CHAPTER - V

CONSTRUCTING COUNTER REALISM
(The Master of the Ghost Dreaming)

The novel *The Master of Ghost Dreaming* as a companion to *Dr. Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* has confirmed Mudrooroo’s career in rewriting Australia’s colonial past. The primary concern is to voice out the place of Indigenous people in the evolution and formation of Australian society. There is an intriguing relationship between the two books, though separated by eight years. Obviously establishing the intertextual relationship with the mother text, the novel reinvents the social history and the race relations of Australia. Reflecting the tribal insight, the novel represents both the spiritual and physical characteristics of Aboriginal religious beliefs. The novel has exposed the ironies inherent in the missionary process of ameliorating the lives of the Aboriginals. Mudrooroo has reinvented the characters of Truganinni and Wooreddy as Jangamuttuk and his wife Ludjee. The novel reflects the new understanding of the fascinating process of revisitation addressed as ‘turning the circle’. The novel goes beyond Wooreddy’s perspectives in including the conscious and subconscious world into Black Australian ideological world. This is obvious in the way Jangamuttuk is concerned with the complete conversion of European interlopers to the Aboriginal way of seeing. Paradoxically ‘Ghost Dreaming’ becomes
subversion to ward off the European invasion. The perennial conflict between the Europeans and Aborigines become a spiritual battle. Jangamuttuk and Ludjee come to realize that the souls of the Europeans are vulnerable as theirs. Mudrooroo proclaims that it is the Black Australians who can liberate the non Aborigines from the spiritual enslavement. The novel opens a contest for spiritual health of the tribe that takes place inside the dreaming of a white woman Mada. The efforts of Mada to cure herself show the way for the liberation of Aborigines.

The novel is a representative work of ‘Magic Realism’. With the style of ‘Magic Realism’, the novel succeeds in constructing counter realism with the power of imagination. It is appropriate to trace out the genesis of the literary history of ‘Magic Realism’ to justify its relevance to Australian Aboriginal situation cutting across the Latin American socio literary and cultural situation. The word ‘Magic Realism’ was coined by the Cuban Novelist Alejo Carpentier, which conveys the mode of narrative presentation. It is also a synthesis of the real and the fantastic. It makes the real turn magical or non realistic and the improbable as real. This style of writing is a striking feature of post modernist imagination. Magic realism blurs the distinction between the real and the fantastic. It is a major subversive anti realist device. This has a long and distinctive history of Latin American criticism. This was first used in wider post colonial
context in the foundational essay by Stephen Alexis ‘Of the Magical Realism of the Haitians’ (Alexis 1956). Alexis tried his best to reconcile the representations and arguments of post war radical intellectuals in favour of social realism. This perspective has emphasized that the pre industrial population had its imaginative life rooted in mythic, legendary and magical cultures. ‘Magic Realism’ is popularized when it was employed to characterize the work of South American writers such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Magic Realism is used to interrogate the assumptions of western, rational, linear narratives within the enormous body of indigenous Meta textual forms and pre colonial culture. Employing ‘Magic Realism’ varied texts have offered an alternative restructuring. Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight Children*, Ben Okri’s *The Faminished Road* have employed ‘Magic Realism’ to the complete extent. Similarly, Keri Hulme’s *The Bone People* and Thomas King’s *Green Grass Running Water* as indigenous texts have exposed the hidden and naturalized cultural formations on which Western narratives are based.

However, Mudrooroo following the frame work of ‘Magic Realism’ rejects the descriptive ‘magic realism’ in favour of specific Aboriginal ‘Maban Reality’. Mudrooroo employs the term ‘Maban Reality’ to describe the indigenous works that could be reasonably classified as ‘Magic Realist’ novels. Despite the problematised indigenous position,
Mudrooroo’s observations on aboriginal culture are credited as valuable as he has worked within the Aboriginal cultural circle. Mudrooroo uses the word ‘Maban’ interchangeably with ‘Magic’ and considers Maban text as a specific subsect of the fantasy genre. The terms ‘Maban’ and ‘Kadaitcha’ are Australian Indigenous words meaning ‘shaman’. In *The Indigenous Literature of Australia: Milli Milli Wangka*, Mudrooroo uses the term ‘Maban Reality’ to describe the fantastic indigenous works (*Indigenous* 101). Among the Australians Aboriginal writers it is only Mudrooroo who foregrounds the magic in the light of Aboriginal cultures to the complete possible extent. Apart from the *Master of Ghost Dreaming* his other recent novels *The Undying* (1998), *Underground* (1994), *The Promised Land* (2000) centres on Indigenous Shaman figures who have the ability to shape shift, and who use their supernatural gifts in order to cope with the disturbing influences of Colonial powers. Maureen Clark in his review of Clare Archer-Lean’s ‘Cross-Cultural Analysis of the Writings of Thomas King and Mudrooroo’ illustrates this perspective. Following the similar pattern, Australian writer Beth Yahp creates a story of three generations of women haunted by extra sensory powers, ghosts and demons. Nyoongar Writer Kim Scott creates a similar thematic frame work in *Benang: From the Heart* (1999) by creating a first person narrator who creates song-cycles as a means of healing dysfunctional family.
In all the novels that present ‘Maban Reality’, the shamanic or trickster figure becomes symbolic of Indigenous powers and fuses his or her resources to those of the contemporary hegemonic society in order to create cross cultural mythology which is relevant to the lived experiences of contemporary Aboriginal subjects in post colonial societies. Mudrooroo’s works often deal with the attempts at reconnecting with a cultural heritage or engaging with Aboriginality. Mudrooroo uses the trope of Shamanism and conventions of the fantasy genre in their work as a means of examining and confronting the complex social movements created by Colonialism. He introduces the Shamanic figures central to Arctic Dreams and Nightmares only to typify the complexities faced by Aboriginals as European culture was introduced and offer a means to cope with such experiences.

