CHAPTER - I
FOURTH WORLD LITERATURES

Aboriginals of Australia, Maoris of New Zealand, Native people of America, First Nations of Canada, Dalits/Tribes of India are considered as ‘People of Fourth world’. George Manuel (1921-1989), the most significant, powerful and revered Indigenous leader of Canada advocated the political unification of Indigenous people across the globe and the creation of the Fourth world movement. As the president of world’s Indigenous peoples during 1975-1981, Manuel traveled Sweden, Nicargua, Chile, Gautemala and realized that Indigenous people have much in common and in the face of adversity, unity becomes the binding factor. To promote the perspective of ‘Fourth World’, with the assistance of Michael Posluns, he published *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality* (1974). Manuel’s campaign from brotherhood to nationhood found its resonance in all the aspects of Indigenous peoples lives. Adam Shoemaker provided a comprehensive account of Aboriginal literature in Australia with *Black words White Page: Aboriginal Literature 1929-1988* (1989). Shoemaker has presented Aboriginal literature as Australia’s Fourth World literature. Upholding the same spirit Gordon Brotherston wrote *Book of the Fourth World* (1992) arguing that American continent was identified as the Fourth world of our planet. The book has explored landscapes and chronologies of this world using indigenous sources as primary sources. It has brought
together wide range of evidence from Latin and Anglo America and offered detailed analyses of texts that range back into centuries of civilized life. It is from these sources the literary cartography of fourth world literature is drawn considering Aboriginal literature of Australia. The consciousness of the ‘Fourth world’ is the result of constant efforts of aboriginal representatives. When Australia is projected as the convergence of the First world and Fourth worlds in the welcoming address of Queen’s representative Governor Sir Zelman Cowman, this was confronted by the Indigenous delegates.

Australian Aboriginal literature as a representation of Aboriginal World articulated the black past and contemporary aboriginal identity. It has elucidated the relationship between Australian Aboriginal writing and other forms of Australian literature.

The Evolution of Aboriginal literature in Australia is in reflection with the socio, economic, literary & cultural circumstances that affected the lives of Aboriginals. During 1929 to 1945, the economic depression and the onset of Second World War influenced the relations of aboriginals with white Australians. Some of the literary works represented this phenomenon. In 1929, Australia could not escape the repercussions of American Stock market crash. Until the outbreak of World War II, Australia could not settle the economic battle. The severe plight of the
aboriginal Australians during this period could not be glossed over. Aboriginal people throughout Australia were invariably hit harder economically, judicially, socially, and culturally. C. D. Rowley in *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society* (1970) depicted the depression as: “One of the effects of great depression, all over Australia, seems to have been more rigid containment in institutions, where conditions were probably worse than ever before, with enduring effects on Aboriginal attitudes” (281). It is during this period the extinction and the numerical waning of full blooded aboriginal population became the concern of everyone. W.H. Stanner in *white Man got No Dreaming* (1979) opined that from the estimated number of 3,000,000 (three lakhs) in 1788 only about 60,000 (sixty thousand) remained in 1930. Richard Broome in *Aboriginal Australians: Black Response to White Dominance, 1788-1980* (1982) gives specific information that only 8000 aborigines remained in New South Wales in 1930 and 1000 in Victoria. The anxiety of Commonwealth governments about the extinction of unique indigenous people is only to avoid international criticism. This anxiety is reminiscent of contemporary campaign to save endangered animal species and this view acted as a campaign particularly to condemn the massacres and punitive expeditions that persisted during the period of early economic depression. The Punitive raids and the retaliatory massacres invited the public attention upon the uncertainty of Aboriginal existence. The Umbali massacre in 1920, the
killing of a white dingo hunter in the vicinity of Alice springs in 1928 and the exceptional case of Arnhem land Aborigine, Tuckiar, accused of the murder of constable McColl are some of the important incidents that invited foreign intervention and concern in prodding the Commonwealth and Australian Govt. to revise the Aboriginal policies over the annihilation of full blooded aborigines. The policies embracing the varying degrees of Aboriginal blood encouraged the exponential increase of Aboriginal population and created part aboriginal or half caste aboriginal with the physical union of the white people. So the aboriginal policies during this period had to deal with the extinction of one group and the proliferation of another projected as ‘assimilation’ that got reflected in the resolution of Commonwealth and State Authorities conference.

POPULAR PERCEPTIONS

Literature produced during this period (1929-1945) aptly rendered the precarious situation of Aboriginal people and created popular perceptions that went against the lives and subjectivity of Aboriginals. It was Katharine Susannah Prichard (1883-1969) who depicted and carried Aboriginal matters to overseas. Born in Levuka, Fiji in 1883, she moved to Melbourne and completed her studies in Melbourne College. She worked as governess and journalist in Victoria and traveled to England in 1908 and published her first novel The Pioneers (1851). After her return
to Australia, she published *Windlestraws* (1916) and *Black Opal* (1921). She was the founding member of the Communist Party of Australia in 1921. She organized unemployed workers and found left wing women’s groups. She has published other works *Intimate Strangers* (1937) that prompted the cause of peace and social justice. Her major contribution was in the reconstruction of social and personal histories in Western Australia’s gold fields from 1890s to 1946 which came in the form of The Gold Fields Trilogy: *The Roraing Nineties* (1946), *Golden Miles* (1948), and *Winged Seeds* (1950). She acquired international reputation with *Working Bullocks* (1926) & *Coonardoo* (1929). *Working Bullocks* has dramatized the traumas of timber workers in the Karri country of Australia South West. *Coonardoo* is a sensitive novel and is considered notorious for portraying the relationship between white men and black women in the northwest. Katherine Susannah Prichard was given first prize in *Bulletin*’s literary competition. *Coonardoo* was serialized in the *Bulletin* between September and December 1928. The book has provided appreciable insight into traditional Aboriginal culture. But the depiction of love relationship between a white man and an Aboriginal woman created public furore and discouraged the publication of Vance Palmer’s *Men are Human* (1928) with similar theme. The depiction of romantic idealization of traditional aboriginal life was vehemently criticized by the Aboriginal critics in
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Australia. But the novel had received a wide critical reception in Britain. *The Times Literary Supplement* wrote in 1929:

The story is vivid and moving study of the blacks in relation to the whites and in particular of the lovely and faithful Coonardoo… The north western life is pictured vividly in all its aspects and seasons with what seems to be an unexaggerated emphasis. (‘New Novels’, *The Times Literary Supplement*, no. 1433, 18 July, 1929. 574)

It is to be perceived that the perception of Aboriginals was quite different in overseas from the very perception of Australians. Most of the Australian readers promptly rejected the idea of love between an aboriginal woman and a white man as the subject was undeniably ahead of its time. The romantic idealization and depiction of Aboriginal life and characterization initiated by Katharine Susannah Prichard is part of colonial strategy that undermined the distinctive significance of Aboriginal culture and dignified literary characterizations.

Geraldton in Western Australia, he worked many jobs before starting his writing career in Melbourne. His popular first novel *Capricornia* was based on the experiences of being a Protector of the Aborigines in Darwin. It has been described as the great comic novels and a novel of protest and compassion. It was acclaimed as ‘a turning point’ and an ‘outstanding work of social protest’. The theme is immense and rambling, following a range of outback characters over a span of generations. The story of the characters is reflected in the story of Australia. The characters are unfortunate underdogs. Xavier presents himself as the outstanding champions who demonstrated the real insight and compassion. Notable characters like Norman (‘Nawnim’ or ‘no-name’) are followed from birth. Vincent Buckley in the article ‘Capricornia’ says that those who did seriously consider the informing ideas of the book often found it a cosmic comment on the wastefulness, anarchy and violence of human experience as a whole, rather than a particular comment on Aboriginal existence. (*Meanjin*, vol. XIX, no.1, 1960.13-30). Herbert has preserved unattractive story by creating a fictional nation ‘Capricornia’ for the readers which was ignored in the 20th century psuedo apolitical history of Australia. He has dismantled the white Australian myth with minimal irony predicting the circumstances of Australia almost 70 years later.

The portrayal of Aboriginal subjectivity by Prichard and Herbert obviously acted as precursors of more enlightened white views about
Aboriginal Australians. They created a significant educative impact on racial prejudices and Aboriginal stereotypes and their account has become a testimony to the changing public opinion about Aboriginals and paved the way for creating inter racial tolerance. But on the other hand the over emphasis on the importance of such works has shadowed the genuine contribution of Ion L. Idriess (1889-1979) whose works are considered as historical fiction. Ion L. Idriess born in Sydney became the most prolific writers of Australia and led a life most could only dream about. He led an amazing life. He survived typhoid. He fought and got seriously injured at Gallipoll. He was marooned on deserted island with a mate that went mad and tried to kill him. He participated in 1908 Olympic Games and bagged silver medal in boxing. His passionate inquiring nature and disarming ingenuity made him to travel and live with Aboriginals throughout Cape York Peninsula. He followed the customs of Aboriginals and spent his life hunting crocodiles and chronicling the rites and history indigenous races. He wrote several books depicting the life of the Aboriginals that transcended time, recorded history in a romantic journalistic style typifying the old fashioned Australian spirit. His most popular works *Flynn of the Inland* (1932) and *Lasserter’s Last Ride* (1931) outsold the works of Prichard and Herbert. *Lasserter’s Last Ride* was termed as best selling epic novel. Published in 1931, it had sold some 1,20,000 copies. It provides an excellent understanding of Aboriginal people. Subtitled ‘An
Epic of Central Australian Gold Discovery’, the novel depicted the thwarted explorations of white men for a mythical reef of Centralian gold. The novel has many Aboriginal characters but they were not individualized. It has carried out number of stereotypes of Aboriginals: ‘jovial Aboriginal comic’, ‘childlike father’, ‘Venerable tracker’, ‘the evil witch doctor’ etc. The character of Micky directs the explorers to the water holes and is exemplified as a tracker. The whites observe Micky’s reaction in carrying earphones for their amusement. They attempt to lower Micky as a simpleton. The stereotype of malicious witch doctor is obvious in the theme of the novel. The depiction and misrepresentation of Aboriginals as amusing imbeciles & animalistic savages is an evidence of the disdain that many Australian writers carried during this particular period. Idriess is not an exclusion in this particular aspect. In Nemarluk: King of Wilds (1941) Idriess has reduced the Aboriginal characters to brutal and bestial level. He evinced an undertone of white supremacy and condescending conception in representing Aboriginal culture and in depicting Aboriginal characters which was shared by many of the Australians. To the best possible extent, his writings have provided the European view of Aboriginals. His accurate representation was considered to be a painful and degrading experience. But his novels demand a revaluation in the light of contemporary consciousness as his popularity
and the damaging impact of his novels were emphasized by a critic Faith Bandler.

