CONCLUSION

Hillel Schwartz in *The Culture of the Copy: Striking Likenesses, Unreasonable Facsimiles*, describes as “Impostures succeed because, not in spite, of their fictitiousness. They take wing with congenial cultural fantasies. *Impostors* persevere because any fear they may have of being discovered is overshadowed by their fear of being alone” (71, 1998).

In this study, the readings of Mudrooroo novels have turned upon the understanding that the most abiding source of his creative endeavors is the fraught terrain of his own disordered life. The author’s books are filled with images, voices and gestures that mediate the emotions and tensions of his borderland subjectivity as he simultaneously casts a keen satiric eye over the inequities of black and white relationships in Australia.

In Mudrooroo’s fiction, the business of myth-making extends to a gender-based pattern of hostility and distrust which may well have been spawned from the hardships and loneliness he suffered in the years he was separated from his mother and known female siblings as a child. The more intently one examines his novels, the more they appear to support the view that the author is somehow committed to representing the role of the feminine in a way that articulates an unapologetic, sexist agenda. Mudrooroo never asks us to re-read the female stereotypes of patriarchal
imagination. Rather, he rigorously reasserts them. By treating his female heroines as figures likely to seduce and then betray he offers, perhaps unconsciously, a defining perspective on the significant role of the mother/female figure in determining the course of his imaginative literary journey. The accompanying prevalent notion that woman, not man, is to blame for the problems of the colonized world (and by implication Mudrooroo’s own) quite clearly privileges maleness, but may also be read as symptomatic of a much wider problematic linked to the burden of the author’s institutionalized past.

As mapped out in the first part of this study, it was in negotiation with his mentor, the late Dame Mary Durack, that Mudrooroo first chose to identify as an Aboriginal author, rather than as a black Australian author of African-American/Irish descent. It was also proposed that the social and cultural power structures in play in 1960s Australia – the racial hierarchies that Durack represented – may well have conspired to motivate the author to take such a life-changing step. In Mudrooroo’s own words, “racism intruded in denying me my Irish identity. It was denied to me by members of the dominant culture, such as Mary Durack” (Mudrooroo, 263). I have also argued that when Mudrooroo did not then (or later) divulge his mother’s “Irish ancestry and, by doing so, [his own] Irish culture” (Mudrooroo, 263), at the root of his reticence was an awareness of the
nature and source of racial oppression in Australia. In other words, the author bought into, rather than challenged, an identity expressed within a predetermined set of ‘authenticating’ criteria, which operated at the level of the skin.

Mudrooroo’s adoption of an Aboriginal persona may have entailed a conscious act of complicity, but it also appeared to be unfettered by any wish on his part to pass as white, despite the grim consequences of ‘living black’ in Australia’s 1960s race-based society. Rather, it seems more likely that the Aboriginal image he alleged Mary Durack wrote into being was, as Gates has suggested, “true somehow to the unwritten text of a common blackness” (Gates, 1988, 183). As such, the colour of the author’s skin both caused and allowed him to ‘choose’ to belong to an oppressed global collective that extended beyond the individual – to a group of humanity which had “all suffered an enduring persecution at the hands of all white people” (Mudrooroo, 260). It seems to follow that, “for a person of literary ambition” (Mudrooroo, 263), Mudrooroo’s move to become the first Australian Aboriginal author was underpinned by a desire to seize and possess the power that comes with writing. The author’s embrace of Aboriginality appears to have been fuelled by a wish to become a speaking black subject armed with a visible sign of dominant white culture which, potentially, could be exercised as a weapon of contestation.
The reliable documentary evidence of Mudrooroo’s ancestry has been uncovered which indicates that the author’s mother, Elizabeth Mudrooroo (née Barron), is not a Bibbulmun woman as he has consistently claimed, but a white woman of Irish/English descent. Just as troubling is the revelation that equally dependable records reveal that the author was aware not only of this reality, but also that his father was of African-American descent. In this scenario, Mudrooroo appears to have known all along that he is not Aboriginal. As argued, however, whilst we can ascertain the ‘facts’ from the ‘official’ records, the motivations behind them cannot be fully known. Rather, the revelation of Mudrooroo’s likely imposture raises even more challenging questions about the significance of race as the location of identity in Australian society.

As I hope to have made clear, this study has taken its general shape from the complexities of identity formation tied to notions of belonging within the constraints of Australia’s racial boundaries and relations of power. There seems little doubt that the mythical version of who Mudrooroo purports to be is grounded in a peculiarly Australian racist logic that denies the possibility of a seamless case for or against where the author may have chosen to situate himself culturally. To advance this particular argument it is proposed that such logic derived its force from, and was ultimately secured by, the author’s hybridity as a textual marker of
Aboriginality in Australian society. Moreover, the colonial paradigm determining hybridity was a defining sign of Aboriginal identity that Mudrooroo himself strategically brought to bear in the “process of inhabiting power” (Ashcroft, 174), however bizarre this claim might seem.

