CHAPTER - III

A Quest for Aboriginal Self Knowledge: The Wildcat Trilogy
(Wild Cat Falling, Doin Wildcat and Wild Cat Screaming)

In all respects, Mudrooroo’s Wildcat Trilogy represents one of the most significant Trilogies in contemporary literature. Mudrooroo began his debt as an author with a brief piece entitled ‘Finish’, printed in the literary journal Westerly. In all his novels Mudrooroo addressed the issues of illusory freedom, social ostracism, the sorrow of rejection and the search for identity and pride. His debut novel Wild Cat Falling (1965) occupies a prominent position. Many of his characters are afflicted by paralysis and anomie and they establish emphasis upon resistance and adaptable survival skills. It is obvious that Mudrooroo was influenced by Jean Paul Sartre’s Existentialism. Stephen Muecke points out that the introduction in Wild Cat Falling is very much on the lines of ‘accidental’ shooting in Albert Camus’s existentialist novel L’Etranger. But the influence of Existentialism does not lessen the validity of Black Australian Ideology. Mudrooroo’s findings are highly original though he is understood as appropriating the views of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Gautama Buddha. The novel introduces many hallmarks in terms of themes, theories and methodology. It encapsulates the protagonist’s return to his spiritual roots of Aboriginality. This is considered as a ‘first’ for Black Australia as a whole. The author described as an intellectual emerges from the ‘bodgie’
origins and undergoes a radical transformation to capture the imagination. Many of the critics have considered *Wild Cat Falling* as an autobiographical novel. Rejecting this perception, Mudrooroo says that the novel is about ways of seeing and living. It has far more to do with spiritual enlightenment than with physical liberation. It has to be read totally as a non biographical and it has to be perceived as a novel about Black Australian who rediscovers his spiritual roots. It raises many questions about the pernicious process adopted by Mudrooroo to conceal his identity. The entire process opens up inventing fictional identities over and over again. So one has to employ a precise psychological or biographical reading. It is for this reason the protagonist of *Wild Cat Falling* remains nameless throughout the book.

Contemporary criticism emphasizes on the Aboriginal sensibility. Stephen Muecke has opined *Wild Cat Falling* has become a precursor to the entire range of Aboriginal literature. McLaren has commented that the novel is a form of sociological text. Mudrooroo feels that fictional freedom is as important as liberation for Aboriginals. Those who try to classify the protagonist of *Wild Cat Falling*, they are engaged in the process of malevolent categorization which led to anthropological determination of Black Australians as primitive stone age savages. The majority of the critics and general readers who disliked *Wild Cat Falling* have
misconstrued the novel as an American beatnik idiom and it was also considered as a social analysis than quest for Aboriginal self knowledge. The novel is nonstop parade if different voices and many of them are musical ones. It underlines the significance of the blues genres. Blues, Jazz, rock, reggae, country and western ballads are central to Mudrooroo’s fiction. Mudrooroo makes a rediscovery or illumination as an exploration of Aboriginality through music. The Blue songs provide us with a scarred psyche of the protagonist but it evinces a clear way out from his predicament of rootlessness. The novel was considered as a post modern text with its inception in the modernist period. Ahead of his time, Mudrooroo excites the opprobrium of many Australian critics. He proves to be constantly challenging and reinterpreting and provides a radical departure from the traditional perspectives of fiction.

The second in trilogy is *Doin Wildcat*. Returning to the territory of first novel, he makes a visiting Jewish American director make a feature film based on *Wild Cat Falling*. The third in trilogy is *Wild Cat Screaming*, showing what befalls the protagonist after he returns from the jail. *Doin Wild Cat* is the story of the creating of a film and is more than a cinematic commentary. The theme operates at three levels. First, it creates the character of ‘Wild Cat’, who is ostensibly the author and the protagonist of *Wild Cat Falling*. At the second level, Wild Cat’s recollections form the
core of the action and they are explicitly compared with the thematic concerns of the first novel. Thirdly, the character of *Wild Cat* exists in the present tense of *Doin Wildcat* as the script writer for the film of *Wild Cat Falling*, making his role personal and professional. The structure of *Doin Wildcat* is complicated and bit difficult to comprehend. It is about a script about the making of a film about a novel. Mudrooroo describes that it is that of an author on a film set observing the shooting of a feature based upon on one of his novels. The complexity stems from this situation than from the language Mudrooroo employs and from the dialogic relationship which Wildcat has with his own fictional character in *Wild Cat Falling*. The novel addresses the issues of remembering the past of Aboriginals, the attempts and survival of Aboriginal writers to retain Aboriginality from the influence of commercialism.

One of the salient features of the novel is its explicit subtitle ‘A Novel Koori Script’. This gives the reader a clue that this is no ordinary novel. It is an amalgam of Aboriginal ideology, Koori English Idiom, Script Writing, Dialogue, reminiscences, scene changes, anecdotes, history and political observations. Mudrooroo employs pun on many words, including the ‘subtitle’ of the novel reminiscent of the bad slogan which reads ‘English Majors are Novel Lovers’. It is equally significant that the book is not written but is a script. This is the clear indication of the tenor of
the book. It is about flawed reflections, uncertain constructions of reality rather than any precisely quantifiable memories. As is mentioned, the subtlest indication is that *Wildcat* is a fictional character created to comment upon Mudrooroo’s first novel. It also reflects author’s emphasis on the traditional story of the Cat and the Crow, narrated by the old rabbiter in the final chapter. The Wild Cat mirrors the unnamed protagonist searching for his identity.

Mudrooroo creates and names an individual fictional commentator who can observe with a dispassionate detachment to the world around him. The protagonist is no longer anonymous and no longer impersonal cipher. Wild Cat gains in self definition and is liked to Black Australian Community through contact with characters like Jinda, Ernie and Detective Watson Holmes Jackamara. In view of the complexities one of the best representations is to imagine the text as photograph album. Mudrooroo about a series of photographs who openly states that were not taken up by him. The photographer is Wild Cat, who recognizes himself in many of the shots and dislikes most of them because of the painful associations. He disagrees with many of the captions to accompany the photographs taken and feels that they are incorrect inadequate and uncertain. These discrepancies were accomplished in *Wild Cat Falling*
within a tripartite structure. The three sections: ‘Release, Freedom and Return’ become ‘Prison, Goin Ome and Ome’ in *Doin Wildcat*.