Another best known work that presented Aboriginals as primitive and moribund is Daisy Bates *The Passing of the Aborigines* (1938). Daisy Bates born as Margaret Dwyer in County Tipperary, Ireland in 1859 emigrated to Australia in 1882 at the age of 23. She devoted more than 35 years of her life to studying Aboriginal life, history, culture, rites, beliefs and customs. She was supposed to have written many things on the lives of Aboriginals. She worked for Aboriginal welfare, setting up camps to feed, clothe and nurse the transient population almost meeting the needs of the people exhausting her own economic sources. She fought against the policies of assimilation and resisted the sexual exploitation of Aboriginal women by white men. She believed in recording the lives of Aboriginals as they were a dying race. She considered half- castes as worthless. Her book *The Passing of the Aborigines* has exerted greater influence upon the perception of Aborigines by European Australians as late as 1970’s. The reissue of the book in the recent times illustrates the longevity of Aboriginal themes among the readers across the globe. Unfortunately, the contribution of Daisy Bates and her works are considered responsible for fomenting misinformation and consolidating stereotypes about Aboriginals. The misconception was further fomented by Ann Kohler and
Janette Kohn (ed) in *From Many Lands: Australians of the Past* (1980) as:

“Daisy went to Eucla on the edge of Nullarbor Plain… At first Daisy stayed with friends, but later she lived in her tent… Daisy learnt languages easily. She could talk to the Aboriginals in 188 dialects. She collected legends, languages and customs. The Aboriginals loved and trusted her and told her many tribal secrets. Once she witnessed an initiation ceremony. This was when the young men were tested for their manhood and then taken into the tribe. Normally no women were allowed to watch the ceremony (65). Implicitly, this description was aimed to create uncritical impression. But an openly critical view of Bates life and career was made in Ken Hampton’s paper ‘The Aborigine in Australian Literature’ (unpublished DAA paper, Adelaide 1976. Ken Hampton who worked in the Department of Aboriginal Affairs considered Bates as an eccentric and opined that her book was considered as the most destructive book written on aborigines. As white people regarded her as heroine she was not condemned as racist. In her book Bates has alleged that Aboriginal women killed their children and ate them. But when the bones of those alleged children were sent for investigation to Adelaide University, they were found to be those of Wild Cat. Ken Hampton has criticized that Bates could not speak the language of the Aborigines even at Ooldea where she spent 16 years. He has dismantled the myth of Bates that she could speak 188 Aboriginal dialects. Considering these observations, the fables of
Bates seems incredible. So it is understood that the popular perceptions generated during 1929-1945 continued to exert their influence on the Australian reading public even in the contemporaneity. It is strongly believed that the works responsible for inflating misconceptions about aboriginals were ascribed more importance than they deserved. It is only the contemporary Aboriginal consciousness that paved the way for an in depth critical evaluation of the circumstances which have recuperated the sources of authentic information about the first Aboriginal writer in English: David Unaipon.

DAVID UNAIPON (the first Aboriginal writer in English)

It is only with the retrieving of Aboriginal wisdom and identity, the life and works of David Unaipon came to the lime light. Unaipon was the first Aboriginal writer who wrote *Native Legends* way back in 1929, when White Australians were busy in churning out Negative stereotypical portrayals of aboriginals. Born in 1872 among Ngarrindjeri Aboriginal community, Unaipon became a preacher, inventor and a writer. He was considered to be an inventor of ten patents including a shearing machine. He was also known as Leonardo da Vinci for his mechanical ideas and for the design of helicopter based on the principle of boomerang. He was encouraged by Aborigines Friends Association (AFA) which became a formative influence on his life and career. His education, travellings,
engagements and publications were financed AFA. But his Christian upbringing made him inquisitively religious and oriented his mind towards propagating the equivalence of traditional Aboriginal and Christian spirituality. His training in Latin and Greek made him comfortable with reading sermons of Thomas de Witt Talmage and Henry Drummond. He became the appreciable writer, musician, public speaker and became the mouth piece of AFA. Gordon Rowe in *Sketches of Outstanding Aborigines* (1956) says that Unaipon’s acceptance as aborigine depends on the aborigine himself. His winning of ‘Coronation Medal’ was a testimony to his wider acceptance.

His analytical and synthetic approach made him to represent the factualities of life with incisiveness. His scientific temperament has inspired numerous inventions. John Beston in the article ‘David Unaipon: The First Aboriginal Writer’ (*Southerly*. No.3, 1979. 335-336) says that Unaipon had to forego the patent rights of many inventions due to the scarcity of financial resources. It is particularly mentioned in the article ‘40,000 years of technology’ that Unaipon unable to secure financial support failed to develop patent rights to more than nineteen inventions. These facts establish that Aboriginal talent was ignored by the White Australians. But Unaipon was indoctrinated to sacrifice and renounce his independence and Aboriginality influenced by Western and Christian life
style. In the very critical analysis of Unaipon’s contribution, critics have defended Unaipon’s intellectual contribution. John Beston has asserted that Unaipon was by no means a white man’s puppet. Beston perceiving Aboriginal development from four of Unaipon’s legends exposes only the Christian idiom of expression. But even Beston’s defence of Unaipon is branded as false premise and was found to be lacking in comprehensiveness. It is observed that Unaipon in one of his addresses (published) ‘An Aboriginal Pleads For His Race’ endorses Aboriginal assimilation into white society. Beston is of the view that Unaipon became a self professed black prophet or seer who managed to cast off Aboriginality adopting the life style of Christian white society. Beston also contends that the strong sense of Aboriginal identity was obscured by the Christianising legends. But this perspective was contested as misleading as Unaipon’s literary output was considered as small. It was confirmed that Unaipon was faithful to Aboriginal heritage and promoted the ultimate role of Aboriginal people through his legends and fables. The contemporary Aboriginal scholarship has drawn attention to Unaipon’s work and provided an accurate critical appraisal of Unaipon’s legends. The revaluation presented Unaipon’s work as fascinating, complex and considered it as defying any kind of classification. But Adam Shoemaker in Black Words White Page: Aboriginal Literature 1928-1988 (1989) classified Unaipon’s works broadly within four categories: the historical/
mythological, the Christian/Aboriginal, practical/ anthropological, fairy tale/fable. (40) A good example of his master craftsmanship is found in the short piece ‘Totemism’. Unaipon explains the concept in an academic tone that Totemism is one of the ancient customs instituted by Primitive Man. The adoption of Totemism by Aborigines owes its origin to mythological conception. He recounts the interpretation of Aboriginal Totemic belief in a more philosophical way. He establishes the spiritual union of the earth and flesh that developed ‘Subjective Consciousness’. Another tale ‘Aboriginal Folk Lore’ reflected Unaipon’s historical/mythological mode of writing. The objective of Unaipon is to achieve synthesis of Aboriginality and Christianity. He compares Aboriginals to Israelites who were guided in their Exodus by Narran-darrie. Nar-ran- darrie is presented as a law giver. Thus Unaipon elucidated Aboriginal myths and legends in the light of present day European culture. These aspects lead to pertinent observations concerning Unaipon’s work. Aboriginal myths were different in stature from the Christian Scriptures. Aborigines despite their primitivity were accorded several good points and Unaipon presented their spirituality as proto-Christian. The scriptural influence is evident is some of the tales of Unaipon. The tale ‘Release of the Dragon Flies, by the Fairy, Sun Beam’ published in Native legends is almost biblical. Arousing the feelings and emotions of sacred fear Unaipon employs descriptive tone of the Old Testament with pyrotechnics. It is from this Beston has termed
Unaipon’s style suggestive of King James Bible, Bunyan and Milton. Unfortunately, the stylistic diversity and the mode of expression in contemporary western terms were not identified in the right perspective. In another tale ‘Youn Goona the Cockatoo’ making the spirit bird to ask his wife about the existence Unaipon quotes directly from scriptures and abandons pretence. In unpublished tale ‘Nhung e Umpie’ he depicts the universality of human nature. His emulation of Biblical psalm in ‘The Song of Hungarrda’ (published in Native Legends) prove his stylistic experimentation. Another unpublished tale ‘Hunting’ is concerned with techniques of tracking wild birds and animals. Unaipon’s statement has strongly endorsed Aboriginal hunting talent: “I may say with confidence that in bushcraft and hunting the aborigines excel and are undoubtedly second to no other of the primitive races in this respect” (Legendary Tales. 60) His other stories include ‘Sport’ and ‘Fishing’ and explain how particular animals came to acquire certain physical characteristics. Tales such as ‘How the Tortoise Got His Shell’ and ‘Why Frogs Jump Into the Water’ evince his propensity to indulge in moralizing characteristics.

Examining Unaipon’s entire corpus of work one easily realizes the limited assessment of Beston. Though there was a generated impression that Unaipon did not have great knowledge of traditional Aboriginal matters as his tales are often in European form. He tried to alter Aboriginal
traditions to his newly acquired Christian tradition. His work became significant as it has illustrated the honest and finest response of a brilliant Aboriginal man to the expectations of socio political and religious system. His writings have explicitly portrayed the paradoxical situation of man who tries to move away from traditional Aboriginal society while ostensibly celebrating narrative and mythical elements in his writing. This attitude of Unaipon proved to be a perfect prediction of the doctrine of assimilation which became a comprehensive mode of reforming the Australian society. His literary output and Aboriginal subjectivity has become an exemplification for inventing vigour and vibrancy when full blooded Aborigines were almost dying out. So there is an urgency and dire necessity to re read and re establish Aboriginal literary and intellectual contribution of David Unaipon critically evaluating the negligible impact of his works during 1929-1945 in order to subvert the generated stereotypical characterizations of primitivity of Aboriginals as irredeemable. These attempts will pave the way for reinstating and duly acknowledging the Aboriginal contribution and intellectuality during this particular period of fabricated negative perceptions about Aboriginals. In many ways the period 1929-1945 should be presented as a shadow of critical neglect and the analysis of the works of Unaipon is long overdue.
THE PERCEPTIONS: 1945-1961

During this period there are different views of Aboriginal Australia. The sensitive and naturalistic stance, the perpetuation of popular stereotypes, the symbolic approach and the position of anthropologist as a translator are the views presented in Australian literature. These options have failed to present Aboriginals as realistic individuals. Some Australian Aboriginal writers were treated as creative subjects by Australian writers. But most of the Australians continued to believe that Aboriginals were incapable of looking after themselves and they had to be oriented and compelled into sophisticated way of life. This perspective of derision naturally led to prejudice and discrimination and invoked pejorative stereotypes. When Aboriginals were considered as objects of praise it developed an idealization of Aboriginal ceremonies and beliefs. These two perspectives were considered to be distancing Whites and Aboriginals. Though there was a great change in the visibility of Aboriginals from the earlier period, similar perceptions were carried out in the poetry and prose of this period. While literary representations were damaging and degrading the anthropological understanding of Aboriginal culture by Ronald M and Catherine H. Berndt Berndt. T.G.H. Strehlow enhanced the reputation of Aboriginals and projected their culture as worthy of praise. But some of the writers during this period praised the intrinsic value of Aboriginal culture. The poet Judith Wright has initiated the literary response to the
indigenous symbols, environmental values and spiritual values with compassion. Wright through her voluminous poetry proved to be one of the most perceptive writers who came to terms with Aboriginal Australia with humanistic terms ushering a phase of guilt conscience and investigation. The elucidation of some her poems in the light of this perspective will be carried out in the following chapter. The chapter would also examine the limitations and failure of Judith Wright in presenting aboriginals as mere metaphysical symbols.