Put another way, in 1960s Australia, the colour of Mudrooroo’s skin alone enabled him to identify as an Aboriginal author within social standards that served (and still serve) the interests and expectations of dominant white rhetoric and values. Given the attitudes of the day, it may well have been commonplace for those who exercised white privilege, to treat ‘a coloured boy’ as Aboriginal and just as commonplace for someone like Mudrooroo to feel pressured “to go along with that” (Mudrooroo, 1997b, 263). Yet the question of responsibility for the perpetuation of what appears to be a further narrative of colonial theft remains. It is imperative not to lose sight of the likelihood that an act of deception, which required Mudrooroo’s participation in a vampire-like performance of cultural penetration and (dis)possession, took place. As can be deciphered from the available evidence, it also seems probable that the success of such imposture was contingent upon the symbolic death of the author’s biological mother, an exigency that furnishes a new platform for wider critical interpretation of his fiction.
Mudrooroo’s novels be recognized as belonging within the dual modes of autobiographical and historical fiction. Chapter IV advocates that it is now possible to see the author’s personal identity and creative destinies as having arisen from his Wildcat Trilogy. The author’s remembered experiences as recounted by his unnamed Aboriginal protagonist in the black idiomatic tradition, are themselves acts of cultural transformation and performance in both a textual and a personal sense. Speaking through the Wildcat figure, Mudrooroo represents alienation and loneliness as a consequence of hybridity and dislocation in the colonial situation. There seems little doubt that his character’s persistent search for self and meaning echoes the lived reality of the author himself. As he wrote to Durack, this subsequently meant that he became “oriented to the Aboriginal people and [was] for the first time definitely committed to a race” (Mudrooroo. xxiii) as well as dedicated to a textualised notion of Indigenous belonging as institutionally embattled.

Mudrooroo’s vampire trilogy conveys a sense of the anger that may well have accompanied the unrelenting questioning of the author’s claim to Indigenous belonging by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians alike. As argued, the novels’ imaginary scenes and events are at times overbearingly violent. It is as though the author expresses his rage (or perhaps takes his revenge) against what was happening in his own life at
the end of the twentieth century in the only way he knows how – through his fiction.

There is another kind of colonial distinction, or hierarchy, in the closing scenes of the trilogy, however that concerns the transformed Aboriginal figure, George, who is equally controlled by the vampire, Amelia. A part of the books’ tragedy is that both Amelia and Wadawaka ultimately abandon the young Aboriginal man. In a final symbolic act George, the hybrid figure, “settles himself down on the verandah” (Mudrooroo, 228), the metaphorical no-man’s land that Ashcroft labels the “zone of uncertainty” (Ashcroft. 195). It is as though he has become superfluous – an unnecessary third element in Wadawaka and Amelia’s story. In the end, “alone and unwanted” (Mudrooroo. 1), George is restored to where he was when his story began – a stranger and a storyteller owning nothing but his tales.

For readers familiar with Mudrooroo’s work, it is not difficult at this point to imagine George as Wildcat’s double. Any attempt to separate the mythologies of the fictional characters and their creator also seems impossible here. The interchangeability and energising power of fact and fiction is conspicuous. This is particularly so in light of the parallels that can be drawn between the ‘real’ Mary Durack and a potentially literalized twin such as the vampire, Amelia Fraser as signifiers of powerful white
females who would aspire to shape and control the ‘life’ stories of others. The tragedy of Wildcat and George is that their narrative journeys suggest their quests were never a matter of fate but of predetermined destinations and perhaps this is how it may have been for the author himself.

As argued, much like his imaginary characters, there can be no final solution to the mystery of what otherwise might have been had Mudrooroo not, metaphorically and actually, been infected and consumed by a system of social inequality underpinned by black and white relations of power. This is an unknowable side of the author’s history that hinges on a covert partnership between violator and violated – powerful and powerless – an unholy sharing of circumstances that still endures and much like the vampire, may never die.

How then is the work of Colin Mudrooroo as a black Australian author to be valued in the future? How has the influence and authority of his work changed since the questioning of his Aboriginal heritage? Where lie his successes and where his failures and how are they to be measured – if indeed they can, or should, be measured at all? Is he in fact both a vampire and a victim? Whatever one’s view, the Mudrooroo narrative continues to be a controversial subject constituted and performed within the racist framework of self-representation and belonging in Australia.
As a man of colour, Mudrooroo may well have chosen to regard his body not simply as a site of organization and control, but of defiance against the systems of colonial domination. The author’s continuing silence on the issue of his mother’s identity and his interdependent claim to Aboriginal ancestry may be read as a credible refusal to lend his authority to subjugating white ideology, a stand that is a defining characteristic of his anti-authoritarian writing. His refusal to speak, however, also implies that Mudrooroo is unwilling, or perhaps unable, to admit that the politics of the body in which he engaged depended for its authority on the same conceptual colonizing apparatus he still professes to resist. It is not unreasonable to suggest that all things considered, the Aboriginal peoples, the literary community, his readers and his biological family deserve something more than his silence.