The third in trilogy *Wildcat Screaming* is a social novel about prison and accurately a prison novel about society. The novel contains a cast of inspired and unusual eccentrics. They are the befuddled old digger, Clarrie, the mammoth Indian prison mastermind, Robbi Singh, and his violent bodyguard, Dick. Singh becomes Wildcat’s Cellmate, his guru, his inspiration and his mentor. Their relationship is fascinating reflection of the Indian and Aboriginal influences in Mudrooroo’s own life and work and a dynamic force in the novel. Singh embodies two significant ideas in the novel: regimentation (both military and psychological) and spirituality (both indigenous and ‘imported’).

The pattern of *Wildcat Screaming* is clever and innovative. Appropriating ideas and designs from a variety of textual sources Mudrooroo transforms them into unique, satirical amalgamation. The theme is based on the Jeremy Bentham’s concept of ‘Panopticon’: the prison in which the seers and the seen are in a symbiotic relationship. It is also equally indebted to Michel Foucault’s application of Panopticon model of the ‘ideal’ prison to society as a whole. Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* proposes that all citizens are ‘under surveillance’. The power relations of the goal become a model for those outside its walls. It is a way
of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life of men. The final section of *Wild Cat Screaming* ‘Continuance’ aptly enacts this perception. Mudrooroo introduces the character of detective Watson Holmes Jackamara as an obvious parody of the archetypical British private detective. The surprising element is Jackamara is an aborigine from Queensland through his demeanor, he becomes wittily reminiscent. Jackamara is sent under cover to Wildcat’s prison, to investigate the Panopticon scheme. As a secret agent, he embodies all the contradictions and ironies of the Panopticon. He is not what he seems, yet he is an aborigine. He is engaged in surveillance but is also the object of investigation by other inmates. Mudrooroo recasts the whole design of the novel to sustain the central way of Aboriginality.

From various critical perspectives, the trilogy is perceived as significant contribution to Aboriginal literature. The contemporary critical terrain finds its sagacity in the thematic concerns of the novel.

Western colonial culture has put itself at the centre of a humanist, metaphysical structure by which others are expected to measure what it means to ‘know’, ‘be’ and ‘act’ in the world. Studies of colonial texts by influential critics such as Robert Young, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said and Benita Parry, to name but a few, have shown how this humanistic knowledge system has enabled and accompanied imperialist
expansion by permeating all forms of narrative production. These critics do not always agree. Where they are consistent, however, is in their understanding of the English novel as a global cultural artifact which has facilitated the reach and dominating influence of colonial ideology. Said, for example, suggests that the discourses inherent in the English book represent “the far from accidental convergence between the patterns of narrative authority constitutive of the novel on the one hand and, on the other, a complex ideological configuration underlying the tendency to imperialism” (Said, 1993, 82). And, as Leila Ghandi more recently puts it when considering Spivak’s critique of Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre, “the cultural and literary production of nineteenth-century Europe […] is inextricable from the history and success of the imperialist project”. (Ghandi, 1998, 91)

History shows that a hallmark of the imperialist colonial psyche is to rank colliding cultures against an imaginatively constructed scale of binary oppositional differences weighted heavily in favour of the authors of the dominating structure itself. By implication at least, from the Brontës to Joseph Conrad, ways of thinking about the world – the symbolic and literal meaning of what is good or bad, right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable, beautiful or ugly – can be found in a huge range of colonialis inspired narrative texts. Moreover, in the realist works of
Western history and literature, representations of how things are rest on the contention that in fact there is no textual mediation: that society and history are simply ‘there’ as pre-existing givens. Said employs the metaphor of the theatre, and the artifice this implies, to argue that, “unlike other texts, the realistic novel is governed by a different, a non-theatrical, mode of representation” (Said, 1983, 193). Put another way, consciously or unconsciously, the realistic novel can be seen as a kind of enclosed stage in which characters (actors) conspire to ‘normalize’ the status quo according to the beliefs and values of those who hold the power of representation. Ashcroft et al also observe, however, that:

in most post-colonial nations (including the West Indies and India), the nexus of power involving literature, language and a dominant British culture has strongly resisted attempts to dismantle it. Even after such attempts began to succeed, the canonical nature and unquestioned status of the works of the English literary tradition and the values they incorporated remained potent in the cultural formation and the ideological institutions of education and literature. (Ashcroft et al, 1989, 4)

These critics argue that the relatively recent counter-discourses inherent in the notion of ‘black writing’ have gone beyond an innocent perspective of colonial encounter based on a mythological claim to white supremacy.
Black writers and critics such as Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thion’o, Albert Wendt and Wilson Harris, for example, have recognized the connection between language and power – of “writing with its signification of authority” (Ashcroft et al, 1989, 8). Moreover, these writers are using the English language as a cultural weapon to indicate their own sense of identity and belonging.

The rebellious, anti-colonial storyteller Mudrooroo is another black author who has seized the power of the written word from the absolute control of dominant European culture. Mudrooroo’s fiction penetrates the screens erected against a ‘true’ understanding of what it means to belong in Australia when one is other than white.