During this period the contribution of White Australians from Anthropological perspective became so significant with the R.M. Berndt’s translation of ‘The Wonguri-Mandijigai Song Cycle of the Moon Bone’ published in the anthropological journal *Oceania* in 1948 (*Oceania. Vol.xix, September.1948. 16-50*) and which was published as an opening poem in Rodney Hall’s *The Collins Book of Australian Poetry*. Another considerable example from Anthropological perspective is T.G.H. Strehlow’s *Aranda Traditions* published in 1947. The book contained anthropological analysis of ‘Northern Aranda Myths’. The translation of Strehlow was described as poetic fashion. Though the translation from Aranda to English was difficult, obviously the English version became the version of the anthropologist. The mediating effect of the translator became very important as the anthropologist’s interpretation is filtered
through his perceptions. The mediating role of translator was more obvious in Berndt’s translation of ‘Song of Cycle of the Moon Bone’. This has conveyed a sense of ritual and sacredness latent in Aboriginal songs. From the sociological perspective, Anthropological poeticising has elevated the lower strata of the Aboriginals. From the social and literary perspectives, the translations of Anthropologists became significant in influencing the perception of Australians associated with Aboriginal people.

Relatively few Australian novelists showed interest in the demands of Sociology and literature. Mary Durack (1913-1994) as an Australian author and historian exhibited enough interest in the sociological and literary aspects of Australia’s past. Born in Adelaid, South Australia she documented the migration of her family from Ireland beginning with the mid 19th century in *Kings in Grass Castles* and its sequel *Sons in the Saddle*. Along with her sister Elizabeth Durack, she has published *All About: The Story of a Black community on Argyle Station* (1935) with illustrations. She wrote *Keep Him My Country* in 1955 and *The Aborigines in Australian Literature* in 1978. She succeeded in presenting sympathetic view of Aboriginal life. The sympathetic view portrayed by the writers has developed association of Aboriginal woman with the land. Frederick B. Vicker in *The Mirage* has portrayed this perspective convincingly. But their attempt to symbolize Aboriginal woman mystically enthralling and
fecund life source turned to be artistic in nature. These white Australian portrayals were considered to be stronger in generating social conscience than creating a required Aboriginal identity.

The gulf between Aboriginality and white spirituality is depicted by Randolph Stow (1935-2010) in *To the Islands* (1958). Born in Western Australia, Randolph taught literature at the University of Adelaide, the University of Western Australia and University of Leeds. He worked on an Aboriginal mission as an anthropologist and as a patrol officer in the Trobriand Islands. He wrote *A Haunted Land* (1956), *The Bystander* (1957), *To the Islands* (1958), *the Suburbs of Hell* (1984) etc., He also wrote meaningful and powerful poetry. Some of his poems are published in the anthologies *A Counterfeit of Silence* ((1969), *We are Champions* (1963) etc. Among all his *To The Islands* brought him recognition as in many respects it carried the comparison with *Voss*. The novel deals with Stephen Heriot who wish to dominate the Aborigine as over lord. He suffers from the delusion that he can communicate with the Aboriginals and conducts journey through the harsh terrain of the land. Persuading himself on the false notion that he can become Aboriginal and indulges in self denial. With a profound desire to be accepted by the Aboriginals he speaks the native language to Justin, the Aboriginal character in the novel. He asserts: “No more white man. I’m a black fellow, son of the sun” (113)
and he pleads with Alunggu, the tribal man: “I am one of you” (124). Heriot’s attempt to become an Aboriginal is an aspect self deception. This is part of self –delusion initiated in Voss and consolidates pseudo royal treatment of the Aboriginals. This kind of spiritual reconciliation proves to be illogical as it is shadowed by the inflated sense of own importance. Heriot’s preoccupation with monomania reinforces the self- centeredness.

Dorothy L.M Jones in ‘The Treatment of the Aborigine in Australian Fiction’ says:

*To The Islands* is a beautiful and moving novel, but its Aboriginal characters are abstractions rather than real people. This can be justified when the novelist makes a symbol of the natives as does Patrick White in Voss. I feel it is scarcely permissible, however, for a writer who makes race relationships a major theme (unpublished M.A. Thesis, Adelaie. 1960.152).

Despite Stow’s significant literary approaches to the Aboriginal theme, ultimately the novel has registered the absence of persuasiveness.

Donald Robert Stuart (1913-1983) is a different writer who dismantled the stereotypical representations of Aboriginals. His poverty stricken and peaceful upbringing in Perth Western Australia made him to live in direct contact with the Aboriginals. As an archetypal itinerant
bushman, he carried out many professions that are near to Aboriginal life like swag carrying, cattle droving, sinking wells, prospecting, mining and working on the wharves. He was directly involved with the aftermath of the Pilbara strike and with Pindan Co-operative. He emerged as an outspoken and outrageous persona. Between 1959 and 1981, Stuart published eleven novels and one collection of short stories. Four of his novels *Yandy*, *The Driven*, *Yaralie* and *ILbarana* were published overseas. Among the four *Yandy* stood for representing Aboriginality in a finest way. He succeeded in depicting completely Aboriginal perspective as a naturalist. In one of his personal interview Donald Stuart as stated: “I think *Yandy* to a great extent is written from the Aboriginal point of view… But it is not for you, it is not for me, it is not for any white man to say to say, ‘Yes that is from the Aboriginal point of view’”. (Canberra, May 1931). Possessing a sincere and heartfelt respect for Aboriginal culture, he attempts to show its vibrancy in harmonizing the modern techniques of industrial action. As the one who is intimately involved with the aftermath of Pilbara strike, he believed that Pilbara was motivated and sustained by Aboriginal ways and beliefs of culture. His admiration for Aboriginal culture circumscribed the views of anthropologists particularly Strehlow and Berndt. He was all in praise for the fringe dwelling urban Aborigines distinctive world view. His detailed spectroscopic analysis and the perceptivity were exemplified in *Yandy*. He has offered a factual,
measured, restrained and affectionate celebration of Aboriginal Australian world view and projected this as idealistic optimism. His genuine appreciation of Aboriginal people and culture remained as a permanent exemplification that exposed and dismantled the stereotypical portrayals of Aborigines by pseudo white Australian writers. Adam Shoemaker in *Black Words White Page: Aboriginal literature 1929-1988* says:

> Of all the White Australian writers who have treated Black Australian themes in their works, Stuart probably comes the closest to an appreciation of Aboriginal people as human beings. However, his belief in the exclusively genuine nature of traditional Aboriginal society ensured that he would always fail to appreciate fully the worth of contemporary Aboriginal culture. (76)

Similarly, in understanding the perpetuated popular stereotypes of Aboriginals Douglas Lockwood’s contribution has to be examined. *Fair Dinkum* (1969) is a typical example of Lockwood’s writing. Describing the events in the Northern Territory in 1940s with some Aboriginal characters *Fair Dinkum* consisted of number of tales. Aboriginal characters were not given universal admiration but were damned with condemnation. Some of the expressions that “Wild and primitive Natives still roam” (9) evince Lockwood’s inborn hatredness towards Aboriginals. His inappropriate
observations like: Aboriginals have an obsessive interest in the spiritual and the mythical. Their religion is ‘paganism’ and the natives have an absolute addiction to films’ (109) deeply illustrate Lockwood’s racial opinion. Undoubtedly Lockwood’s contribution exemplified that perpetuation of Aboriginal stereotypes fabricated by Australians.

The socio literary and cultural expansion during this period 1945-1961 is believed to have been limited by the writings of Judith Wright and Patrick White. Both the writers have shared poetic and metaphysical depiction of Aboriginal culture. Judith Wright has succeeded in developing her literary contribution into fruitful collaboration with Aboriginals. However, in the light of contemporary Aboriginal literary consciousness, even her contribution is found to be lacking in genuine representation. But it is proved that these mainstream writers who dealt with the Aboriginal portrayals succumbed to the then prevailing notion that Aboriginals were mindless of objects of derision and condescension. On the whole, none of the writers during this period succeeded in presenting Aboriginals as fully sentient individuals. They were only treated a subjects for creative exploitation. This conceptual failure and vacuum has been fleshed and clothed by Aboriginal writers from 1970s onwards.
AUSTRALIAN HISTORY IN ABORIGINAL LITERATURE:

Aboriginal literature has tackled the theme of Australian history in many ways. It is by studying Aboriginal oral tradition, by fostering a sense of Aboriginal pride in the heroes of Black Australian past and through revaluation of interracial relations, Australian history is presented. Australians are preoccupied and burdened with their past history. During bicentennial celebration of British invasion in 1988, the commemoration of Australian achievements was in contradiction with a sense of guilt and responsibility over the treatment of Aboriginals. Australians attempt to identify themselves with the feeling of guilt also created an insistence that Aborigines should forget their past and become more tolerant towards the injustices. Jack Davis, one of the popular Aboriginal playwrights refutes this: “I really think the majority of Australians are just buffoons. They tell us to forgive and forget what’s happened in the past… How are we supposed to forget what’s happened to us in Australia when white Australians keep on remembering their own violent history elsewhere? (Personal interview with Jack Davis, Canberra, November. 1981). Kevin Gilbert another popular Aboriginal writer subscribes to the opinion of Jack Davis and considers the act of remembering the past history is unavoidable for Aboriginals. He strongly feels that Aboriginal writers should not shy away from examining the past. In his article ‘Black Policies’ he opines:
An onus is on aboriginal writers to present the evidence of our true situation. In attempting to present the evidence we are furiously attacked by white Australians and white converts…Does the past not live on in the mind of the victim? Does it not continue to scar and affect the thinking? Deny it, but it still exist. (Jack Davis and Bob Hodge ed. Aboriginal Writing Today. 1985.41)

Subscribing this perspective, most of the Aboriginal writers are preoccupied with the theme of past injustice and emphasize in creating autonomous Aboriginal history. One of the reasons for this preoccupation is to distort the European version of history and to establish Pre/Post European contact history. However, the Aboriginals views of history are not confrontational or polemical. In order to establish the longevity and continuity of Aboriginal existence in Australia, they evoke the pre/post contact theme. Oodgero Noonuccal (Kalth Walker) popular aboriginal writer in the poem ‘The Past’ writes:

Let no one say the past is dead.

The past is all about us and within.

Haunted by tribal memories, I know

This little now, this accidental present

Is not all of me, whose long making

Is so much of the past.. (My People. 1981.92)
In her another poem ‘Stone Age’, she uses ‘Past’ as the potential symbol for the reconciliation of Aboriginals and whites.