*Master of Ghost Dreaming* typifies the incomprehensible issues of Aboriginality as a signifier to elucidate the inter textual references. The theme is about a *mapan* and elder, Jangamuttuk, who attempts to restore his people to health. His objective is to liberate and rescue the aboriginals from the paternalistic intentions of the Superintendent of the Govt. Mission for Aborigines, who is addressed as ‘Fada’ (‘father’) throughout the novel. The depiction of ‘Fada’ is in reminiscence of historical counterpart G.A. Robinson. In the Ceremony that centers, the novel more than twenty five
are originally taken to an Island off the coast by Fada perform a dance designed by *Jangamuttuk* to liberate his people of Fada and Mada. The dancers are painted to resemble Europeans-ghosts- and their hair is styled to look like flowered hats, flat caps and soldiers’ helmets: “Their body painting has been designed to signify European fashion” (3). The novel is considered as a ‘signifier’ for intertextual reference to similar significant theoretical works. Henry Louis Gates who has contributed to ‘Black criticism’ with the “Blackness of Blackness: A Critique of the Sign and the Signifying Monkey” published in 1984 is considered as an important intertext for elucidating the theme of *Ghost Dreaming*. The novel also shares intertextual reference with Mudrooroo’s polemical critical work *Writing from the Fringe: A Study of Modern Aboriginal Literature* (1990). At the backdrop of these two theoretical works, Mudrooroo illuminates how the widely accepted epistemologies and sociolinguistic hierarchies work to silence both the Black and indigenous writers. During the ceremony Jangamuttuk imitates Fada’s voice singing the ballad “Van Diemen’s Land” (289). Practicing the resistance, Fada watches the ceremony as the natives act out the travesty of the central ritual of a Popish Mass. Fada fails to realize that he is watching a ceremony designed to exorcise a ghost. The act of watching the ceremony is a repetitive, unlike the unsuccessful repetition of European forms; Fada perceives Aboriginal ceremony as an act of subverting hierarchy. In his polemical book *Writing from the Fringe:*
A Study of Modern Aboriginal Literatures tries to define Aboriginality and elucidates different perceptions such as ‘authentic aboriginality’, ‘return to pristine Aboriginal values’, ‘the authenticity of Nyoongah voice’ and ‘the need to break away from the Metropolitan tradition’ to create an authentic aboriginal writing. The novel Master of the Ghost Dreaming achieves Aboriginality from the defined perceptions of Writing from the Fringe and within the circumscription of contemporary literary genre. To Mudrooroo Aboriginality becomes a process of cultural apprenticeship and a conscious construction. He negates with Aboriginal identity formed through genetic essence or perceived as an accident of personal history. He promotes separatism at the level of the thematic concern and attempts assimilation of the British invasion at the cultural level. He employs European theories and cultural forms to subvert the dominance of European over Aboriginal culture. Eventually Fada leaves, as paternalism fails.

The Master of the Ghost Dreaming quartet confirms Mudrooroo’s career-long interest in re-writing Australia’s colonial past. The series is a companion to Doctor Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World – the author’s most celebrated work of fiction. As argued in Chapter VI, Doctor Wooreddy is a representation of history exposed as the invention of British colonial discourse, its primary concern to give voice and place to Indigenous peoples in Australia’s foundation narrative. The
Ghost Dreaming novels ‘feed off’ Doctor Wooreddy whilst simultaneously broadening its scope. Theirs is a strikingly evident intertextual relationship, a sustained form of writing back to the ‘mother’ text in a way that pays homage to it, changing its shape rather than rivalling it. The unifying message is explicitly suggestive of a history shared – of the troubled realities and inventions of race relations in Australia – a social history of which the author has personal experience.

As is mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, Ghost Dreaming is an Australian incarnation of the ‘magic realist’ style of writing. The novel moves beyond Doctor Wooreddy’s counter realism and imaginatively engages the multi-dimensional language of dreams – shape-shifting, timelessness, the mysterious, the supernatural – to disrupt the totalising effects of dominant historiography. The book also reflects Mudrooroo’s penchant for the blurring, or distortion, of genres by embracing the Gothic mode to signify his characters’ sense of disembodiment, bereavement and deep despair.

As Brenda Cooper in Magical Realism in the West African Fiction: Seeing With a Third Eye (1998) observes, however, ‘magical realism’ is a label that certain anti-colonial writers spurn, as the term carries with it “overtones of exotic otherness” which attract and fascinate white readers “greedy for escapism” – particularly in Europe and North America
(Cooper, 15&31). *Ghost Dreaming* demonstrates that, for the most part at least, Mudrooroo seems to hold no such reservations. The author does, however, reject the descriptive ‘magical realism’ in favour of the more specifically Aboriginalist term, ‘maban reality’. For him, magical realism/maban reality is a political form of representation with the potential to reach, entertain and teach a black and white readership about the “transformative contaminations that came with colonialism” (Boehmer, 237). As he writes:

Maban reality is akin to magic realism [...] Indigenous texts should intervene politically and socially in the dominant ideology [...] Maban reality is how this can be done for, unlike many high cultural message constructs, maban reality can not only pass on a message but also find a popular audience who will read the work because it is, at least on the surface, enjoyable [...] Indigenous visual arts have gained a viewing and a wide acceptance through the use of maban reality [...] and thus passed over deeper knowledge of Indigenous reality in contemporary Australia. (Mudrooroo, 96-97)

Mudrooroo’s use of the term ‘maban reality’ establishes the context of the postcolonial idiosyncrasies of the society from which his writing materialises – the historical, political and social positioning of Australia.
At the same time, it reveals the author’s concern to avoid the homogenisation of the unique/specific histories of the countries that make up the colonised world. Elleke Boehmer observes that postcolonial writers often draw “on the special effects of magic realism […] to express a view of the world fissured, distorted and made incredible by cultural displacement” (Elleke Boehmer, Colonial and Postcolonial Literature, 235). As a socially displaced black Australian, Mudrooroo professes to write out of a so-called ‘Fourth World’; a nation within a nation where the social and cultural patchwork is as inequitable, varied and bewildering as any other touched by colonialism.

As we have seen, the practice of re-inventing himself over time has had the effect of dividing the author’s life into various categories of performance and belonging. Mudrooroo continues to play out his interest in (re)named and shape-shifting in Ghost Dreaming where – much like their creator – his constantly mutating fictional characters become signifiers of both continuity and change (The notion of an ‘ending’ occasioned by the death of Doctor Wooreddy’s protagonist, is replaced by a new beginning in Ghost Dreaming. Wooreddy and Trugernanna, for example, are re-named Jangamuttuk and Ludjee respectively, but are clearly recognisable as the same characters from the antecedent text). Such interest is magnified by the author’s decision to sign his novel with
the shortened pseudonym, ‘Mudrooroo’. This is a first – and a last – for *Ghost Dreaming*. Neither the name ‘Narogin’ nor ‘Nyoongah’ is ever memorialised in Mudrooroo’s subsequently published work. Another significant first for the book, however, is the introduction of an African-American character, Wadawaka, an imaginary figure who clearly reflects Mudrooroo’s pre-occupation with a personal mythology – one that becomes clearer as his project unfolds.

