising Australia—her preying across racial, class and gender difference has been relentless, ruthless, and sparing no-one. If it is possible to read Amelia's predatory obsession with (little) death as a postcolonial script for the birth of a new Australia, such a reformulation of Australianness is at least discomforting, if not harrowing. Despite the sophistication of the vampire trilogy, Mudrooroo's adaptation of the Fantastic to write about Australian identity has apparently come full circle: from disempowering Gothic to empowering Maban Reality and back—at least when it comes to writing about Indigeneity.

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<sup>i</sup> This was mentioned by the Aboriginal author Jeanine Leane at the 2013 ASAL congress at Wagga Wagga, NSW.

<sup>ii</sup> In the series, on the Australian mainland the Aboriginal communities speak of *moma* in reference to the White 'ghostly' settlers. The phonetics suggest a link with mother or 'momma'/'mummy'.

<sup>iii</sup> The Dark Continent was a term used in the 19th century to denote Sub-Saharan Africa, whose interior was basically unknown and left dark by mapmakers. In Freudian terms, it is also used to refer to a male perception of female sexuality. Julia Kristeva notes that Freud borrowed the term from the colonial exploits in Africa, and that "[h]is metaphor for the female sex turns it into an unrepresentable enigma, expressing the castration anxiety of the man who approaches it." This neatly joins the racial to the sexual, and the colonial to gender (see "Dark Continent" in Works Cited).

<sup>iv</sup> At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there was a substantial black community of freed slaves in London, whose lack of means of support and involvement in petty crime raised concern among the authorities. A plan was conceived to relocate these people to the first free black colony in Sierra Leone on the African west coast. The colony also housed a convict population and functioned parallel to the Australian penal colony to empty English prisons (Pybus 2003: 26-8).