Aboriginal writers in order to establish pride in distinctive Aboriginal Australian history try to retrieve the life information about the indigenous heroes and heroines. Kevin Gilbert in *Living Black: Blacks Talk to Kevin Gilbert* (1978) says that the contemporary indigenous writers had to adapt to these approaches as the problem of historical ignorance and neglect had proved them inferior to whites without a perfect chronological history of their own people. It is pertinent to observe that Aborigines became victims of Eurocentric bias which engulfed the Aborigines in a cloud of historical ignorance since 1788. Only during 1970s Historian Henry Reynolds in *Aborigines and Settlers: The Australian Experience 1788-1939* (1972) and *The Other Side of the Frontier: Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia* (1982) has shown the way to understand the Australian past from an Aboriginal perspective. Following this perspective, Aboriginal historians Phillip Pepper in *You Are What You Make Yourself to Be* (1981) and Robert Borpho in *Fringedweller* (1980) consolidate the past history as socio political analyses of oppression.

The responsibility of retrieving and tapping Aboriginal past history is a Herculian task for many of the Aboriginal writers. Exploring the Oral
history of the Aboriginals is considered to be fertile as it was proved by Kevin Gilbert *Living Black* (1978). In elucidating Oral histories, many critics have identified inherent limitations regarding the accuracy and comprehensiveness. But the reticences of oral histories are disturbed by the intervention of technology and the knowledge of publication of the words inspite of their authenticity and reliance to governmental and official records. The Oral history is rendered effectively in Aboriginal autobiographies, novels, poetry and plays offering a strikingly different presentation of past history marked with historical perspectives. On the other hand it depends on the genre that the Aboriginal writer seeks to explore. Mostly it is in the genres of poetry and drama Aboriginal writers have established the centrality of Oral culture. But Mudrooroo has succeeded in his recent novel *Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* in presenting the centrality of Oral tradition as the unexhausted resource to establish cultural independence of Aboriginal literature. It is Jack Davis who demonstrated the identifiable link with Oral tradition in most of his plays. All his plays *The Dreamers, Kullark, No Sugar* are imbued with strong sense of Aboriginal history. Particularly in *The Dreamers* Davis employs Nyoongah language throughout. He establishes strong Aboriginal atmosphere with the reminiscences of old Aboriginal, dream dances and didgeridoo music. Depicting the lifestyle of a typical Aboriginal urban household in the
1980s, it poses a challenge to the White theatre and provides a unifying contemporary sense of identification. Intermingling past and present in the character of Worru, the play establishes the social problems and demoralization of Wallitch family having the roots of history that stem from Oral tradition. The elements of personal memories, the Nyoongah language and Aboriginal history are integrated in an unobtrusive fashion.

Another Aboriginal drama with a precise historical setting is Robert Merritt’s The Cake Man (1978). It has presented the historical atmosphere by its locale and action representing a strong indictment of New South Wale Aboriginal missions. The Central theme of The Cake Man is anti-missionary and against forced conversion. Sweet William, the Aboriginal father declaims bitterly against Christianity. It makes valid comments about the inter racial history. Unlike Jack Davis, Merritt does not depend on using the Aboriginal oral tradition instead he relies on caricatures. The symbolic stereotyping of the Priest, Soldier, Civilian, the Aboriginal Man, Woman and Child. Through these caricatures he satirises the combined forces of God and Gun. Merritt skillfully appropriates the techniques of Western theatre and caters more to the European theatrical conventions but succeeds in pushing his drama from the European expectations into a greater realm of originality.
Faith Bandler (Born 27 September 1920) is an Australian civil rights activist and a campaigner for the rights of Indigenous Australians and South Sea Islanders. As a full time activist Bandler was involved in the Aboriginal Australian Fellowship and the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI), formed in 1957. Bandler worked on four books, out of which two were histories of 1967 referendum, one is an account of her brother’s life in New South Wales and one about her father’s experience of blackbirding in Queensland. Among these works Waevie (1977) is a fictionalized biography of her father Waevie Mussingkon who was transported from Ambrym (Pacific Island) to the Mackay area of Queensland in 1833. Bandler has illustrated the institutional violence of the labour trade and its impact upon the Pacific islands and also upon the transported individuals. She gives examples of individualized cruelty and shows clearly how violence breeds resistance. She has also depicted the sexual exploitation of the Aboriginal servants by the whites. The whites transform sexual relations with aboriginals into crude forms. The whites entrap the blacks offering minor privileges for sexual favour. Bandler has aptly illustrated how European women on the cane plantations could wield sexual power over Black men. Her descriptions only reveal the meaningless sexual relations: “Maggie waited for her husband’s snores but they didn’t come.
She was feigning sleep, afraid that he might take from her the pleasure still lingering from having successfully seduced one of the black men that afternoon” (Waevie 52-53). She also presents how Aboriginals exploit the sexual relations with whites as a means of liberation and advancement in life. Sexual relations are perceived by the whites as a means of asserting their dominance and blacks as a means of realizing equality. Waevie is perceptive enough in realizing that white supremacy is accompanied by alcohol, gambling, exploitation of the labour apart from the sexual exploitation. Waevie pleads his fellows to abstain from these debased practices. Bandler by depicting the impact of sexual relations and violence on the lives of Aboriginals ends the novel with an optimistic note that freedom was achieved.

Archie Weller (1957- ) is another aboriginal writer who depicted sex in the midst of violent life in his popular novel *The Day of the Dog* (1981). He wrote the novel in a spirit of anger as a reaction to his wrongful conviction. It fetched him the Australian/Vogel Literary Award and 1982 Prose Fiction award. The novel was made into a film entitled *Blackfellas* in 1993. He published the second novel *Land of the Golden Clouds* in 1988. As a short story writer, he has also published collection of short stories *Going Home* (1986). The title story *Going Home* dealt with the complexity of Aboriginal identity in Australia. Another short stories with the title
*Herbie* is about a white boy named Davey who kills an Aboriginal boy and sympathises with Herbie’s mother.

Weller’s *The Day of the Dog* depicts the absence of love which should accompany the sexual relationships. But the world Weller presents is brutal, cruel and male dominated one. It is only in the life of the protagonist Doug Dooligan we see the coalescing of sex and love. Doug Dooligan and his friend Polly develop passionate relationship on a different plane: “They both think it is the best lovemaking they have ever experienced; not out loud, like a rooster crowing at the death of gentle night and all her warm secrets, but soaring silently in circles of inner joy like a godly eagle, swift and high above earthly matters” (66). In a culture where women are considered as expendable sexual objects, love is projected as the afterglow of intercourse. Though this is not a profound concept, the attitude of Doug Dooligan borders upon the heretical. Besides this, Violence is ubiquitous in the novel. Gang feuds, the attempts of Aboriginals to prove their masculinity, the constant harassment of Aboriginals by the police emphasizes the violence in the theme of the novel. The example of the detectives bursting into the room when Polly and Doug are peacefully sleeping in each other’s arms without a warrant illustrate that the most private and intimate Aboriginal relationships are open to police abuse. Weller illustrates the attempts of the detectives to degrade the sexuality of Aboriginals: “Carnal knowledge. There they were,
making, what they thought was beautiful love, and all along it was just ‘carnal knowledge’. People have to spoil everything” (100). On the lines of *Wooreddy* the image of rape and exploitation is associated with the destruction of nature which symbolizes Australians innate aggressiveness. Weller also employs the image of enticement and rejection to sex that snowballs the events leading to blood and destruction towards the end of the novel. Doug in his seduction of the white waitress Angelina at the Halfway House, degrades himself and demeans the woman. The absence of affection in the relationship of Doug and Angelina makes it an animalistic exercise. This makes the sexual relationship meaningless and degradation of sexuality into a commercial undertaking. From another perspective, sex as a mirror of power relations was introduced into Australia by the whites. Aboriginals who were inimical to these themes have adopted them as part of their culture.

The relationship between sex and violence is ancient one. Today, the western culture and Aboriginal culture suffer from the disturbing elements of crime that inflates from sex and violence. The problems will be recognized as white Australian and Aboriginal Australian problems represented in their novels. If the Aboriginal writers with their candid expression can bring the realization among the Aboriginals, it would be a
valuable service. It is only from this perspective; Aboriginal novels in English can signify alternative form of literature.

**ABORIGINAL POETRY**

Aboriginal poetry in English illustrates the diversity of Aboriginal literary perspectives. Poetry, in Aboriginal literature continuous to be the popular genre of creative expression because it offers a wide spectrum in orienting the Aboriginals towards realizing the significance of health, education, legal matters, government policies etc. In the process of generating this consciousness, some Aboriginal poets consider themselves as mouth pieces of their people in representing grievances and concerns of Aboriginal community. Most of the Aboriginal poets agree with the art for art’s sake perception and believe that the purpose of literature is to serve the society. Aboriginal poets try to reinforce Aboriginal pride in identity and criticize social ills within the Aboriginal community. W.E. H. Stanner in *After the Dreaming* (1969) observes that the Aboriginal sense of oneness with the soil in relation to the essence of land rights campaign requires a poetic understanding: “No English words are good enough to give a sense of the links between an Aboriginal group and its homeland. Our word ‘home’, warm and suggestive thought it to be, does not match the Aboriginal word…Our word ‘land’ is too spare and meager. We can now scarcely use it except with economic overtones unless we happen to be
poets” (44). Aboriginal poetry is polemical, impassioned, restrained and consciously apolitical. Aboriginal poetry ranges from overt political commitment to celebrations of nature expressing and reinforcing a distinctive Aboriginal world view. It highlights the pride, dignity and survival of the Aboriginals in the face unpredictable future. The most significant and unique aspect of Aboriginal poetry is its inherent oral or phonetic character. Aboriginal poetry has successfully relegated the views of Jindyworobak writers. Jindyworobak movement inaugurated with Rex Omgamell’s and Ian Tilbrook’s *Conditional Culture* (1938) tried to develop truly Indigenous White Australian culture, using Aboriginal culture. It tried to establish superficial understanding that Aboriginal culture is only to promote the autonomy of Australian culture from the European domination. In the process of recognizing the efforts of White Australians in exploring the Aboriginal themes, they failed to preserve the distinctive Aboriginal identity. It is from this perspective, Judith Wright dubbed Jindy Worobak movement as a matter of white art theory (Personal interview with Judith Wright, Canberra, July.1982).