*Master of the Ghost Dreaming* opens with a collection of Conradian-style metaphors that invoke an Australian landscape with features characteristic of darkness and death. Set principally in the same colonial island mission of the earlier *Doctor Wooreddy*, such metaphors set the scene for a tale which straddles a kaleidoscope of different worlds, the old and the new, the physical and the metaphysical, the human and the animal, the black and the white. The novel presents itself as an oppositional narrative to Australia’s severely blemished colonial history by once again invoking an Indigenous presence at one of the most tragic and defining times in Australia’s history – Tasmania in the 1880s. As an actual site of orchestrated cultural genocide, Tasmania is perhaps *the* bloodiest Antipodean symbolic. It is therefore a particularly appropriate geographical point of reference for Mudrooroo’s unrelenting exposé of the vampiric nature of colonization.
Ghost Dreaming never seeks to diminish the immensity of the death and injustice inflicted on Australia’s Indigenous peoples and culture. From the novel’s beginnings, however, the impossibility of drawing an unfettered distinction between the histories of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures is made clear. The author consistently embraces a politics of cross-culturalisation in his work. Ghost Dreaming upholds the conviction that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous societies (if not spiritualities) are inextricably bound up in the aftermath of the violence that signalled the colonial project. Moreover, the tensions inherent in attempting to negotiate between two cultures become synonymous with the ambiguities and power relations inherent in language as an uncertain sign system and as the site of domination par excellence. In other words, the inventions and (sur)realities that have shaped dominant discourses of (dis)possession and how they have come to haunt Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal space, are a metaphor for Ghost Dreaming itself.

Readers acquainted with Doctor Wooreddy will recognise in the pages of Ghost Dreaming, the return of four principal characters. Robinson and his wife, Marie, are renamed/re-born as ‘Fada’ and ‘Mada’ respectively, while Wooreddy and Trugernanna become Jangamuttuk and Ludjee. As Helen Daniel observes, “while the novel is largely confined to the island mission, it does run back to London for some savage parody of
the Cockney origins and sordid story of the marriage of Fada and Mada” (Daniel, 75). True to its title, *Ghost Dreaming* also embraces the emotionally charged language of dreams – what Renato Oliva calls “the product of the mythologizing activity of the psyche” (Oliva, 2.4). The injection of dream symbolism into *Ghost Dreaming* goes beyond manifestations of the psyche, however, and takes readers into a fantasy world of shamanic (spi)rituality where the author aspires to represent the religious beliefs of traditional Aboriginal totemic culture. Such a move is something new to Mudrooroo’s work and is a significant departure from *Doctor Wookeddy*’s more rationalist/realist-attuned approach to the coming of white ‘settlement’ to Tasmania.

The author employs dream symbolism throughout *Ghost Dreaming* to invoke the Indigenous belief in the mystical connection between humans and animals. The novel’s characters both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, have the power to shape-shift into birds, spiders, reptiles and various other animals to reflect their sense of self and place in the world. The Goanna, for example, is Jangamuttuk’s dreaming, or spiritual, companion and extends the patterning of his subjectivity as tied to the land. Conversely (Oliva’s Jungian analysis of Nigerian author, Ben Okri’s use of dream symbolism in his writing has been both helpful and influential in my reading of the dream sequences in *Master of the Ghost Dreaming*),
Ludjee’s identity is linked to the sea – an element Jangamuttuk fears and cannot come to terms with – and her dreaming companion is the giant Manta Ray. As befits his origins, the “African convict” (Mudrooroo, 67) Wadawaka, on the other hand, enjoys the dreaming companionship of the Leopard.

Wadawaka enters the narrative at mid point and his introduction is a move that further distinguishes *Ghost Dreaming* from *Doctor Wooreddy*. The character’s dreaming animal, the Leopard is, of course, essentially a ‘wildcat’. This descriptive recalls Mudrooroo’s use of a similar totemic animal in his most autobiographical novel, *Wild Cat Falling* as well as in the kindred texts, *Doin Wildcat* and *Wildcat Screaming*. A symbol of ferocity and valour, Leopards are also solitary and nocturnal animals, attributes that combine not only to signify Wadawaka’s ‘split’ identity but also, with the benefit of hindsight, to align him with the lore of the vampire – literature’s most famous ‘dual life’ night wanderer. (Whether or not this is a calculated narrative strategy with an eye to future work is, of course, debatable.) An initiate into Aboriginal society, Wadawaka is also represented as someone who “still labour[ed] under the burden of his past” (Mudrooroo, 84). As he says, “Africa to him [was nothing] but the memories of his wretched mother […] Such a life she had had” (Mudrooroo, 77). However, the character’s choice of totemic animal may
be read as a signifier of his unwillingness or inability to renounce the African side of his identity while ever the memory of his mother lingers.

Born beneath the decks of a slave ship, Wadawaka’s name means ‘Born on the Waters’ (Mudrooroo, 77) or ‘Seaborn’ (Mudrooroo, 184). As his name (‘waterwalker’) facetiously suggests, the character may be read as a Christ-like figure, someone above the rest. He is prone to speaking in parables and is a methodical man who is always at the ready, organised with everything in its place. He is also a leader, a healer, a teacher and an expert seaman – a man whose sheer physical presence makes the white missionary, Fada, “nervous enough to bluster” (Mudrooroo, 74). Wadawaka is a major symbolic site for Mudrooroo’s appropriation of an interiorised colonial fantasy – the white mythology of the black man’s sexual depravity and prowess – a mythology the author parodies but, arguably, fails adequately to overturn in the course of the Ghost Dreaming series. The figure is a complex mixture of ex-slave, ex-convict, exile and orphan all of which characteristics combine to prevent him from having a clear sense of where he belongs. Of all Ghost Dreaming’s characters, it is Wadawaka who most emphasises the identity confusion that comes from moving between cultures and how, over time, the self is created/produced contextually in multiple and contradictory ways.
The relationship between hero, shaman and trickster is manifested in both Jangamuttuk and Wadawaka. But it is only as a consequence of Jangamuttuk’s shamanic powers that Wadawaka is able to access “his totemic animal – the one which he had never been given in Africa” (Mudrooroo, 89) and thus attain shape-shifting status. At this stage in the author’s literary trajectory, Wadawaka is recognisable as a kind of ‘magician’s apprentice’ – the pupil destined to at least equal, if not outgrow, his teacher’s potency. Such a reading calls into question whether or not the Aboriginal, Jangamuttuk is Mudrooroo’s indisputable ‘Master’ of the title or if in fact the African, Wadawaka, is destined to take over that role as the author’s project unfolds, ‘Master’ is a ‘rank’ associated more conventionally with white culture but, in fact, is also linked to the meaning of ‘Trickster’ in ancient Brazilian and African folklore.