Mudrooroo’s project calls attention to the corporeal form in a way that encourages a rigorous rethinking of dominant representations of Aboriginal culture and identity. Self-consciously metafictional and deconstructive, the trilogy is marked with a substantial measure of irony in its engagement with the illusory nature of colonial discourses of self-sufficiency and power. Transgressing the limits of ‘classic’ realist categories of history and of fiction, the books also challenge the processes and the politics of writing. At the heart of Mudrooroo’s undertaking, however, is an intractable refusal to accept the dismissal of Indigenous reality as less worthy than any other, and a commitment to promote its
'truths’ as a legitimate form of knowledge. The manufacture of any one form of ‘reality’ he claims, is “neither more or less ‘true’ than any other” (Mudrooroo, 96). Such relativism denies the legitimacy of dominant discourses and allows the development of a different perspective of history, identity and belonging. In other words, Mudrooroo challenges the European monolithic version of reality whose grandiose claims are founded on a precarious, arbitrary link between language and the appearance of what it means. As he writes: Language after all is a magic construct and to try and gain truth from it is a dubious undertaking, especially when even now the European way is the best and too often they create and seek to impose hard realities existing on nothing but the words and marks of language. (Mudrooroo, 89)

Written in an autobiographical mode, Mudrooroo’s first novel, Wild Cat Falling, tends to see “meaning as an illusion” (Mudrooroo, 90). The novel is an open-ended, anti-authoritarian and multi-layered narrative of self-representation. As J.J. Healy remarks, “it is the preface to a career that did not then know that it was going to be a career. It remains a reacting, expressive book open very much to the landscape of idiom that swirled around Melbourne at the time”. (Healy, 1991, 22)

Born into a time of oppressive assimilationist ideology (as was the author himself), Mudrooroo’s nameless protagonist is presented as
becoming rather than being an Aboriginal man. The character chooses not to “believe in anything” and sees concepts such as freedom and equal rights as “the absurdest [sic] illusions of all” (Mudrooroo, 90). The protagonist grapples with his own image and believes the world is against him – it is not he who is against the world. Healy astutely observes that “the deeps in which the narrator finds himself have an orphaned, abandoned texture to them” (Healy, 1991, 26). A most telling remark discloses that he feels he belongs nowhere in an alienating and manipulative social terrain – “all things are alien from me. I am rejected and I stand utterly alone. Nothing is mine or belongs to me and I belong nowhere in this world or the next” (Mudrooroo, 91).

As Justin MacGregor observes, “the discourse that has marginalised [the Wildcat character] has also allowed him to accept his place on the fringes of society” (MacGregor, 1993, 652). In the closing pages of the novel, however, the character’s entry into an Aboriginal world “sung into [his] mind” (Mudrooroo, 125) by an elder, gives readers the sense that an alternative existence may be available to him. In terms of Mudrooroo’s later work, MacGregor’s remarks are prophetic when he suggests that this move offers the Wildcat character the “possibility of (re)placing himself in the centre, of denying monolithic interpretations of ‘reality’” (MacGregor, 1993, 653) whereby he might emerge as a ‘different’ kind of being to
socially (racially) defined and determined concepts of identity. This issue is discussed in more detail in the full analysis of the novel covered later in this chapter.

The second and third books of the trilogy, *Doin Wildcat: A Novel Koori Script* (1988) and *Wildcat Screaming* (1992), move beyond the helplessness expressed by *Wild Cat Falling’s* protagonist who repeatedly declares, “I haven’t got a country […] I don’t belong anywhere” (Mudrooroo, 126). The novels span a period of twenty-seven years during which time some progress was made towards the attainment of social justice for Australia’s Indigenous people. The most significant milestone shared by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal historiessince 1788 is arguably 1992 which, coincidentally, is the year that *Wildcat Screaming* emerged. It was in 1992, in Australia’s second native title case, *Mabo v. Queensland*, that the High Court overruled Mr. Justice Blackburn’s 1972 ruling and held that courts now recognize Aboriginal rights and entitlement to land, in common law. As a consequence, the doctrine of *terra nullius* – that Australia was unoccupied at the time of colonial invasion – was forever erased. The response of the (Keating) government of the day to the *Mabo* ruling was to legislate the *Commonwealth Native Title Act, 1993*.

Despite this apparent headway in the struggle for Aboriginal rights, however, all three of the Wildcat texts reflect the continuing sense of
entrapped of the Indigenous minority in the inequitable social, economic and cultural relationships they have inherited from British conquest. The novels breach the compartmentalising limits of conventional literary narrative. They travel outside the confines of subjection and marginalisation to reflect, metaphorically and actually, the vast social gap that continues to be maintained between black and white Australians. A growing awareness of the importance of history, self-identification and community in Aboriginal life corresponds to the backward and forward movement between the three texts. Among other things, the trilogy captures a version of Indigenous identity and belonging inextricably tied to the high incidence of incarceration of young Aboriginals in Australia’s welfare and penal system – an issue that lends coherence to the texts.

*Wild Cat Falling*, which has a strong autobiographical dimension, deals directly with the effects of institutionalization of black Australian youth. Publication of the text in 1965 was quite remarkable for a number of reasons. Not the least of these is that the Aboriginal people with whom the author then chose to identify and whose cause he openly supported, enjoyed few of the prerogatives, freedoms and privileges accorded to non-Aboriginal Australians, including the right to vote for those whose laws they were expected to uphold. It was not until the Australian Constitutional Referendum of 1967, two years after Mudrooroo’s novel was published,
and that Indigenous people were even recognized as citizens of Australia under the law. As mentioned earlier, 1965 was also the year of the so-called ‘Freedom Ride’. Nicolas Peterson and Will Sanders observe that Australia’s ‘Ride’ was modeled on similar events of the American Civil Rights movement. Of the thirty people involved in the organization of the Freedom Ride, however, only two, the late Charles Perkins and Gary Williams, both of whom were then students of Sydney University, were believed to be Aboriginal (Peterson and Sanders suggest that Charles Perkins was the sole Aboriginal man involved in the organisation of the Ride and to undertake the entire ‘Freedom’ journey. For an in-depth study of the Australian Freedom Ride and an account of Williams’ participation throughout, however, see Ann Curthoys (2002)). The point Peterson and Sanders make is that, at that time in Australia’s history, “the struggle for Aboriginal rights was still substantially in the hands of sympathetic non-Aboriginal people […] and that a widespread Aboriginal consciousness was only weakly developed” (Peterson and Sanders, 1998, 16). That sympathetic non-Aboriginal people were largely responsible for the promotion of Indigenous rights and opportunity in the ’60s is borne out by the fact that, as a budding author, Mudrooroo was not in command of the terms of his novel’s production. As discussed in Chapter II, the publication of Wild Cat Falling at that particular time in Australia’s history, was owed in no small part to the influence of the late Dame Mary Durack.
Wild Cat Falling was, in Mudrooroo words, “edited into publishability [sic] by Mary Durack” (Mudrooroo, 263) who was then well placed to assist Mudrooroo to overcome any difficulties he might experience in relation to the publication system and its processes. In the main, the novel conforms to conventionally accepted European standards of ‘the literary’, which are implied in Durack’s patronising foreword. Over time, Durack’s prefatory words have become.