Any understanding of Aboriginal poetry should commence with the knowledge of Oodgeroo Noonuccal (1920-1993). She was an Aboriginal poet, political activist, artist and educator. She was a campaigner for Aboriginal poetry and was best known for her poetry. She was the first
Aboriginal Australian to publish a book of verse *We Are Going* (1964). The book was extraordinarily successful and placed Oodgeroo as the highest selling poet alongside C.J. Dennis. She has published many anthologies of poetry: *The Dawn is at Hand: Poems* (1966), *My People: A Kath Walker Collection* (1970), *Stradbroke Dreamtime* (1972), *Little Fella* (1986), *Kath Walker in China* (1988), *The Rainbow Serpent* (1988), *The Colour Bar* (1990), *Oodgeroo* (1994) etc. Through poetry she registered the pride in her Aboriginality to the broadest possible audience. She won several literary awards: Mary Gilmore Medal (1970), the Jessie Litchfield Award (19750), the Fellowship of Australian Writers’ Award. In 1988, she adopted a traditional name: Oodgeroo (‘paperbark tree’), Noonuccal (her tribe’s name). She returned her MBE degree as a protest to make Australia realize the condition of her people during Australia’s Bicentenary celebrations. Sam Watson wrote a play entitled *Oodgeroo: Bloodline to Country* in commemoration of Noonuccal’s life. The social and literary commitment of Oodgeroo has made her the doyen of Aboriginal literature. She was chosen to script the Australian Pavilion’s major presentation of holographic version of the Rainbow Serpent Legend at World Expo 88. Her international reputation enabled her to act as a positive and successful role model for Aboriginal Australians. Her first volume of poetry *We Are Going* was published at the height of her political involvement. This has provided impetus for the cultural expression of
Aboriginality. In the initial critical reception, her poetry was considered protest poetry as it violated the permissible forms of society’s literature. There are other evaluations that displayed wider appreciation of *We Are Going*. Jill Helleyer in the article ‘Aboriginal Poet’ says: “Kath Walker’s poetry possesses the very definite merit of coming to life when spoken aloud…When Kath Walker learns the difference between wisdom and propaganda she could well become a significant voice in Australian poetry” (*Hemisphere*. Vol.8, no.12, December, 964.p.18). Her poetry connotes strong socio political message:

No More woomera, no more boomerang,
No more playabout, no more the old ways.
Children of nature we were then,
No Clocks hurrying crowds to toil
Now I am civilized and work in the white way,
Now I have dress, now I have shoes:
Isn’t she lucky to have a good job!’
Better when I had only a dillybag.
Better when I had nothing but happiness.

(‘Then and Now’ in *My People* 1981.91)

The second volume of Noonucal *The Dawn Is At Hand* (1966) has displayed her keen sense for depicting simple and direct imaginings of
Aboriginal life before the invasions of Europeans. She captures the simplicity of Aboriginal life in *Gifts*:

‘I will bring you love’, said the young lover,

‘A glad light to dance in your dark eye.

Pendants I will bring of the white bone,

And gay parrot feathers to deck your hair’.


It is pertinent to understand that despite initial hostile criticism, Oodegeroo poetry was new and different in Australian literature. Most significant aspect of her poetry is that she has introduced Aboriginal perspective for the first time into contemporary Australian literature. She proudly celebrated the survival of Aboriginals in the face of adversity. She expressed her grief over the oppression and exploitation of Aboriginals and presented an optimistic and potential view for interracial harmony in Australia. She has introduced directness, environmental values and Aboriginal world view with innovative and exciting ways. Ruth Doobov in the essay ‘The New Dreamtime: Kath Walker in Australian Literature’ observes: “Her importance lies in showing the potentialities of the Aboriginal influence rather than in fully exploring it… She has written poetry based on the Aboriginal philosophy that art is not the province of an intellectual elite, abandoning the esoteric fashion which some believe is strangling modern European poetry. She has produced literary works out of
a culture which is neither traditional Aboriginal nor European but an emerging symbiosis of both” (*Australian Literary Studies*. Vol.6, no.1, May, 1973.54-55). One of the obvious significant aspects of Oodgeroo’s poetry is that she wanted poetry to be distillation of the feelings and concerns of Aboriginal people and firmly believed that poetry would definitely be a breakthrough for the Aboriginal people from the mere action of storytelling song making. Undoubtedly, Noonuccal has established representative school of Aboriginal poetry that paved the way for the emergence of notable aboriginal poets such as Jack Davis, Kevin Gilbert etc.

Jack Davis apart from his notable contribution as a Playwright, published serious poetry with innovative experimentation in the volumes *The First Born and Other Poems* (1970), *Jagardoo: Poems from Aboriginal Australia* (1978), *John Pat and Other Poems* (1988) and *Black Life: Poems* (1992). Most of his poems are a testimony to his sincerity and honesty. They are composed in the immediate aftermath of socio political events bearing upon Aborigines. His contribution to socio political affairs of Aboriginals and their advancement through poetry is immensely significant. His popular poem ‘Laverton Incidnet’ was composed as a response to the shooting of young Aborigine Raymong Watson. Arriving
on the scene and moved by the sight of Watson’s blood on the ground
Davis writes:

The two worlds collided
In anger and fear
As it has always been-
Gun against spear
Aboriginal earth,
Hungry and dry,
Took back the life again,
Wondering why.
Echo the gun-blast
Throughout the land
Before more blood seeps
Into the sand.


Davis in his second collection of verse Jagardoo- Poems from the Aboriginal Australia engaged the celebration of nature in its completeness and whimsical childhood experiences. He also provides a lucid analysis of self, convalescence from illness and evils of militarism. His best work always displayed minutest observation and reflection of people. He encapsulates the irony of cultural relativism in his poem ‘Bombay’ where he argues that White and Aboriginal Australians are alike in many of ways
of living. Thus Davis has upheld unique Aboriginality with imagistic clarity with constant experimentation in poetry.

Kevin Gilbert as another popular Aboriginal poet expressed concern for Aboriginal social issues almost on the lines of Noonuccal. With a remarkable directness, he brings a greater appreciation of Aboriginal colloquial patterns. He has published *End of Dreamtime* (1971) and *People of Legends* (1978). Gilbert was bestowed with enthusiastic critical reception as some of his Aboriginal images are more striking. But some of the critics have dubbed his stance as anti white racism. However, he has succeeded in stirring the feelings of culpability in sensitive White Australian readers and also created most trenchant verse criticizing the betrayers of the Aboriginal movement. The poem ‘The Better Blacks’ is an effective poem that conveyed a strong sense of criticism. Besides the strong militant side of Gilbert’s poetry one could also observe sarcastic connotations. In the poem ‘Granny Koori’, he portrays the emasculation of Aboriginal men. His vibrant humour lurks in disguise. Gilbert has also celebrated the themes of love and humour. The poem ‘Extract from a letter to a Woman Friend’ which celebrated love and devotion surprised many readers. He has written substantial whimsical and light poems directed at children. But inspite of his variety of accomplishments, Kevin Gilbert is downplayed as the poet who perpetuates solely the protest poetry.
A natural comparison often is established between Aboriginal poetry and Native Canadian poetry in view of the common ideological stance of ‘Fourth world Identity’ and numerous other similarities. Poetry as the genre of creative expression becomes amenable to previous oral cultures in the case of Indigenous groups in these countries. Poetry is a politicized activity and a form of agitation for the rights. In native Canadian poetry the symbolic and spiritual nature of indigenous existence is extensively explored. Native Canadian poets Chief Dan Deorge, Rita Joe, Duke Red Bird, Jeanette Armstrong, Sarian Stump, Daniel David Moses etc., evince in their work an over riding sense of loss, the loss of happiness, of traditional laws, of togetherness and of freedom almost similar to Aboriginal Australian poets.

On the whole, Aboriginal poetry is remarkable for striking immediacy and is augmented by the personal and socio political stances. It underscores the fourth world perspective and highlights the distinctive Aboriginal world view. Kevin Gilbert in his landmark anthology Inside Black Australia proclaims the independence of Aboriginal poetry: “Black poets sing, not odes to Eurpides or Dionysus, not Keats, nor Browning, nor Shakespeare, neither do they sing a pastoral lay to a ‘sunburnt country’ for they know that russet stain…is actually the stain of blood, our blood,
covering the surface of our land so the White man could steal our land” (p.xxiv).

ABORIGINALITY & AUSTRALIAN DRAMA

Aboriginal Drama has contributed to the formulation and concept of Aboriginality in particular and to the enrichment of Australian literature as a whole. It has explored the important aspects of Aboriginality: endurance, pride, protest, sorrow, anger and humour. All the Aboriginal Playwrights paid particular attention to humour and relied on it as an element of Aboriginal self image. Humour is considered as a solace in the midst of adversity. All the Aboriginal plays examined the aspects of hardship, misery, poverty, discrimination, death etc. by employing humour and rescued them from being oppressive. Jack Davis in one his interviews has observed that Aboriginal drama displays wide range of emotions: “Don’t just show them (the audience) the comic side of the life right through…show them sadness, pathos, gladness, happiness, sorrow and all the in-between…all those emotions” (Westerly, Vol.27. no.4. December 1982.112). However, many Aboriginal playwrights consider humour in contradiction to Western perception. They perceive humour deriving from the traditions and skills of Aborigines. W.E.H. Stanner in Aboriginal History (1982) notices general aspects of humour shared by Whites and Aboriginals. But he attributes the distinctive Aboriginal approach to
humour found in the roots of traditional sphere. Stanner also emphasized on the longevity of humorous tales derived from the real life experiences of Aboriginals. Many of the Aboriginal dramatists have given effective expression to the kind of humour emphasized by Stanner. However, they have taken their inspiration from the direct observation and recollection of personal experiences.

Aboriginal playwrights evinced their faithfulness to perceived black reality. They endeavour to illustrate the Aboriginal past inspite of its sorrowful density with honesty and directness. Kevin Gilbert in his first play *The Cherry Pickers* (1988) has explored the psychology of deprivation and subservience. The play is about a group of itinerant Aboriginal fruit pickers who meet every year at the same White owned Cherry Orchard. The Cherry tree symbolizes money and food. So for the fringe dwellers the fruit season represents the end of the year. Gilbert has conveyed other related themes like affinity between Aboriginals and nature, destruction of the natural world by the Europeans, inability of the aboriginals to regain their past and the failure of Good white people to appreciate Aboriginal culture and ethos.

Gilbert’s second unpublished play *Ghosts in Cell Ten* is an evidence of author’s keen ear for black speech patterns. It is about the mental and physical torments of white character called preacher. The preacher grows
from the novice to the seasoned veteran in the prison cell. It is only with the Aboriginal character Clarry the drama gains focus and real power. Apart from the detailed prison life, Gilbert focuses on personal, psychological, sexual and racial aspects of life. He enables Preacher and Clarry to contemplate on the important aspects of life. Gilbert criticizes the judicial and punitive system and illustrates the failures of Black Australian society. Clarry reveals his unjust imprisonment for a rape and scorns the help of Aboriginal legal service. Through this Gilbert addresses larger questions of human rights and prison reforms. Robert Merritt in his play *The Cake Man* (1974) examines the similar theme of Aboriginal imprisonment. It is a complex and subtle drama built on bitter illusions. In the play ironically named Sweet William gets arrested for standing near a pub door while the police quell a brawl. Merritt instills hope and pride in Sweet William’s son. William’s decision to break out of the institutionalised degradation is presented as the key factor of the play. The play raises various socio-political issues which bear upon Aboriginal activism and self image and particularly highlights Aboriginal aspects of despondency, family closeness, the threat of alcoholism and the retention of pride.

Gerald Bostock an Aboriginal Playwright in the play *Here Comes the Nigger* (1977) deals with the theme of blindness. He portrays figurative
blindness which enables to overcome racial prejudice. The play is an examination of physical and mental disabilities experienced by Aborigines in contemporary Australia. The play revolves around two major characters: blind Aboriginal poet Sam Matthews and a white woman Odette O’Brien. The white woman tutors the blind Aboriginal poet. The affectionate relationship they develop is understood as opportunistic sexual exploitation by each one. Though the two characters succeed in achieving ‘colour blindness, they become victims of racial difference. The concept of Aboriginality that Bostock has explored comes at the backdrop of the solidarity of city dwelling Aboriginals. The Aboriginality reflected in the play is vibrant and defiant.