Wadawaka’s initiation into the Aboriginal world occurs in the night (Mudrooroo, 90); that is, in the realm of the unconscious. The central theme of the ritual is death and re-birth, a symbolic process of self-renewal that rolls away the walls of the character’s “prison craziness” (Mudrooroo, 89) and despair. Apart from the obvious autobiographical intonations – Mudrooroo, as we have seen has spent time in prison – this scene is based on shamanic rites of initiation traditionally practised among Australian Aborigines (For a study of the initiation of Australian shamans and
magicians and the spiritual belief in the ability of rock or quartz crystals to bestow magical powers, see Mircea Eliade (1972), *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, 135-39). Mudrooroo describes that process thus:

His organs were removed. His beating heart, his spleen, his kidneys, his liver, his bowels, even his lungs. His body was a bloody hollow and even that disappeared. Now it was a butchered carcase, empty and cleared of fragility. How could he see it when he was it? Now new organs of crystal began to replace what had been taken away. Built up inside, his body shone with the whitest of translucent light, and then the dark skin was gently folded over as a new song verse began.

(Mudrooroo, 89)

White readers may find this passage excessive in its ritualistic symbolism. Yet the drama of ritualistic practice is not something linked to mythical primordial time or practice. Christianity, for example, is not free of its own complex rites of passage and ‘supernatural’ tales of transubstantiation, virgin birth, miraculous cures and heroic feats, none of which are incompatible with the tropes of Indigenous ceremony and custom.

Beginning with *Wild Cat Falling*, Mudrooroo has a history of embedding/expressing certain elements of his own identity and autobiographical social world in the ‘life’ experiences of his characters. At
times this occurs to an extent which promotes the notion that the author is creatively textualising himself – as though he is continually reproducing his own persona as a work of art – within the pages of his books. Wadawaka is no exception to this apparent artistic indulgence. He takes his place six for a study of the initiation of Australian shamans and magicians and the spiritual belief in the ability of rock or quartz crystals to bestow magical powers. Beside several other characters before him such as ‘Wildcat’, ‘Jackamara’ and ‘Tom Johnson’ all of whom, as previous chapters have argued, share fragments of the author’s own ‘personality’ and background.

As noted above, much like his creator, Wadawaka has been imprisoned. The character has also been separated from his mother as a child. Furthermore, he has never known “his father’s arms about him” (Mudrooroo, 88) – a life circumstance that reflects the fact that Mudrooroo’s father died shortly before he was born. Given more recent disclosures relating to the author’s family heritage, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the parallels to be drawn between the author and his character suggest the possibility he may have always been aware of his African-American antecedents. *Ghost Dreaming* emerged some five years before journalist, Victoria Laurie, publicly called the author’s Aboriginal status into disrepute. As Canadian academic and critic Terry Goldie observes, “if
[Wadawaka] represents Mudrooroo’s assessment of himself as what might be called an Aboriginal African-American [this] suggests he knew of his background long before Laurie’s revelations” (Goldie, 108, Mudrooroo does introduce another African-American character, Maynard Brookes, in The Kwinkan (1993), however. Brookes is portrayed in the novel as someone assimilated into white society’s ways. The character ‘appears’ only in The Kwinkan, whereas Wadawaka is ‘reborn’ time and time again in the author’s work).

Although released to critical acclaim, commentators have approached Ghost Dreaming in markedly different ways. Penny van Toorn in the article “The Terrors of Terra Nullius: Gothicising and Degothicising Aboriginality” addresses both Doctor Wooreddy and Ghost Dreaming and focuses on how “scenes of ceremony and ritual […] offer postcolonial writers an ideal means of representing impositions of, and acts of resistance to, particular discursive regimes in the broader socio-historical sphere” (World Literature Written in English, 87-97). To demonstrate her argument, Van Toorn inverts Bakhtin’s notion of the Carnivalesque, suggesting that, in principle, “ceremonies and rituals are the antithesis of carnivals” (Van Toorn, 74). For Van Toorn, anti-colonial texts such as Ghost Dreaming “destabilise the power and meaning behind various rituals of colonial possession” by mocking the decorum of its ceremonies (Van
Toorn, 76). In her view, “to carnivalise another society’s ceremonies or rituals is to sabotage a cultural mechanism designed to inaugurate or defend that society’s authoritative words”. (Van Toorn, 76)

More recently, Gerry Turcotte in *Jack Davis: The Maker of History* (1994) has offered an alternative explanation for Mudrooroo’s frequently scornful focus “on rituals and ritual enactment” (Turcotte, 338). For Turcotte, the author’s seemingly irreverent play with the tropes of ritual and ceremony is a symbolic protest linked to a “refusal to play by the rules” and to the limitations of generic convention. As Turcotte writes, “genre, of course, is ritual as well. It allows for the rehearsal of social and literary conventions according to seemingly binding rules. It has also been read, not least by Mudrooroo himself, as a way of policing Aboriginal writing” (Turcotte, 338) – a socially and culturally stultifying imposition which the author has clearly challenged and disrupted throughout his oeuvre. Turcotte’s sentiments echo those expressed some years earlier by Ron Devins who notes that Mudrooroo “deplores the element of constraint that genres impose on Aboriginal writers [...] but he also knows that much of the Aboriginal culture also now lies within them”. (Devins, 20)

As a successful novelist who not only writes in the English language of the colonizer but also consistently bends the rules and conventions of literature, one might read Mudrooroo himself as ‘a master of the ghost
dreaming’. Margery Fee in her article “The Signifying Writer and the Ghost Reader: Mudrooroo’s Master of the Ghost Dreams & Writing from the Fringe” views Ghost Dreaming from yet another perspective. Fee reads the novel through the work of African-American theorist, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and combines her reflections with a critical response to Writing from the Fringe (1990). In her view, Ghost Dreaming “takes a second run at the theoretical problems of achieving Aboriginality tackled [by the author] in Writing from the Fringe” (Australia and Newzealand Studies in Canada, 19-32). Fee bases her argument on Ghost Dreaming’s many intertextual references to cultural systems of signification and to what she calls “a whole range of structuralist and poststructuralist theoretical works” (Fee, 18). Fee suggests, however, that whilst such theories appear to dominate the text this does not necessarily occur at the expense of the author’s creativity. Rather, Fee sees Ghost Dreaming as “a literary version of the argument for Aboriginality”, which, ultimately, is itself a construct of colonial discourse (Fee, 23). She goes on to argue that by “Using European theories that have evolved to cope with the crisis of representation [Mudrooroo] is not so much incorporating alien ideas as adding to traditional ways of understanding the world as a world of representations, rather than as a world of rationally-comprehensive objective facts”. (Fee, 21) In this view, Mudrooroo is thus performing a similar role, or textualised/personalized position, to that played by his
protagonist, Jangamuttuk – a character that uses whatever means he has at his disposal to not only come to terms with, but to bend to, the demands of a changing world. Fee writes:

*Master of the Ghost Dreaming* is a literary version of the argument for Aboriginality […] The implied author/Mudrooroo is to his readership as Jangamuttuk is to Fada and Mada and the other Europeans: the writer is a shaman. Mudrooroo is using his skill at signifying, at using European literary and theoretical techniques to cure his non-Aboriginal readers of the attitudes that lead us to exploit or patronize minorities and also to persuade us to leave them, figuratively if not literally, alone. (Fee, 1992, 23)

Figuratively or otherwise however, in the context of post-colonization, such a scenario tends to down-play Australia’s prevailing racialised structure and holds to a utopian wish that is unlikely to become a reality in the foreseeable future. As Rey Chow argues in the essay ‘The Politics of Admittance: Female Sexual Agency, Miscegenation and the Formation of Community in Frantz Fanon’ that much post-structuralist theory “has […] too hastily put its emphasis on the ‘post’ of ‘post-structuralism’, (mis)leading us to think that the force of structure itself is a thing of the past” (*Frantz Fanon: Critical Perspectives*, 35-36). Chow asserts this has meant that other issues like the politics of admittance which “pertain even
more urgently to the kind of conceptualization of community that begins as a revolt against an existing political condition, such as the condition of colonization” have been neglected (Chow, 36).

In his unambiguous analysis of the text, Adam Shoemaker in *Mudrooroo: A Critical Study* describes *Ghost Dreaming* as a “fascinating process of revisitation” (68). Shoemaker interprets the novel as being mainly concerned “with converting the European interlopers to the Aboriginal way of seeing” (68). For him the text takes a wish-fulfilling stance and “gives primary control over the spiritual destiny of the world to Aboriginal people” (69). Shoemaker’s reading of the novel seems to rest on the basic principle that colonised Aboriginal peoples have come to ‘know’ and understand their colonisers as well, if not better, than such colonisers ‘know’ and understand themselves. This view is reminiscent of *Doctor Wooreddy*’s message that, as prisoners in their own land, Aboriginal peoples “had been forced by their oppression to become good judges of character, especially the characters of their masters” (Mudrooroo, 58). Fanon’s pronouncement that “The settler and the native are old acquaintances. In fact, the settler is right when he speaks of knowing the [Indigene] well. For it is the settler who has brought the native into existence and who perpetuates his existence” (Fanon, 28), is questioned in Mudrooroo’s novels. In both *Doctor Wooreddy* and *Ghost Dreaming*
Mudrooroo’s authorial position of social and cultural hybridity is more hopeful and appears to reject Fanon’s apparent culturally impotent position. For Mudrooroo, the struggle for identity played out in the ambiguous and unstable space of colonial encounter is one in which ‘the native’, or man of colour, has had at least some part to play in (trans)forming the identity of the settler – with little reference however, to the relations of power operating within the politics of identification itself.

Much like Doctor Wooreddy, Mudrooroo structures Ghost Dreaming around his intrepid hero, Wooreddy/Jangamuttuk. Identified as “the last of the old chiefs” (Mudrooroo, 43), Jangamuttuk plays a major role in a narrative that once again sees the white ‘Great Conciliator’ Robinson/Fada, take second place as “his tame spirit” (Mudrooroo, 17). The constant source of authorial ire, Robinson is portrayed as a pretentious buffoon, an uneducated self-proclaimed evangelist who acts as a metaphor for the ignorance underpinning the self-serving ‘protectionist’ discourse of the colonialist project. The character embodies the part played by white unqualified missionaries in creating and perpetuating the illusion of the assumed inherent superiority of the European so-called ‘civilising’ enterprise which, in many ways, is what Mudrooroo’s novel is all about and seeks to challenge. It is as though Jangamuttuk represents Wooreddy
as the spectre of the Aboriginal peoples’ last hope, whilst Ludjee, may be read as the one to blame for their inevitable surrender.

As the narrative begins, Jangamuttuk’s most inward thoughts and fears are enlisted to convey the shared predicament of twenty or so Tasmanian Aboriginals who have been exiled to a place referred to simply as ‘Island’. The small band has survived the physical and spiritual damage sustained under the dubious ‘protection’ of white missionaries – the ‘ghosts’ or num who are the source of their misery. The people are, however, “in despair […] sickening unto death” (Mudrooroo, 1). Our souls wander forlornly in the land of ghosts. Our spirits become their play things; our bodies their food, to be ripped apart […] We are in despair; we are sickening unto death; we call to be healed. Anxiously we wait for the ceremony to begin. We wait for our mapan, the Master of the Ghost Dreaming to deliver us. (Mudrooroo, 1)

As their leader, it falls on Jangamuttuk to sustain them and also to deliver them to a better place – a “promised land” (Mudrooroo, 143). The plot turns around the quest to leave the stricken Island, which itself is a kind of character in the novel, “to find [a] new world” (Mudrooroo 142). Jangamuttuk is portrayed as a crafty survivor, a healer and a magic man whose telepathic and interpretive powers allow him to decipher “the collective feelings of his people” (Mudrooroo, 2). The protagonist is a
perfect fit for a definition of the trickster figure suggested by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. as one whose “priority over destiny is inscribed in his role as the guiding force of interpretation itself” (Gates, 1989, 23). *Ghost Dreaming*’s plot revolves around Jangamuttuk’s ambition to take his surviving people from the “hell of an island” (Mudrooroo, 123) to which they have been brought by Fada in the course of his ‘conciliatory’ mission. To achieve this, Jangamuttuk must draw on ancestrally-acquired magical skills to gain entry into the ‘ghost’s’ dreaming, or collective unconscious, thereby appropriating white power and knowledge:

> He, the shaman […] hoped to bring all of his people into contact with the ghost realm so that they could capture the essence of health and well-being and then could break back safely into their own culture and society […] He would enable them to evade the demons of sickness which were weakening and destroying them, and then when they were strong… but first the ceremony, but first the ceremony. (Mudrooroo, 4)