A testament to Mudrooroo’s claim to Aboriginal origins and to the circumstances of his birth as a writer. Wild Cat Falling is almost devoid of the idiomatic expression introduced in Mudrooroo’s later work and adheres more closely to the rules of white literary tradition. This has the effect not only of maintaining the centrality of European literary practice, but also of keeping the identification of black writing ‘in its place’ on the fringes of society, both symbolically and actually. In many ways, the voice of Wild Cat Falling reproduces the sound of dependency and assimilation. The style, form and conventional use of English in the discourses of the novel appear to have ‘fallen’ into the coloniser’s conformity trap in an endeavour to please a readership anticipated to be predominantly white.

In an introduction added in 1992, however, Stephen Muecke gestures towards the cultural momentum of the book. He suggests that, against great odds, its message is one of “revival, a searching for roots and
the maintenance of links between contemporary Aboriginal Australia and traditional Aboriginal Australia” (Mudrooroo, ix). In Muecke’s view, *Wild Cat Falling* is a radical text that marks a turning point in Australian colonial history, its story defying prevailing expectations that Aboriginal people forget their community-based traditions and way of life. Yet the novel also signals an emerging social order of individualism inspired by the same white colonial discourse. This is reflected in Mudrooroo’s perception of himself as a 1960s bohemian figure – as belonging in a rare fold of social space designated to the solitary artist. Muecke argues, however, that this was how Mudrooroo “was able to create a structural parallel to run the motor of his novel, with the figure of the Black and beatnik artist as doubly outcast in the form of his nameless hero” (Mudrooroo, vi). For Muecke, Mudrooroo sees himself as a part of a very different society “responsible only to himself but pulled into the world of people by chance encounters” (Mudrooroo, x). In this view, society – ‘the world of people’ – fills the role of the predatory spider and contains an element of artistic posturing that echoes nineteenth-century perceptions of the artist as belonging outside the demands of everyday life. It is an impression that also appears to contradict Mudrooroo’s own asserted perception of the artist “not as an isolated individual, alienated from his or her society and interested in only extending the bounds of her own private vision, but as a value creator and integrator” (Mudrooroo, 39).
Mudrooroo’s words beg the question of whether any individual is ever ‘responsible only to himself’ and suggest that no one exists in a vacuum. Rather, much like the readers they serve, writers are a part of society at large and are equally subjected to its demands and limitations.

During a 1975 interview with Bruce Bennett and Laurie Lockwood, Mudrooroo acknowledges the autobiographical dimension of *Wild Cat Falling* – that the story “islargely drawn from his own experience” (Bennett and Lockwood, 1975, 35, In an interview with Eckhard Breitinger, Mudrooroo is quoted as saying, “*Wild Cat Falling* has been called semi-autobiographical, but then most of my books are semi-autobiographical. You have to put your own feelings and your own experiences into the books you do, so I don’t know if there is ever any such thing as a work of pure imagination” (Breitinger, 1985, 12))This includes the time spent by the author in both Clontarf Boys’ Town and Fremantle Prison – experiences he has also reflected upon when promoting himself as a representative of Aboriginal authors generally. In interview with Susanne Bau, for example, he states:

> Aboriginal writers write from experience. If you don’t have the experience you can’t write. There is a whole ideology based on that fact. White people can’t really write about Aborigines, because they don’t have the experience. 120-21)
Encouraged by Durack’s foreword, Mudrooroo is the omnipresent hero of his own and of his character’s life story – both autobiographer and biographer. Fictional hero and author become assimilated as it were as Mudrooroo takes control of family narratives that bring new meaning into ‘lives’ that exist both inside and outside his text.

Readers of *Wild Cat Falling* find themselves positioned as the hearers of a story in which the ‘presence’ of the author as an Aboriginal self is represented both as an existing entity and as one that lives in the imagination of its creator. In Mudrooroo’s discourse there is no clear boundary between autobiography and biography – between the author and his character – and therefore between what is ‘true’ and what is ‘false’. The allegorical representations in the work solicit belief that the narrated events are based on the material reality of the author’s identity and private life. They recall the referents that precede them – the fictionalised past experiences of the author, told through his narrator. This can be a powerful attraction for readers wishing to authorise their fiction with a measure of historical ‘fact’. In her book *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing*, Margaret Atwood suggests that such “stories exist in a realm that is neither fact nor fiction – [the land of] enhanced fact” (Atwood, 2002, 118). Atwood notes the power of such narratives, and argues that “real life’s jagged extremes mixed with verbal artistry are a potent and
sometimes explosive combination. This is why so many people have faked such stories, beginning at least with Daniel Defoe” (Atwood, 2002, 118)

Muecke observes that *Wild Cat Falling’s* main character is anonymous and that “not to have a name is to be unplaced” (Mudrooroo, vii). But to be without a name is also to enter the competing narratives of what it means to belong (or not to belong) in Australian society. For Muecke, when we read the words of *Wild Cat Falling* we are “following the tracks of a friend” (Mudrooroo, xi). However, to borrow Atwood’s concept, readers are also entering the world of “a good wizard – good at doing [his] magic [...] creating illusions that can convince people of their truth” (Atwood, 2002, 113). Atwood goes on to argue that:

If the writer as wizard is good in this sense, then power of various sorts may well come [his or her] way – power in relation to society – and then [his or her] goodness or badness as a human being will have a part in determining what you do with this power. (Atwood, 2002, 113)