Jack Davis as the most popular Aboriginal dramatist succeeded in presenting Aboriginality in an extremely well balanced manner. His play *Kullark* offers a careful characterization. He perceptively illustrates Aboriginal socio political attitudes and their genuine ambivalence when they are confronted with radicalism. The Aboriginal father and mother Alex and Rosie display their self contradictions and their own version of Aboriginality. Dividing the play into three sections, Davis develops the theme of independent and sustained aboriginal resistance. He significantly presents the ways of the survival of Aborigines from the onslaught of
Whites through mutual dependency and their continuous subscription to tradition.

Davis’s another play *The Dreamers* is a personal play than *Kullark*. Davis envisages himself in the lead role of *Worru* and depicts the experiences of Wallitch family. The happiness and sorrowful experiences, the drunkenness and sobriety of Wallitch family is presented with lyrical sensitivity. Davis employs Nyoongah language in almost every scene. He uses Aboriginal music and dance to create awareness of otherness and a separate sense of Aboriginality. He celebrates the survival of urban Aboriginal culture under the pressure of European culture. Davis makes humour as a vital component of the distinctive Aboriginal self image in these plays. Another play *No Sugar* (1986) presents a historical theme focusing upon the past half-century of Aboriginal history in Western Australia. It focuses on the story of the Millimurra family highlighting the oppression of institutionalized Aborigines. Davis treats Aboriginal history intriguingly and manages to establish his position as chronicler taking into faithful consideration documented massacres of Aborigines. He employs alternation between European style of historical narration and Aboriginal colloquial speech. The basic necessities of Aborigines such as tobacco, soap, sugar etc. resurface as motifs throughout the play. The theme justifies the title by proclaiming that the Aborigines have ‘no sugar’ in
their lives literally and figuratively. Another play Barungin (Smell the Wind) establishes Davis as the most accomplished playwright. Set in the context of Bicentennial and the Royal commission on Aboriginal deaths in Custody, the play is considered as overtly political and accusatory. The play has underlined the distinctive naturalism of Aboriginal drama. Thus, Davis by successfully weaving together the observations of his people with wise humour became a world class dramatist.

**DEFINING ABORIGINALITY**

The definition of Aboriginality has become an incomprehensible subject for decipherment. From the colonial traditional perception Aboriginality is underlined with negative characteristics. But from the perception of Aboriginals it is a significant aspect of self definition and a positive state of mind. It is the legacy of traditional Black Australian culture. It implies a movement towards future. It is a counter cultural movement and a reaction against the hegemony of white Australian society. It leads to the construction of the self image of Aboriginals. However, the perceptions and definitions of Aboriginality vary. Keith Smith observes in Kevin Gilbert’s *Living Black: Blacks Talk to Kevin Gilbert* (1978) : “I don not mean that we have to go back with our spears and our boomerangs and nulla nullas and hunt our tucker and do this type of thing. What I mean is that we’ve got to regain the spirit of our
Aboriginality so that we can go on to greater things according to whatever a community wants… The spirit, the soul, the Aboriginality of it. You’re an Aboriginal, you’ve got to be proud, you’ve got to know something of your background, know where you come from, where you’re going and what you’re doing, but at the same time you’ve got to take that Aboriginality with you” (184). Taking a different course from this self-affirmation, Robert Merritt defines Aboriginality as an inheritance from history and as a violent reaction to the contemporaneity. In his interview in *Living Black: Blacks Talks to Kevin Gilbert* he proposes an alternative form of Aboriginal identity. He opines: “If you want an identity today… if you’re sick you’ll get a band-aid, and you’re an Aborigine-and everyone knows about ya… if you want to be normal person there’s no incentive in life whatsoever for ya… To break the law now—it’s a substitute initiation” (193).

It is at the backdrop of this churned out consciousness; Aboriginals are mounting unified response to all the major events: Brisbane Commonwealth Games protests in 1982, the anti Bicentennial protest of 1988 in Sydney. Brisbane and Canberra have proved as examples of unified consciousness and paved the way for the formation of Pan Aboriginalism which has become a significant part of Black Australian self-definition. It is pertinent to observe that unified Aboriginal consciousness articulated in the formation of Aboriginality. At this juncture the concept
of Aboriginality circumscribes respect for the Aboriginal past and for traditional Aboriginal Australian ties to the land, a sense of pride and dignity and an impetus towards establishing Pan Aboriginal identity. This Pan Aboriginalism is reinforcing socio cultural and literary movements.

The attempts of Aboriginal people to define themselves in literature brought in the issues of shared experience of oppression and the shared enjoyment of life. Aboriginal literature centrally encompasses and promotes cultural nationalism, literary talent and Aboriginal pride. It also deals with the complex attitudes, beliefs and mores that constitute Aboriginality.

I need the clefts and crevasses of, well, of a city about me. Surrounded by man-made rock, I am at home and can hide away from all that I must hide away from; but, but, I drag the world in after me, and my misery is exposed on a stage for all to see. Mudrooroo ((1995c) [1993] *The Kwinkan*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 29.

Mudrooroo’s considerable oeuvre extends well beyond the dimension of his novelistic fiction. He is equally admired for his poetry, plays, short stories, books on Aboriginal culture and literature, critical commentary and reviews. Mudrooroo’s imaginative, poetic and critical commitment over the course of his extensive career, chronologically and
objectively, opens up biographical details and the thematic concerns of his major works.

The defining words, ‘Mudrooroo - author’, appear on the letterhead of a man obviously stand for the Australia’s most provocative and enigmatic literary characters. A prolific and gifted literary craftsman, Mudrooroo has been highly influential in the development of a politics of Indigenous literature in Australia. His fiction, poetry and theories of what constitutes Aboriginal writing, is taught in schools and universities in a number of Australian states. However, the author’s work is also well known beyond the predominantly English speaking borders of the country of his birth and has been translated into a number of different languages including Italian, German, Russian, and French. Recognised mainly for his fiction – a postmodern form of political protest /cultural revival literature – the multi-dimensional, self-conscious nature of Mudrooroo’s work shifts incessantly in line with changes taking place in Australia’s political climate. Mudrooroo is a self-declared follower of the Aboriginal oral forms of narration where, as he puts it, “there is never the same story told twice even by the same storyteller” (Mudrooroo, 138) and no individual ownership of any tale. With a tendency towards the dialogic rather than the monologic that evokes Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of dynamic exchange, the author’s fiction has a polyphonic, or many-voiced, structure which avoids
interpretation within a single cultural system, or logic. His authorial methodology is a complex strategy of spiralling revision that attempts to accommodate movement in his world view, avoid totalising answers and ensure as far as possible that his artistic product avoids encapsulation within a particular category or pre-conceived literary framework.

Mudrooroo was born on August 21, 1938, a year in which white Australia celebrated the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of British settlement. That same year, however, Aboriginal Australia mourned what it saw as the commemoration of the death of a way of life. Although officially registered in nearby Narrogin, a name the author would subsequently take as his pseudonym (spelt Narogin), his place of birth was the Western Australia wheatbelt town of East Cuballing. Mudrooroo is the youngest of a large extended family of twelve surviving children, nine of whom are matrilineal and three of whom are from his father’s first marriage to an Irish immigrant from Baltimore in the United States of America.

Mudrooroo’s writing is haunted by a sense of belonging nowhere – a feeling of loss and abandonment, which may well have its genesis in a traumatic childhood and troubled teenage years spent in Australia’s welfare institutions. His work illustrates a profound consciousness of the significance of being, not only an institutionalised child, but also a non-
white (I acknowledge that the use of the term ‘non-white’ may be seen as a debatable practice. For a discussion of this issue, see Himani Bannerji (2000) *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender*, Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press. Following Bannerji, I invoke the term cautiously as “a political signifier, not an ontological one” (Bannerji, 2000, 174) to denote the racist undertones of notions of hybrid, or border identity in the colonial situation. From time to time I will also refer to the author as ‘a man of colour’, a term he himself uses to describe peoples of non-white background, particularly in the rural areas of Australia (Mudrooroo, 1997b, 259)) child caught within a racist social structure. For most of the first nine years of his life, the author lived in the small country town of Beverley with his mother and just two of his nine siblings, six of whom had already been taken into the care of welfare institutions. It was in Beverley that Mudrooroo first experienced the sense of alienation that accompanies small town racism and which led to the realisation that he was different, or perhaps more accurately, that he was not white. At the ages of nine and eleven respectively, like their siblings before them, in 1947 both Colin and his older sister were given into institutional care. A younger sister, born in Beverley in 1940, remained with their mother.

Little is known about Mudrooroo’s early childhood relationship with his mother or of what he may have learned from her about his father.
The author’s father farmed in the Highbury district of Western Australia from 1905 to 1930 and later in the Cuballing Shire until his death in 1938. An insight into this side of the Mudrooroo story, which shows that what he knew of his father came from his mother who represented him as a hard working, if racially discriminated against man, may be gleaned from his poem “Me Daddy”, published in 1986:

Me daddy was a righteous man,
That is what me mummy told me,
Tried to build up a farm,
Tried to sell his crop –
And they said:
Hey Jacky, hey Jacky
What you trying to do,
The silo is full and yet
Cart your grain down here.
Hey Jacky, hey Jacky,
Sell us your wheat,
We’ll give you sugar and tea,
Instead of white man’s coin,
Which you can’t count.
Hey Jacky, hey Jacky,
Give us your grain,
And when you fail,  
We’ll understand,  
And know you can’t comprehend,  
That money is the boss,  
In the land we took from you. (Johnson, 1986, 108)

Whilst he remained a State Ward until 1956, at the age of sixteen Mudrooroo left the Christian Brothers’ orphanage known as Clontarf Boys’ Town in the suburb of Waterford to take up employment in the city of Perth. Mudrooroo’s account of coping with life whilst in the ‘care’ of the Christian Brothers is revealing. As he states in an interview with Adam Shoemaker some thirty-seven years later, “the tyranny of Rome was what we had at Clontarf. We had inquisitions and so on and they tried to assert their authority by the most brutal means possible” (Shoemaker, 154, 1993a).

An understanding of how Mudrooroo learned to deal with the brutalities of Clontarf life can be gleaned from his most autobiographical first novel, *Wild Cat Falling*, which was first published in 1965. In Mudrooroo’s hands, animosity towards his unnamed protagonist’s minders is sprinkled with sexual innuendo and rebellious mockery as he negotiates potentially grotesque situations involving characters of authority. As he has his unnamed Aboriginal character waggishly state: “The old boss is the worst of the lot. His strap doesn’t hurt as much as Dickie’s but he’s a
stupid old goat. The kids reckon a mouse once ran up his trouser leg and fell down dead” (Mudrooroo, 1995a, 64-65).