The ritual, which is choreographed by Jangamuttuk “as the dreamer of the ceremony” (Mudrooroo, 3) symbolises a kind of spiritual journey into the past where the survival of Indigenous ritual assists them to cope with movement and change in the present. Jangamuttuk incorporates into the trappings of traditional Aboriginal ceremony new images/signs, which
represent a form of cultural metamorphosis, or hybrid ‘newness’, that both reveals and plays with contradiction. On male and female Aboriginal bodies are written various cross-cultural signifiers that mediate the transformative nature of colonial cohabitation. In other words, Jangamuttuk’s dancers have one foot in the old world (black) and one in the new (black and white):

The males were naked except for the initiated men who proudly wore the incised pubic shell of their clans; the women subjected to the new Christian faith wore a long skirt, but above their waist [...] they had painted in a lattice work of white lines that which signified a bodice lowcut as in formal European wear. [...] The men’s head ornamentation also signified the European. Civilisation had shorn many. Gone were the elaborate and proud hairstyles of the initiated men. Now they covered up their naked shame under woollen caps, thus replacing the reality for the symbolic. (Mudrooroo, 2)

The layering of dreamlike messages in *Ghost Dreaming* emanates from a multi dimensional way of seeing the world that European myopic culture (for which Fada is a metaphor) is unable to see. Fada regards himself as both a scientist and a man of God. “The missionary and the anthropologist uneasily shared his soul. The stern Christian knew that these pagan
ceremonies had to go, whilst the anthropologist (and the romantic) found a natural joy in them” (Mudrooroo, 18). For Jangamuttuk, however, the performance of ceremony was “serious business” (Mudrooroo, 4) – a practice which allows his people to believe in the virtue of their own way of seeing and living in the world. Locked in his own confused system of knowledge, however, Fada can neither see nor hear, a cultural disability succinctly expressed by Wadawaka’s Ashanti saying, “See and blind: hear and deaf” (Mudrooroo, 82). He finds the Aboriginal ceremony nothing but a baffling sequence of meaningless sights and sounds. Unable to grasp the significance of the ritual or to decode its meaning, he is unable to see that the spirit of the old world is taking whatever steps it has at its disposal to cope with the demands of tradition.

Elements of traditional ceremonial practices are retained and improvisations introduced on Jangamuttuk’s terms almost as by-products of an unavoidable historical situation – to borrow Sangari’s phrase – as “something owned as well as something resisted” (Sangari, 1987, 159). As the narrator puts it, Jangamuttuk “was not after a realist copy, after all he had no intention of aping the European, but sought for an adaptation of these alien cultural forms appropriate to his own cultural matrix” (Mudrooroo, 3). For Jangamuttuk, the performance of ceremony, even in mutated form, is a defence mechanism against cultural destruction – a
means of preserving a distinctive Aboriginal voice and identity even as it demonstrates the inevitability of its adulteration. The work of magic and ceremony in *Ghost Dreaming* is not restricted to the symbolic, however. Rather, it is shown to be a necessary function of community survival – “this was the purpose of the ceremony” (Mudrooroo 4). As Brenda Cooper argues, postcolonial writers are at pains to “show that magical beliefs had spiritual roots that acted rationally in keeping the society together” (Cooper, 1998, 221). This comment precisely invokes Mudrooroo’s condemnation of the totalising notion that there is but one way of seeing and understanding the world – an underlying principle that is evident throughout his body of work.

Shoemaker has argued that *Ghost Dreaming* contains a narrative strategy that is a first for Mudrooroo, one which suggests that “Aboriginal females are of equal status and that they have a rich and independent social and religious life” (Shoemaker, 80). As has already been shown, women do not fare well in Mudrooroo’s fiction and his perhaps more positive treatment of the Aboriginal character, Ludjee, can certainly be read in the way Shoemaker suggests. Mudrooroo depicts Ludjee in a number of guises, however, which represent her as simultaneously power ful and power less. Hers is a substitute for absolute power – what Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror: Essays on Abjection* (1982) calls “the underhand double
of explicit phallic power” (Kristeva, 1976, 170) which veils the degree to which her character signifies the underlying patriarchal ideologies at work in the text.

Much like Jangamuttuk, Ludjee is portrayed as a mortal with the power to cross over between the human and the animal worlds. Her level of skill when changing into her dreaming companion, the giant Manta Ray, however, is scarcely a match for Jangamuttuk’s extensive repertoire. Ludjee’s shape-shifting capacity is limited to the Manta Ray whilst Jangamuttuk is able to take various forms from a small spider to a large Goanna. Nor does Ludjee possess Jangamuttuk’s miraculous ability to harness and control the natural elements, such as the wind. As the author has Jangamuttuk say, “that wind same as cousin to me. I make him turn” (Mudrooroo, 143) and he does so. In comparison, the magical/mythical powers afforded to Ludjee do not reflect a world in which males and females are judged as equals. Moreover, the powers she is able to deploy also seem at odds with her relative powerlessness to tell a story that is ‘truly’ her own. The novel’s omniscient narrator never actually allows her to speak for herself. Ludjee’s story is consistently enmeshed with, and controlled by, those of Mudrooroo’s male characters both black and white in a way that, ultimately, signifies her inability to break free of patriarchy’s discourses of objectification.
Although as a shape-shifter, Ludjee appears to transgress stereotypical gender roles, she is also portrayed more conventionally. Depicted as a nurturer and carer who “radiated a sense of security over” (Mudrooroo, 104) the principal male characters, she is also represented as the archetypal femme fatale. In two separate scenes, for example, Ludjee saves both Jangamuttuk and Robinson from drowning (Mudrooroo, 28 &46). In another, Robinson sketches her in the image of “a naked English prostitute” (Mudrooroo, 62) as she is about to plunge into the sea – a potentially humiliating configuration which sees Robinson tie her to the base, or lower classes as an object to be possessed. Perhaps most tellingly, however, much like Trugernanna before her, Ludjee symbolises the tragic period in which she lived and suffered. In Mudrooroo’s masculinist discourse, the Aboriginal woman’s body becomes a metaphor for the damaged condition of the colonised nation. As the narrator states, with the arrival of the ghosts: *everything had changed*.