As in all spheres of life, with power comes social responsibility. A gifted wordsmith, with one foot in black and the other in white society, Mudrooroo’s power is to move, to disturb and to influence his readers. Some might argue that this is a talent that cannot and should not be measured by ethnicity. As Ashcroft and others argue, however, the position
of Australia’s Aboriginal people “is a special one in that they are doubly marginalised – pushed to the psychic and political edge of Australian societies which themselves have experienced the dilemmas of colonial alienation” (Ashcroft et al, 1989, 144). This is a system in which it is not possible to separate the politics of race from the politics of identity. The two are constantly integrated and in play. The production of literary texts is therefore inevitably bound up with an author’s social position and cultural interaction. It is quite possible that Mudrooroo’s writing helped him to create the illusion of an Indigenous ancestry, a history of his own making. It is also possible that this provided the window through which he gained entry into Aboriginal cultural production. A wizard with words he may be, but he can also be perceived as a literary vampire whose revisionist writing draws and returns to draw ‘blood’ from material – outside the physical limits of the texts perhaps – but integrated just the same with an authorial claim to Aboriginal identity and experience.

Published almost a generation later in Australia’s bicentennial year of 1988, the second novel of the trilogy, *Doin Wildcat*, writes back to *Wild Cat Falling* in a way that lends substance to Mudrooroo’s claim to Aboriginal belonging. Even as it expands the sense of what happened to his protagonist in the past by offering corrective readings, the novel reflects the reality of an Indigenous culture in a process of transformation.
and a contemporary shift in black and white relations. This was a year which saw a rising momentum in the number of political protests by Indigenous Australians keen to register their cultural ‘legitimacy’, one which demonstrated an Aboriginal way of living and acting in dominant white society. It was also the year that the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody was formed to investigate the causes behind the disproportionately high number of deaths among Aboriginal people whilst held in custody in Australia’s State and Territory gaols (A total of 99 Aboriginal deaths in custody were recorded between 1 January 1980 and 31 May 1989). For many Indigenous people, Australia’s bicentennial year marked a time of mourning for the loss of language, culture and the right to belong in their own country. The protest marches that took place in Canberra and Sydney signaled that it was time for black Australia to take more energetic steps towards gaining autonomy and political rights through treaty. In an interview with Adam Shoemaker some years later, however, Mudrooroo suggested that in Australia’s bicentennial year, the whole impetus towards a treaty between black and white Australia was lost, with little or no political gain made either then or since (Shoemaker, 1993b, 44). These comments, whilst they seem negative, tend to bring the issue of the reality of change versus the appearance of change into perspective. In 1988, white Australia may have acknowledged that it had a black history (The ambiguous message, “White Australia has a Black
History”, was spray-painted in large letters on the walls of the parliament building in Canberra during the protests to call attention to the false premise on which the celebrations of 200 years of European settlement were based), but progress towards righting the wrongs of that history remained (and remains) slow.

Some of the political and legal barriers that deny the right of Indigenous people to inhabit their own social, cultural and economic space may seem to have lowered since the protests of 1988 but, in reality, they continue to endure. Paul Sheiner notes that by 1993 in Western Australia, concern regarding the high level of Aboriginal deaths in custody “had worked its way to the top of the political agenda” (Sheiner, 1993, 253). Sheiner goes on to say that public pressure for the government to act was fanned by the West Australian, a regional newspaper with the largest circulation of any ‘daily’ in Australia. The West’s racist reports built and continually reproduced the sense that “there were connections between youth and violence, Aboriginals and crime” (Sheiner, 1993, 255). Public outcry reached its peak in February 1992 with the enactment of a Crime (Serious and Repeat Offenders) Sentencing Act. This Act provides for the mandatory incarceration of repeat offenders in institutions that cater for both juveniles and adults (Sheiner, 1993, 253) and remains a highly debated topic in Australian media and political circles.
Wildcat Screaming, the last book of the trilogy, was published in 1992 against a background of public rallies protesting a perceived increase in the level of Aboriginal youth-related crime. The self-altering experience of the pain of personal institutionalization arguably allows Mudrooroo to imagine the effects of such trauma on others. That experience is reflected in a form of narrative that redefines and redirects the power of writing in order to serve black Australia’s moral and political ends. As Marguerite Nolan suggests, the author’s texts “are reflexively concerned with the political context of their writing and reception, and the constitution, through writing and reception, of the [black] colonial subject” (Nolan, 1998, 201). However, the novelistic discourse within which Mudrooroo operates is a form of storytelling seen by many critics as unhelpful to the Aboriginal cause. Ivor Indyk, for example, believes that the appropriation of white literary forms by non-white writers such as Mudrooroo:

is to imply a strong, subversive use of those forms. But the matter is a political one, and there will always be some suspicion that the forms, or at least the values implicit in them, could prove more powerful than the subversive intention which governs their use. So far from appropriating the forms, the Aboriginal writer might instead end up being appropriated by them, the text contaminated by white values and white perspectives. (Indyk, 1992, 249)
By this I understand Indyk to mean that by repeatedly appropriating his own work and that of others, Mudrooroo risks complicity with the very discourse he seeks to oppose. In the process, strategic appropriation of dominant texts by minority writers is both mocked and invalidated. In this view, rather than empowering writers such as Mudrooroo, the novel becomes yet another tool of colonial assimilation in which any worthwhile gesture of rebellion is lost. Indyk goes on to argue that, in terms of Mudrooroo’s “habit of appropriating and rewriting his own texts, there may be a point at which the process of rewriting becomes self-consuming” (Indyk, 1992, 252). As he writes:

Mudrooroo’s fiction severely tests the limits of appropriation, taking the process of rewriting to the stage where the texts that are being rewritten are the author’s own – so Wild Cat Falling (1965) is rewritten as Doin Wildcat in 1988 and Dr. Wooreddy’s Prescription (1983) appears in a very different incarnation as Master of the Ghost Dreaming in 1991. (Indyk, 1992, 259)