After his Clontarf experience, Mudrooroo continued to demonstrate his anti-authoritarian disposition. As a consequence the author spent twelve months in Fremantle prison for robbery and assault. Discharged from prison in 1957, he then lived for a time in the home of the late Dame Mary Durack, with whom he had become acquainted during his gaol term. As well as being a member of Western Australia’s most influential pastoralist families, Durack was also an Australian novelist and poet who often cared for young men like Mudrooroo, newly released from gaol with seemingly nowhere to go. Mudrooroo’s interest in writing was first stimulated during his stay in the Durack home, a welcoming place that saw the constant comings and goings of artists of all description.

Subsequently, Mudrooroo moved to Victoria and worked in Melbourne with the Motor Registration Branch of the Victorian Public Service. He also wrote and mixed with what he called “bohemians and beatniks and things like that […] usually whites” (Beier, 1985, 70). During that time, Mudrooroo never lost touch with Durack and with her help he published his first, and perhaps best-known novel, *Wild Cat Falling*. Thereafter the author journeyed through Thailand, Malaysia and, for the first time, to India, a country where he would later spend a number of
years. From India, Mudrooroo travelled to London where he adopted the
drug-taking ethos of the 1960s with apparent gusto. In an interview with
Bruce Bennett and Laurie Lockwood, an unabashed and openly honest
author stated that whilst in London, he “was stoned for three months and
did not see very much – you know St. Paul’s and all those places people
are supposed to have seen” (Bennett and Lockwood, 1975, 34). Upon
leaving London, Mudrooroo again journeyed through Thailand and India
before returning to Melbourne.

*Wild Cat Falling* was inspired by Mudrooroo’s experiences of
learning how to survive both within and without public institutions in a
racially structured society that saw him first and foremost as someone who
was not white. The novel may be read as a first step in a life-long quest to
find a valid philosophy of life, but also a way of belonging in terms of
survival rather than in a pre-determined, racialised context of selfhood.
Heavily edited by Mary Durack, the novel includes a foreword by her, one
disconcertingly filled with the racist discourse of the day. Nevertheless,
Mudrooroo has publicly acknowledged that without her friendship, help
and influence, he may never have become a writer. (Mudrooroo, 2000b, 7)

Critics and commentators of the day hailed *Wild Cat Falling* as both
a triumph and a literary curiosity. Such observations emerged in light of
what was then thought to be Mudrooroo’s unique position as the author of
the first novel ever to be published by someone who self-identified as being of Aboriginal descent. Whilst the veracity of both of these descriptives is now contested, publication of Mudrooroo’s novel at that political and historical moment marked a turning point in Indigenous Australian literature. The appearance of the text on 1960s mainstream bookshelves was an outstanding accomplishment for a number of reasons, but particularly as the creativity of writers other than those of British/European descent was then considered to be of little value as an element of Australian literary production (For discussions of the development of postcolonial literature in Australia and other colonised countries, see Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (1989) The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures, London and New York: Routledge, and Dennis Walder (1998) Post-colonial Literatures in English: History, Language, Theory, Oxford: Blackwell). That said, the novel’s publication also spoke of the high level of political and cultural influence of the Durack family in Western Australia and of the reality that entry into print culture by non-whites was held firmly in the hands of sympathetic, more powerful white patrons.

Mudrooroo returned to India in 1967 and remained there for the next seven years. He resided mainly in Calcutta and in Dar Es Salaam where he studied Tibetan Buddhism. For three of those years the author
lived as a monk, a cultural transition and exposure to a transcendental spirituality that is evident throughout his work. Mudrooroo returned to Western Australia in 1974. He then travelled to the United States before returning to Victoria in 1976. Perhaps with a different agenda in mind, Mudrooroo then studied at Melbourne University, worked at the Aboriginal Research Unit at Monash University and taught at Koorie College.

It was not until 1979, at the age of forty-one, that Mudrooroo’s second novel, *Long Live Sandawara*, was published, a seemingly immense gap in terms of his literary production. Mudrooroo has indicated, however, that in fact he never ceased to write. In a 1993 interview with Adam Shoemaker, for example, the author refers to unpublished works produced by him between 1966 and 1974 (purported to be at least six novels and one play), their manuscripts either lost or destroyed for various reasons (Shoemaker, 1993a, 29).

*Long Live Sandawara* is a savagely ironic and experimental text that attempts to bring together contemporary and historical locations in symbolic juxtaposition. The book offers a challenge to the widespread belief in the myth of Aboriginal passivity in the face of violent white invasion. On another level, the text also reflects Mudrooroo’s Buddhist leanings by suggesting that counter violence is not the path that leads
towards the end of suffering. The book also uncovered a lack of confidence in the approach the author takes to his version of the story of Sandawara, which draws heavily on *Outlaws of the Leopolds* (1952), by Ion L. Idriess.

A writer of historical fiction and an exponent of the ideological production of an emerging Australian national character, Idriess wrote previously on the same subject; that is, the events surrounding the anti-invasion campaign of the Aboriginal freedom fighter, Sandamara (in literature, the names, Sandawara, Sandamara, Jandamarra Pigeon, Pidgin and Eaglehawk have been used to identify the same historical figure. See for example Ion L. Idriess (1952) *Outlaws of the Leopolds*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson; Howard Pederson (1984) “‘Pigeon’: An Australian Aboriginal Rebel”, B. Reece and T. Stannage (eds.) *European Aboriginal Relations in Western Australian History*, Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 7-15, and Stephen Muecke, Alan Rumsey and Banjo Wirrunmarra (1985) “Pigeon the Outlaw: History as Texts”, *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 9, Part 1, 81-100). Sandamara’s armed rebellion, about which the majority of Australians know little, was an extended, violent colonial encounter that took place in the Kimberley Ranges of Western Australia in the late nineteenth century. Mudrooroo’s failure to embrace Aboriginal oral history as the principal source of his tale, was seen by his critics as a missed opportunity to forge a new literary tradition – to defy colonial ideology and

*Long Live Sandawara* was followed four years later by *Doctor Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World*. As the novel’s title suggests, *Doctor Wooreddy* is a work of historical fantasy that is predicated on the notion of a fall. The novel contains many ingredients of the dramatic epic, including the conflicts and adventures of pseudo historical characters appropriated from an heroic Aboriginal age – one that pre-dates white colonial invasion. The period of the novel’s historical focus is between 1829 to 1842. The year 1829 identifies the appointment of George Augustus Robinson as Conciliator and Protector of Aborigines and is the same year to which Mudrooroo claims to have traced back his Aboriginal roots to the Bibbulmun people of Western Australia. 1842 on the other hand marks the symbolic death of the last Bruny Island male, Woorrady, the historical character upon whom the author models his Aboriginal protagonist, Doctor Wooreddy.
*Doctor Wooreddy* deals with one of the more catastrophic episodes of Australia’s recorded history, one that began in 1803 – the attempted systematic extermination of Tasmania’s indigenous inhabitants as organised and directed by early British colonial administration. Perhaps heeding his critics, an apparently more politically aware and culturally confident Mudrooroo deliberately and challengingly re-styles rather than re-writes a previous interpretation of what was essentially a synchronised program of cultural genocide. Suffused with profound ironies, the circular narrative of *Doctor Wooreddy* replays themes found in *Wild Cat Falling* such as endings as beginnings and the loss of a sense of self and place in the colonial situation. Perhaps more tellingly in terms of Mudrooroo’s entire oeuvre, *Doctor Wooreddy* also addresses an issue that illuminates the contaminating nature of colonial value systems – the betrayal of trust for personal gain – a hypocritical form of deception personified most clearly by the character, George Augustus Robinson.

The appearance of Robinson, and what he stands for in relation to the betrayal of Aboriginal peoples by white authorities generally, is far from an isolated phenomenon in Mudrooroo’s work. Perhaps coincidentally, the name Robinson first appears in *Wild Cat Falling* to describe a white probation officer who betrays his young Aboriginal charge. Mudrooroo has, however, denied any connection between the “fat
old square” (Mudrooroo, 1995a, 99, During a personal email communication with the author on 18 May 2001, he indicated that he “first came across G.A. Robinson when researching Dr. Wooreddy”). Robinson of his first novel and Robinson the fanciful historical figure who plays a significant role in five of his later texts. Yet the author describes the distinctive physical features and behavioural qualities and patterns of his fictional characters in like terms. Both are similarly represented as untrustworthy blustering buffoons. Described as being overweight and short in stature, both also bear an uncanny resemblance to Benjamin Duterrau’s 1840 painting of the actual historical figure, which forms part of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery collection.

The suggestion that the two Robinsons are somehow connected in the author’s (sub)conscious is, of course, purely speculative. It seems more likely that Mudrooroo’s initial invocation of the identifier Robinson to exemplify betrayal of a different kind at a much later point in time, is mere coincidence. That said, the exploits and idiosyncrasies associated with history’s first Protector of Aborigines in Doctor Wooreddy, are rehearsed and revised almost to the point of obsession in all four volumes of the Master of the Ghost Dreaming series, which was published between 1991 and 2000. This means that the literalised association between the author and his thinly veiled representation of history’s Robinson has, at the very
least, been a long and fruitful twenty-seven years. Over that extended period, Robinson has become not simply an emblem of the colonisation process against which the author continually struggles as a political writer, but one of his most interesting and enduring characters.

The years 1986 and 1988 respectively saw the publication of two volumes of Mudrooroo’s poetry, *The Song Circle of Jacky* and *Dalwurra: The Black Bittern*. The former targets the injustices of the Australian penal system and, in particular, the extraordinary number of deaths among Aboriginal people whilst in custody. The latter takes a step forward in light of the Aboriginal peoples’ proclaimed unwillingness to passively accept their ongoing oppression in contemporary times and reflects Mudrooroo’s personal sense of frustration and anger at the lack of measurable progress. In *Dalwurra: The Black Bittern*, the words of his long poem, “Perth Stained in Blackness: A Bicentennial Gift” (later re-named “Sunlight Spreadeagles Perth in Blackness: A Bicentennial Gift”), state his political position quite clearly. There, the author paints an image of Australian society in grotesque terms as “a wrecked black body swarming with white termites”.