The Earth raged with giant fires; kangaroos and wallabies began to disappear, and even the giant animals of the ocean were dragged ashore to be butchered. The smell of boiling flesh rose with the smoke and a haze of death hung over much of their land. Such were the times, an everyone had to adapt to them. The girl Ludjee had been taken in by ghost and used and abused as everything was used and abused. (Mudrooroo. 26)
Such a gender bias is implicated in (colonial) patriarchy’s degradation of the female body, a stigmatising discourse that, ironically, Ludjee shares with the novel’s only white female character, Mada. Speaking in a different but related context, Brenda Cooper observes that “nothing sums up the ambiguity of [identity] politics better than the ambivalent attitude [of certain writers] towards women” (Cooper, 1998, 218). Mudrooroo’s daunting Mada, who is portrayed chiefly, or perhaps most obviously, as a destroyer of both herself and of her husband, personifies such ambivalence. Mada “complained of a bewildering number of illnesses” (Mudrooroo, 93) – maladies that metaphorically express her profound social and psychic dis-ease with life in what she believes is “an uncaring land covered with the secretness of the night” (Mudrooroo, 6). The messages are again mixed, however, for Mada is also represented as “something pathetic” (Mudrooroo, 61) – a victim of circumstances not all of her own making. Mada is not only white and female in a new colony, she is also poor and lower class. And, as Cooper writes in a different but related context, “to be a poor white [female] in the colonial context is to carry a particular burden of suffering and concealment, humiliation and secrecy”. (Cooper, 1998, 7)

Mada’s sense of helplessness/hopelessness is manifested in an addiction to laudanum, “a deadly drug responsible for the prison in which
the poor woman lay‖ (Mudrooroo, 112). The character’s drug dependency may be read as a sign of her failure/weakness as a human being but also as representing a wish to escape from a world she fears, cannot understand and that, vampire-like, sucks up her vitality. Ron Devins offers a further dimension to the significance of Mada’s ‘sickness’ in the narrative, however. For Devins, the origin of the character’s dis-ease is tied to the strange mix of scientific and religious ideology which her hypocritical husband, Fada, attempts (but ultimately fails) to impose autocratically on both his wife and his Aboriginal charges. Devins argues that “Mada’s worries suggest more than physical death by disease. Assimilation into Fada’s world view represents a more insidious, if less direct, road to [the] ‘ghostliness’, [or drug-induced world] which is slowly killing her” (Devins, 1995, 28). Here the implication seems to be that, for Mada and the Aboriginal people alike, the source of their suffering is the system in which they both find themselves – one that offers no ‘cure’ for ailing souls beyond the drugs and alcohol that accompanied colonialism on its so-called ‘civilising’ mission.

In her dislocated and soulless condition, Mada longs for her old home in London, the harsh realities of which had dimmed over time to become a “fairyland free from suffering” (Mudrooroo, 6). As Devins points out, Mudrooroo’s depiction of London is less than flattering
(Devins, 1995, 23). It is described in particularly coarse terms as a “shithole” into which both Fada and Mada “had been dropped at birth” – “a cold and forbidding realm filled with so much suffering that a human could not survive in it” (Mudrooroo, 32). Yet Fada is blind to his wife’s malaise – that she “hungered for her homeland far away” (Mudrooroo, 113) – just as he is equally blind to the value of Aboriginal spiritual belief. He sees his wife in similar terms as he views the Aboriginal people – as weak and childish. In his estimation, Mada’s condition was a symptom of female hysteria, for “women, he knew, were subject to mysterious visitations of illness” (Mudrooroo, 93). In Mudrooroo’s discourse, Fada is tried and found guilty of underscoring one of patriarchy’s most powerful (im)moral drives – to control and marginalise in order to preserve the status quo. As the character states:

Similar to children, [women] needed strict guidance and control, for if left to their own devices, they were apt to forget their stern duties of kitchen and nursery and wander off into flights of feverish imagination. A certain ‘wandering’ was an inclination of the female mind. If not controlled reason was lost as it drifted off into fantasy which might end in insanity, or worse, vice of the most depraved kind. (Mudrooroo, 93)

Mudrooroo in fact portray Mada as being better educated than her once-irresponsible, street-urchin-turned-missionary husband. In a scene which
details their meeting in London, Mada is described as the impregnated “slattern from the corner pub” (Mudrooroo, 41) who is deserted by Fada when he sails to Australia to escape his paternal responsibilities. Mada is also depicted as the beneficiary of a rich Londoner’s philanthropy, however. In many ways she is an Eliza Doolittle character – the apt (if pregnant) pupil of “a Mrs. Haliday who instantly decided she might as well help the girl with an education while she waited for the birth” (Mudrooroo, 41). As noted in Chapter III, the author’s maternal grandmother was Sarah Halliday, a possible indication that he was aware of his British as well as his African-American ancestry when writing Ghost Dreaming). With Mrs. Haliday as her role model, “like a good little mimic, Mada flung off her [London] East End origins and hastily began acquiring all the manners and prejudices of the middle class” (Mudrooroo, 41). On one level then, Mada is comically represented as a lower class woman with a lust for life. On another, she is the archetypal “vulgar little hussy” (Mudrooroo, 40) who, in a ‘past life’, was the all-too willing actor in an historical/social script where “the uplifting of the lower classes was becoming fashionable in the philanthropic circles of England” (Mudrooroo, 41).

Much of Ghost Dreaming’s narrative is invested in the rather piteous figure of Mada. Her story is a wonderfully mixed hybrid that takes her from the misery of the physical world of white colonial settlement and,
perhaps because of her unique brand of suffering, gives her a place in the magical dreaming world of Aboriginality. As a symbol of the human imperfections of those caught in the web of the new regime, Mada’s dreaming shapes are conflicting and ambiguous – both positive and negative. In her dreams, for example, she is at times a large white bird – a symbol of her charitable, or peace-loving, side. At other times she ‘sees’ herself variously as a spider, a maggot, a fish and a hornet (Mudrooroo, 107)– as possessive, penetrating and poisonous as the system that bred her. And then again, she appears in dual form – as a soul in dialogue with itself – in a dream scene where as the white bird (passive) she triumphs over the hornet (aggressive) in a symbolic struggle between the conflicting sides of her nature (102, 103). Finally, towards the end of the novel, close to death and enclosed within the walls of her tomb-like room, Mada’s radically altered physical characteristics become synonymous with representations of the female vampire:

Tendrils of hair floated about a ravaged face and skeleton body. Ill-health lay there almost ready to be interred […] It was the female ghost, one that had caught some contagion and became imprisoned in this room. Suddenly the female jerked into a sitting position. Her blue eyes sprang open and she uttered a cry of despair filled with a hunger not to be denied.
Now her fang-like teeth began gnawing at her pallid lips until they were lacerated; but no blood came. (Mudrooroo, 112)

In the scene which follows, Mada’s “hunger of the heart” (Mudrooroo, 113) is alleviated by the combined efforts of those she believed “were as badly off as she was” (Mudrooroo, 9). Jangamuttuk chants over her protectively, Ludjee suggests a crystal-induced ‘magic’ treatment and Wadawaka, whose bittersweet memories of his mother are of a similarly wretched creature, keeps Mada warm until “her skin lost its pallor and became flushed with health” (Mudrooroo, 114).