Here Indyk seems to be pushing a critique of appropriation to its logical extremes by suggesting that Mudrooroo intentionally plagiarises himself, a strategy which creates a danger of solipsistic obsession – of belonging nowhere except as a solitary isolate.
Conversely, in her essay, “ Authenticity and Betrayal”, Nolan argues that assertions such as Indyk’s arise from a widespread, white point of view that takes as a ‘given’ the values inscribed by institutional discursive practices which deny cultural mobility to any Australians other than those of British extraction. Among other issues, Nolan questions the assumption that a static form of pre-invasion Aboriginality is the only ‘authentic’ Aboriginality and explains it as the colonial wont to ‘fossilize’ Indigenous culture (Nolan, 1998, 202-03). As indicated above, a focus of Mudrooroo’s literary and critical project has been the inversion of dominant white constructions of Aboriginal identity and ways of belonging. His entry into the ‘foreign land’ of postcolonial literary fiction is a material sign of an alternative kind of power and movement. Embracing the novel as an agent of connection between competing narratives of what it means to be Australian, by choice, constitutes a freedom and a challenge to the status quo. This is not to say that the appropriation of an ‘authoritative’ white discipline by non-white authors may not lead to the production of certain cross-cultural tensions. Not to attempt appropriation at all, however, would be to leave white literary authority intact. Questioning the textual means by which a prolific writer such as Mudrooroo makes contact with black and white Australia alike in this technological age, is impractical and irrelevant. Of greater consequence is that, as an anti-colonial Australian writer, he employs whatever form of representation he has at his disposal
in his attempts to efface or interrogate dominant versions of the past and make room for non-white belonging in post-colonial space (For a discussion of how Mudrooroo embraces the metaphor of the palimpsest in his efforts to ‘write over’ Australian history, see Francoise Kral (2002) “Re-Surfacing Through Palimpsests: A (False) Quest of Repossession in the Works of Mudrooroo and Alexis Wright”, Commonwealth Essays and Studies, Vol. 25, No. 1, Autumn, 7-14).

Whatever the past held for Aboriginal people, as subjects of colonial conquest, their own literary heritage has been sucked dry, cannibalised, and transformed into the prejudicial versions of history and belonging which loom largely in the European mind. The storytelling region Mudrooroo enters to tell his tales was once the exclusive realm of a white literary tradition from which the Aboriginal presence and point of view was either omitted or re-written for them. The author suggests that, as a minority writer, he is in a position to choose modes of representation, rather than to have them pre-selected in the processes of colonial subjectification. For him, this “is a source of empowerment rather than of negativity and division” (Mudrooroo, 50). Undoubtedly, Mudrooroo’s entry into print culture gave many black writers the opportunity to engage in a number of strategic manoeuvres to produce new discourses of Aboriginal identity and belonging. Along the way, however, the author has
attempted in his literary criticism not simply to define what constitutes Aboriginal writing but also to limit and dictate the meaning of ‘authentic’ Aboriginal authorship. As Aboriginal writer and academic Pat Dudgeon observes, Mudrooroo has “written books actually prescribing how other Aboriginal writers should write. He’s run down other Aboriginal writers, and he’s been very prescriptive in what identity is” (Oxenham et al, 1999, 79). Dudgeon goes on to offer the opinion that:

of all the Aboriginal people in Australia, [Mudrooroo] has contributed most significantly to the reconstruction of Aboriginality yet he may not be Aboriginal. So, I think that we need evidence [of identity]. […] I want to know that those constructing the future for me and my children to live in at least do have some inkling of it [Aboriginal experiences and identity]. Maybe it’s not very noble but I would like to think that they have at least some sort of biological descent.

(Oxenham et al, 1999, 79)

It is a hard irony that the environment in which today’s readers locate Mudrooroo as a writer and critic is one in which the ‘authenticity’ of his own claim to Aboriginal identity remains in doubt. It is not unreasonable to suggest that the mechanism for that claim lies in the author’s talent for
narration or storytelling – that the ‘integrity’ of his claim to Aboriginal belonging takes its cue from *Wild Cat Falling*.

*Wild Cat Falling* is the first landfall on a literary journey of self-discovery for an imaginary urban Aboriginal character who has little sense of his own place in Australian society and does not “know much about the Aborigines or how they feel” (Mudrooroo, 78). Autobiographical links can be drawn between Mudrooroo and his protagonist when, early in the novel, we read that the character has written and published a book whilst spending time behind prison bars. As an inmate of Fremantle prison, the protagonist finds it “a refuge of a sort” (Mudrooroo, 3), the social classes it houses more rigid and easier to define, the rules “more clear cut than outside”. (Mudrooroo, 5)

Speaking in the first person, the character/narrator addresses readers directly and ironically as an alienated ‘I’, the epitome of difference and ambiguity. As he says: “I’m not what they call Australian. I’m just an odd species of native fauna cross-bred with the migrant flotsam of a goldfield (Mudrooroo, 69), In an interview with journalist Terry O’Connor, Mudrooroo describes himself as “some sort of weird mongrel” (O’Connor, 1998, 24)). From his position of (dis)advantage, Mudrooroo’s complex hero is at once afraid, proud and defiantly conceited. Unable to escape his fate or to determine what it should be, he takes responsibility for
it nevertheless, his language reproducing the paradox central to his marginalised social position. As he states, “I have trained myself to be self-sufficient, self-controlled and I am in this way superior to the world of struggling, deluded fools” (Mudrooroo, 68). But, when offering an explanation of how he actually deals with that same world of fools, the lonely character’s response is melodramatically suggestive that one’s identity is a purely psychological phenomenon rather than a political and social construction. Overlooking his own delusions of the possibility of social disembodiment, he “play[s] it cool” (Mudrooroo, 68) and goes “through the actions of life, like in a dream. Actor and audience. Split personality. I can get outside my skin and look at myself” (Mudrooroo, 4), he says.

Not unusually, Mudrooroo’s meaning in this scene is ambiguous. His character’s rhetoric reveals a profoundly ambivalent conception of self– one contingent upon both form and a lack of form. Such a concept reveals the character’s deeply confused sense of identity as dislocated, multi-dimensional and ‘unfree’ – something ephemeral that is difficult, if not impossible, to hold onto.