The year 1988 was also the year in which *Doin Wildcat*, emerged – some twenty-three years after *Wild Cat Falling*. *Doin Wildcat* is the second volume of what is now known as the Wildcat Trilogy, three different, often
opposing and contradictory narratives involving the same, institutionalised Aboriginal figure. Despite the sketchiest of childhood history in Mudrooroo’s narratives, strong biographical links can be drawn between the author and his *Wildcat* character for whom the act of writing is connected to the need/will to survive and to find a place to belong. Much like its predecessor in the trilogy, *Doin Wildcat* offers a number of fine examples of the ironic comedy habitually exercised by Mudrooroo in the process of transforming memory, teamed with imagination, into fiction. The novel takes readers back to the beginning – to the location, the time and the events of the author’s first book – to tell the story of the script-writing for a film based on *Wild Cat Falling*. Mudrooroo uses his principal character as an allegory for how far the Aboriginal struggle for equal rights has come since the mid-1960s and to comment on the continuing white stronghold over cultural production, whether print or film. Primarily, however, the novel demonstrates Mudrooroo’s concern to again raise community awareness of the high level of Aboriginal prison conviction rates compared to their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

It appears to be no accident that *Doin Wildcat* emerged in a year that also saw the formation of a Royal Commission to investigate the causes behind the continuing, disproportionately high number of Aboriginal deaths in custody within Australia’s State and Territory gaols. As was soon
to become apparent from the Commission’s findings, whilst the appearance of change was evident, the actual distance travelled was short – another kind of fiction if you will. It was also in 1988 that Mudrooroo changed his name. As a form of political protest, he became Mudrooroo Nyoongah, but retained his nom-de-plume Narogin to denote his region of birth. The name Mudrooroo means paperbark (an Australian tree) in the language of the Bibbulmun people, with whom the author then identified. As a politically active writer, who is also a non-white Australian, Mudrooroo has indicated that he chose the sobriquet ‘Mudrooroo’ for its ambiguity and appropriateness in terms of his hybrid identity(The terms ‘hybrid identity’ and ‘hybrid writer’ are used throughout this study. I acknowledge such usage might be seen as a point of imprecision. However, it is not intended that the descriptive ‘hybrid’ blend together the social, cultural and political questions relating to Mudrooroo’s claim to Aboriginal belonging with the tropes of textuality. Rather, the aim is to highlight the need to consider the separation of ‘identity’ and ‘writer’ to account for the racialised complexities of the author’s ethnicity and creative productivity. For a discussion of the complex nature of the cultural politics of hybridity, see Robert J.C. Young (1995) *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, Routledge: London and New York, and Anne McLintock (1995) *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and
Sexuality in the Colonial Contest, Routledge: London and New York) and cross-cultural speaking position. As he states in interview, however:

a surname is sort of a European imposition. And so “Nyoongah” doesn’t mean much; “Mudrooroo” is more me than “Nyoongah”. “Nyoongah” refers to the people I belong to […] And what Aboriginal people use when they address each other is their first name; the second name is not that important except, you know, to trace families. (Shoemaker, 1993b, 43)

Mudrooroo is the name that presently appears on the covers of the author’s books. From 1988, Mudrooroo’s published work emerged at a greatly accelerated pace. Writing from the Fringe: A Study of Modern Aboriginal Literature in Australia (1990a) announced the author’s entry into the field of critical analysis and established him as an authority on Indigenous writing. Writing from the Fringe was generally well received. Whilst there was some negative commentary (See, for example, Simon During (1992) “How Aboriginal is it?” Australian Book Review, No. 118, February/March 1990, 21-23, and Ivor Indyk (1992) “Assimilation or Appropriation: Uses of European Literary Forms in Black Australian Writing”, Australian Literary Studies, Vol. 15, No. 4, October, 249-60), the legitimacy of Mudrooroo’s self-asserted ‘qualifications’ not only to speak as an Aboriginal but also to impose limits on what, in his view,
constituted ‘authentic’ Aboriginal writing, received scant attention from white academics and critics of the day.

Mudrooroo’s little-known 1990 novella, *Struggling*, hearkens back to the world of disadvantaged urban Aboriginal youth expounded upon earlier in *Long Live Sandawara*. Continuing his tendency to write back to previous work, a second, much shorter bicentennial gift poem, renamed “Happy Birthday Australia – 1988” appears in Mudrooroo’s 1991 volume of poetry *The Garden of Gesthemane*, which (in 1992) won two Western Australian Premier’s book awards. Also published in 1991, *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* confirms the pattern of spiralling retrospective now strongly evident in Mudrooroo’s writing, with a return to the time and space of Robinson in *Doctor Wooreddy*. The revisionist trend continues in *Wildcat Screaming*, the third volume of the Wildcat trilogy, with the reappearance of a now older, fully-institutionalised and still angry protagonist. Once again, the plight of socially excluded young Aboriginals is addressed. However, the novel reaches a new level that is a forceful indictment of the judicial practices of white Australia in the context of the early 1990s social justice for Aboriginal people generally.

Apart from the accolades Mudrooroo received for his literary output, 1992 proved to be a significant turning point in his life. After forty-five years of cultural and familial displacement, it was then that Mudrooroo
was reunited with members of his biological family. As a consequence, the author stated publicly that he was now “unclear regarding his tribal connections” (Moran, 1992, 9). Nevertheless, he continued to write, publish and self-identify as an Aboriginal person, effectively turning his back on his re-discovered non-Indigenous family, a form of abandonment that they may well have found hard to accept or comprehend.

Between 1992 and 1996, Mudrooroo’s published output was abundant, diverse and varied both in style and content. Significantly, it expressed anxieties about what the author saw as Australian society’s disengagement in the post-modern era with the realities of home grown political and social problems as a nation. In the *Mudrooroo/Müller Project: A Theatrical Casebook* (hereafter referred to as *Project*), Mudrooroo writes that, for him, Australia was “a post of infinite posts” (Mudrooroo, 1993, 138). Australian society was a kind of colonial theatre “engaged in a continuing ritual, a struggle between the past and the present” (Mudrooroo, 1993, 19), in which the ‘play’ for power was no harmless game. Perhaps this explains, at least in part, why Mudrooroo chose to invoke a ceremonial dance scene from the imaginary world of *Master of the Ghost Dreaming*, to introduce his play, which forms the symbolic kernel of *Project*. Mudrooroo’s play is farcically yet symbolically entitled “The Aboriginal Protesters Confront the Declaration
of the Australian Republic on 26 January 2001 with the Production of the Commission by Heiner Müller.”

Mudrooroo saw his play, in which his own and Müller’s Der Auftrag join together in an uneasy, collaborative mating, as a “new kind of dance” (Mudrooroo, 1993, 74) – a new form of make believe still connected to the exercise of power. Depending as it did on a link between Australia’s 1788 invasion by the British and the French Revolution of 1789, the bond between the two texts was tenuous at best, particularly when one considers that Australia’s Aboriginal people have yet to enjoy their bourgeois revolution. In the final analysis, the attempted mix of two social and cultural languages proved disappointing success on a number of levels. As Gerry Turcotte points out, the power imbalance inherent in non-Indigenous/Indigenous collaborative efforts is such that non-white writers often find “themselves working against absorption through the medium of collaboration […] their energies and stories channelled – sybilled – in the service of non-Indigenous vision” (Turcotte, 2001, 189). Turcotte goes on to argue, however, that the ‘unperformability’ of Mudrooroo’s play was “a sign of its radical resistance to the framework which [was] attempting to incorporate it” (Turcotte, 2001,189). For Turcotte, this in itself renders the exercise a success in a political sense at least. Project also demonstrates the author’s capacity to meet whatever
literary challenge was put before him. Mudrooroo had moved to Sydney University’s Centre for Performance Studies to work on the collaboration, which first began in 1987, the year prior to Australia’s bicentenary. The irony of finding he had achieved the ultimate, if absurd, dream of the isolated bourgeois writer when he “was escorted to the top garret of the house turned into institute” (Mudrooroo, 1993, 139), may not have been lost on a man who had spent much of his life struggling against inner and outer exile.

Mudrooroo’s sixth novel, *The Kwinkan*, was also published in 1993 and represents the author’s entry into detective fiction. *The Kwinkan* is an offshoot of *Project* and it too is futuristic and experimental. Narrated in retrospect, the novel is a satire of white anthropological ‘fact’ gathering methods. A first for Mudrooroo, the plot moves beyond the borders of Australia to an imaginary Polynesian island. *The Kwinkan* was soon followed by *Aboriginal Mythology: An A-Z Spanning the History of the Australian Aboriginal Peoples from the Earliest Legends to the Present Day* (1994). Then came *Us Mob - History, Culture, Struggle: An Introduction to Indigenous Australia* (1995b) and a collection of poetry entitled *Pacific Highway Boo-Blooz* (1996).

In April 1996, Mudrooroo was awarded the prestigious Ruth Adeney Koori Award for Aboriginal writing for his cultural study, *Us Mob*. Then
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Head of Aboriginal Studies at Murdoch University in Perth, he remained a dominant figure in Aboriginal literature in Australia. Whilst rumours had been circulating previously, it was also in 1996 that Western Australian journalist, Victoria Laurie, brought the controversy surrounding Mudrooroo’s claim to Aboriginal heritage out of the shadows in her now infamous article, “Identity Crisis”. Laurie’s article appeared in *The Australian Magazine*, a widely read publication with national circulation. It sparked an unprecedented level of public debate in the academic and literary community, one involving critics and commentators from both sides of the racial divide. The controversy was widely reported in the press during 1996 and 1997. At its height, the co-ordinator of the Dumbartung Aboriginal Corporation, activist Robert Eggington, went so far as to suggest Johnso’s work be removed “from all Australian bookshelves and pulped” (Jopson, 1997, 5), a request that to many constituted the worst kind of literary censorship. Eggington’s suggestion was not taken up. It is perhaps a hard irony – one with uncanny echoes of the circularity of Mudrooroo’s fiction itself – that the Dumbartung Aboriginal Corporation is housed in what was previously known as Clontarf Boys’ Town. This is the same Christian Brothers’ orphanage where the author spent seven years of his childhood, between 1947 and 1955. Possibly in response to what was to become an unrelenting and doubtlessly embarrassing public debate, the author resigned his position at Western Australia’s Murdoch

As a writer, Mudrooroo has demonstrated that he has few limitations. Where he disappoints, however, is in his lack of insight or acknowledgement of the contribution of females, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, to the weaving of the social fabric. The central interest of much of Mudrooroo’s work is to restore the lost prestige of Aboriginal males, but he tends to do so at the expense of females from both sides of the racial divide. His female characters are sidelined, rarely fully developed and often portrayed as social property with the capacity to reason, behave and act self-consciously in a male-dominated world. He writes the place of women in the developing Aboriginal political environment as physically and morally weak – supportive at best and as traitorous at worst. His last three novels, *The Undying* (1998), *Underground* (1999) and *The Promised Land* (2000), are written in the fantastical Gothic mode. The books continue to hand down characters, names and themes almost as unfinished acts of remembrance of the antecedent text, *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* which, as indicated above, has its own beginnings in *Doctor Wooreddy*. Mudrooroo’s latest trilogy is
replete with metaphors of British imperialism as a “retrograde social development, a backsliding toward barbarism” (Brantlinger, 1988, 236). A misogynist to the end, with ever-increasing rage, the author embodies his brutish metaphors in the figure of an excessively violent, white female vampire to whom readers are introduced in *The Undying*.

Plagued by the ongoing controversy over his claim to Aboriginality, Mudrooroo left Australia and returned to India in 2001. The author presently resides in Kathmandu, Nepal pursuing his studies and long-term interest in Buddhism. At the time of writing, Mudrooroo had not reconciled his differences with members of either his Aboriginal or his non-Aboriginal ‘family’. The discourses informing the author’s discredited claim to Aboriginality have been yoked to notions of the authentic linked to the responsibilities of authorship. How this state of affairs arose is the question to which this study will now turn.

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