Wadawaka remembers his mother as simultaneously embodying the notions of safe haven and prison walls. “Safe at home in the womb. Feeling the warm walls constricting; feeling all the hurt receding; feeling, feeling, sadness sweeping, bitter the taste, bitter the womb, pressing walls pressing, pushing, pushing” (Mudrooroo, 88). Whenever during the course of the narrative Wadawaka recalls his mother’s anguish, however, it is represented as a legacy of childhood trauma. The character regresses, becomes powerlessly infantilised and slips “into the shell of the small boy […] a poor lonely waif” (Mudrooroo, 100-01). Wadawaka’s search for self and belonging is underpinned by a desire for a state of being offering the “comforting warmth” (Mudrooroo, 87) conventionally associated with the masculine idealisation of ‘woman’ as ‘mother’. But his quest also involves
a wish to be rid of feelings of dependency on a mother whose memory represents “a crown of thorns” (Mudrooroo, 89) – a curse. It is not by accident that Wadawaka’s thorny ‘crown’ slips and “his forehead [is] healed” (Mudrooroo, 89) when, in an ecstasy-inducing ceremony he is initiated by Jangamuttuk into Aboriginal society and only then can fly “high and free” (Mudrooroo, 90) into forgetfulness.

Wadawaka’s sense of self-awareness is inextricably tied to his ‘personal’ history both as a man of colour and as someone who finds himself a prisoner in “the furthest colony of the British Empire” (Mudrooroo, 82) with little chance of escape. “Without land, without hope […] he drifted along on the whims of the white devils with only the sorrow of his mother keeping him wholesome, with only his rancour to give direction” (Mudrooroo,77). Perhaps this explains why the character comforts Mada – a projection of the mother figure – in a way that is symbolic of an innocent familial relationship but which also has more sinister, incestuous connotations. Leaping upon her bed in the form of his Dreaming animal, Leopard, Wadawaka snuggles up to the pathetic apparition this particular mother has become. Like magic, her “hands ceased their spasmodic clutching. One was pushed out to weakly stroke the warm fur. Leopard purred on and the female ghost relaxed” (Mudrooroo, 113), strangely comforted by an ‘alien’ form with whom she appears to
have an affinity. If Mada’s room signifies a kind of prison, then Jangamuttuk’s hillside camp represents a domain of freedom. While his people pined and despaired:

Jangamuttuk would roam the island seeking for the net of power that kept the entire earth together. There were few places of strong power. Only a few ancient nodes that flickered in his awareness. These he accepted as the footprints of his Dreaming ancestors. (Mudrooroo, 21)

Situated high up on a slope and protected by “a huge boulder” (Mudrooroo, 56), Jangamuttuk’s campsite is such a place of spiritual strength. Much like a church, it is represented as a site of solitude and worship. A cultural refuge off limits to the uninitiated and uninvited, Jangamuttuk is free to practice his own traditional ceremonies there. Towards the end of the novel, for example, both he and Wadawaka preside over the initiation of two novices – one named George “because he looks a bit like that crazy old King” (Mudrooroo, 125) and another named Augustus after the first Roman Emperor. There is, of course, some irony in the fact that the initiated youths are named after the author’s ‘favourite’ character, George Augustus Robinson and that they are so named with an eye towards their anticipated place in the author’s later work.
Janaiah’s choice to live high above the mission compound puts him outside Fada’s tyrannical control and symbolises the legitimacy of different levels of perception – a rationale the novel consistently upholds. But the split between ‘the two camps’ also embodies the reality that first shaped Australian society and speaks of the continuing divided nature of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal existence today.

The novel ends as it begins – with ritual – but also on a note of hope and forward movement not found in its opening pages. A final irony sees Fada duped one last time by those he sees as inferior as he and Mada depart the island to return to England, leaving their son, the immature and dull-witted Sonny behind ostensibly in charge of the mission. However, Jangamuttuk “was highly doubtful of the future of the mission under the son, or anyone else for that matter. In fact, he had no plans for the continuance of the mission at all” (Mudrooroo, 133) but instead intended to sail away from the island in a stolen ship stocked with Fada’s own supplies and captained by Wadawaka. Before they sail for their “promised land” (Mudrooroo, 143), however, a final ceremony is conducted.

The huge boulder, which marks and protects Jangamuttuk’s sacred site on the Island, becomes the mechanism by which that most hallowed symbol of colonial power, the church, is destroyed. Jangamuttuk, Ludjee, Wadawaka and, tellingly, Mada, in the form of her dreaming ‘giant white
bird’, combine the ‘magical’ powers contained within their individual rock crystals to dislodge the stone:

it began to move, slowly at first, then gathered speed as it rolled down the steep slope at the foot of which lay the mission compound […] Fada’s monument to history, the chapel, stood directly in its path. The huge boulder pressed it into the earth. All that was left was the square outline of what had once been a church. (Mudrooroo, 146)

Mudrooroo’s final irony then, is that symbol of the Aboriginal peoples’ as well as Mada’s ‘sickness’ is demolished by the rock on which Jangamuttuk had built his ‘church’. On the one hand the destruction of the Christian church signifies that the historical attempts to convert Aboriginal Australians to European ways have failed. On the other, Mada’s involvement in its ‘demise’, also suggests that the binary black/white nature of human divisions is a condition of historical experience that need not necessarily continue unchecked into the future.

Mudrooroo is a writer whose novels, time and time again, present beginnings as endings and endings as beginnings. Not surprisingly then, Ghost Dreaming closes on a note of hope and with the ghostly voice of the author signalling that, going forward, the mythologies of another history and new contemporary realities constructed by his band of intrepid
voyagers remain to be dealt with (Mudrooroo, 148). As Jangamuttuk puts it – it’s never “too late to begin again” (Mudrooroo, 83). But the character whose expertise, or ‘magic’, makes such a new beginning possible is not Jangamuttuk. For the time being at least, the role of ‘saviour’ is located in the figure of the African-American, Wadawaka. The accomplished seaman “who could sail anywhere” (Mudrooroo, 133), Wadawaka emerges from the novel’s closing pages as the figure willing and able to accept the challenges of any world which he and those he represents might face.

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