But the author also seems to be making the claim that, owing to a self-awareness of their own discourse, theoretically at least, it is possible for writers to step outside – to escape – the logocentric world. As Edward
Said has it, however, the materiality of the conditions of writing is such that any text is “a series of discursive events ruled not by a sovereign author but by a set of constraints imposed on the author […] by historical conditions and so forth” (Said, 1983, 213). Said qualifies his observation by also suggesting that, in textual representation (or critical analysis), “there is always something that escapes. Because writing itself is a form of escape from every scheme designed to shut it down, hold it in, frame it, parallel it perfectly” (Said, 1983, 192).

Said’s sentiments are an uncanny echo of Mudrooroo’s self-conscious approach to his fiction in which, perhaps unconsciously, he recreates dominant discourses of power even as he recoils from them – an ambivalence for which the misogynist treatment of his female characters, black or white, is a consistent measure. The following extracts from *Wild Cat Falling*, for example, demonstrate an aversion to both black and white women as well as a tendency to link sexual encounter with violence, a theme which overwhelms the author’s later work. The first is the protagonist’s reaction to sex with a black female:

> Her breasts jut under her jumper and desire floods into me. I want her and hate her for making me want her. I pull off her clothes and take her violently, like it was rape. Hate her. Hate
her. Love her. It is finished. I fling away from her and she lies like a discarded doll. (Mudrooroo, 59)

The second involves a white female student:

She pulls me down with her into a bed and sighs as her arms twist around my neck. My body is as warm as hers but my mind is detached and cold. This time I don’t feel anything like hate or love. Only feel sick. I throw off her stranglehold and fling myself out the door. (Mudrooroo, 93)

Essentially, however, it is only ever possible to cross over from language to life metaphorically. By their very nature, a narrative figure can signify only linguistically and not realistically, even when such a figure may well be the subject of self-representation as in *Wild Cat Falling*. Perhaps this explains, at least in part, Mudrooroo’s metaphorical engagement with the notion of the cat. Throughout the novel, the unnamed character defines himself through the motif of a cat, with all the signifiers of a certain non-identity and self-alienation such usage implies – who/what he is and who/what he is not. The strategic, sense-producing use of the sign ‘cat’ strongly marks the character’s sense of self, metaphorically constructing him in a way that denotes the plurality of his hybrid persona. He is the quintessential ‘native’ cat – the European import gone feral. On the one hand he admits he is “like a scared alley cat in a strange joint”
(Mudrooroo, 1995a, 68) and on the other sees himself as “the swingiest cat in town!” (Mudrooroo, 83). The ‘cool cat – cool dude’ concept also works allegorically to provide a signifying linguistic extension that taps into the idiomatic language of 1960s bodgie culture, giving readers a clear – if dated – sense of the period in which the story is set.

The cat, of course, is not a native to Australia. It is an ‘outsider’ – a species introduced in the early days of colonisation. When the animal enters the psychological and physical being of the author’s displaced hero, it speaks of two hundred years of European influence in Australia (Stephen Muecke supports this view when he writes “the elements of the dream are also constructed as an allegory of the boy’s contemporary condition – part-Aboriginal (Crow), part-European (Cat)” (Mudrooroo, ix)). On the one hand, the cat represents a traditional maxim the character understands only in terms of its existence in his inner world – as expressed in his dreams of the legend of the Cat and the Crow. On the other, the cat motif, in association with that animal’s survival instincts – its mythologised nine lives – signifies a dangerous and alienated state of belonging in the external world. The nameless character responds to the pressures of that world by defining himself in an ironically totemic way through the symbolic projection of the cat as a signifier of ‘abnormal’ change. Whilst that image helps to validate his identity in the context of an evolved
oppressed position, it is also a consequence of a more complex and ambiguous process of the imagination that purposefully seeks a new form of belonging. The character’s renegade attitude reflects the historical setting of the novel, but it also speaks of a wish to break down the boundaries within and without prison walls. Forever trying to find a place in which he ‘fits’, he still has “this tiny hope that someday someone will listen and nearly understand” (Mudrooroo, 39) – a ‘secret’ wish which invades the character’s feelings of alienation – of belonging nowhere.

The story of Wildcat begins with the protagonist’s release from prison. Removing the “grey prison uniform of belonging” (Mudrooroo, 16), he discovers that the mirror outside institutional walls “reflects a person he takes to be [himself] gazing blank-eyed” (Mudrooroo, 16). His identity makes no sense at all, however, in a community which denies him existence other than as a man of colour. The loneliness felt by Mudrooroo’s hero, who describes himself as a half-breed delinquent for whom no one spares a glance and for whom there is “no refuge anywhere” (Mudrooroo, 93), speaks of the racism and exclusionary practices of Australia’s assimilation policies. The material reality of such policies leads the character to experience a sense of isolation from people of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal backgrounds rather than creating a feeling of shared belonging.
During the 1960s, it was a widely held view in Australia that Aboriginal peoples were on the way towards being fully integrated into white culture. As Mudrooroo observes, however, assimilation also operated as a tool of separation and its divisive effects continue to be felt today. As he writes:

It was declared outright that the reason behind this [assimilation] policy was fear: fear of a people of Indigenous descent eventually breeding into an underprivileged, angry, militant majority. A result of this policy has been the separation of so-called coloureds from blacks. (Mudrooroo, 13)

The Wildcat character constructs his sense of self in relation to a world where he is at once the outsider and the eternally constrained, with little hope of escape. His response is to demonstrate a wide range of characteristics that subvert and resist integration into dominant white culture. He exhibits anger, lack of discipline and disrespect for the prejudicial laws which exist only to reconcile him to Western culture’s social and moral objectives. In his waking moments, he reads the translated literature of European writers which provides him with an insight into other realities:

what to choose?… Maybe one of these highbrow-looking paper-backs. I take one from the rack. *Crime and Punishment*. 
Funny, I read that in jail. Good yarn. *War and Peace. Anna Karenina.* Hell! Fancy finding them here too. (Mudroooroo, 71)

MacGregor makes an intriguing point when he notes that:

the texts that Mudroooroo uses in his novel have an interesting affinity with Aboriginal writing in English: all the texts he refers to are translations [...] like the Aboriginal writer, these texts describe a non-English reality in English. While Mudroooroo is privileging non-Aboriginal texts in his narrative, the texts he chooses contain many of the same problems as his text: how to include non-English perceptions in the English language and how to translate the signifier without losing the sign. (MacGregor, 1993, 650-51)

One of the strategies Mudroooroo uses to overcome this dilemma is to introduce the Aboriginal concept of the Dreamtime into his novel. It is in his dreams and nightmares that the protagonist identifies subconsciously with the “complex system of mythologies which underpins Indigenality” (Mudroooroo, 97).

The Dreamtime legend of the Cat and the Crow represents the intuitive processes of Indigenous realities stemming from the cultural phenomenon of the Aboriginal Dreaming. In Mudroooroo’s understanding,
the reality of the Dreaming and the spirituality underlying the term, indicates “a psychic state in which or during which contact is made with the ancestral spirits […] a complex metaphysical and spiritual concept for which there is simply no adequate English rendering” (Mudrooroo, 41). The particular reality that is the Dreamtime, or what Mudrooroo refers to in his discourse as ‘maban reality’, is first experienced by the Wildcat character in the form of a recurring dream that is forgotten on awakening. As the narrative progresses, however, his dream becomes a nightmare in which he sees himself in the form of a cat with the wings of a crow, an in-between being that belongs neither to the earth nor to the sky. The terror the protagonist feels as he reaches for the moon only to plunge downwards through the night is his own and dramatises a desire to disengage from a colonial reality which demands he “live white and learn to think with a white man’s mind” (Mudrooroo, 122). The wish to flee a hostile world that binds him physically and mentally and the failure to leave it, even in his dreams, signifies the fear of being punished for stepping outside that world. By identifying a secret world inside himself, the atmosphere of myth and magic takes on a reality which connects the character to Aboriginal history and tradition and, in particular, to the land which, in Mudrooroo’s words, “is synonymous with Aboriginal existence” (Mudrooroo, 209).
The Aboriginal people’s affinity with the land and their aspirations in relation to sovereignty are issues which Mudrooroo addresses throughout his work. In *Us Mob*, for example, he discusses the limitations of the *Native Title Act* of 1993 and implies that the problems associated with Aboriginal land rights are far from over:

in spite of all the uproar it aroused, on the whole [the Act] benefits only a small minority of Indigenous people who can prove a continuing association with the land or whose claims are uncontested. This leaves a considerable majority who have [sic] no chance to claim, or gain, Native Title. (Mudrooroo, 227)

Sometime later, amidst mounting pressure for him to show his Indigenous status through descent or attachment to place as demanded of others, Mudrooroo appears to contradict this earlier contention. As though consciously re-positioning himself, he writes:

I have done my part in the Aboriginal struggle and, now that native title has been established in law, there is really nothing left to fight for, especially when I do not intend to pursue an Aboriginal identity merely for the sake of claiming a piece of land. (Mudrooroo, 264)
Mudrooroo goes on to propose that the concept of Aboriginal affinity with the land is spurious and open to debate. He suggests that the notion is part of white Australia’s homogeneous construction of the meaning of Aboriginality and that:

all in all, such constructions do not come from Aboriginal people but from those Europeans who want their pet Other to be constructed as The Aboriginal, which includes a spirituality and an affinity to the land and environment.

(Mudrooroo, 265-66)

It is true that the importance of the land to Australia’s Indigenous peoples plays a large part in the identity-shaping narratives of the colonising culture. But it is also true that a view held commonly by the majority, if not all those who identify as Aboriginal Australians, is the right to own and to occupy land as a precondition for both the development of material and the preservation of cultural needs.

The reality of colonialism and the clash of cultures it involves means that in various ways and degrees, the intertwining of social structures is inevitable. Michael Dodson puts it well when he states that Indigenous peoples are never entirely “free from the influence of non-Indigenous societies” (Dodson, 1994, 5). Such influences are evident throughout Mudrooroo’s writing, a clear example being the legend of the Cat and the Crow. The story is told by an Aboriginal elder, who is described as “a
magic man – as old as the sky” (Mudrooroo, 35) and whom the protagonist recalls from his childhood past. In the closing pages of the narrative, a marvellously telling sequence occurs when a crushed contemporary spirit collides with another whose traditional spirituality is beyond measure – a magical counterweight to white power. “You need a spell. I got a camp over there” (Mudrooroo, 120), the old man says – a play on words that is vintage Mudrooroo. The old rabbiter’s incantation integrates the spiritual world of Aboriginal mythology and the material world of the outlawed character to become the ‘stuff’ of dreams – “I have remembered the dream. It has been in some secret part of my mind to which he has given me the key” (Mudrooroo, 127).

In many ways, *Wild Cat Falling* is a novel about the power inherent in naming and, in particular, the possibilities that attend the search for identity when names are either absent or imposed. Perhaps not surprisingly then, the ‘secret’ identity of the unnamed protagonist is finally ‘authenticated’ by the Elder’s utterance. In an emotional moment of naming, the hero finally escapes the realm of anonymity and enters the world of his Noongar mother, to become knowable as “Jessie Duggan’s boy” (Mudrooroo, 121). An ironic mix of the biblical, the Irish and the colonial, this name reflects self-consciously, the education and social indoctrination of the author’s Clontarf days(In light of the author’s interest
in naming, it is perhaps worth noting that ‘Jessie’ is a feminised derivative of the biblical ‘Jesse’, an ancestor of the House of David. As Jesse was David’s father, it was the custom of medieval artists to represent the genealogy of Jesus as beginning from him. Moreover, as is well known, ‘Duggan’ is the name ascribed to the legendary ‘wild colonial boy’). The novel closes on an ambiguous note that calls attention to the estranged nature of Aboriginal existence whilst also suggesting the Wildcat character “might know just a little how to live” (Mudrooroo, 130). As he seeks to grasp some sense of belonging, there is a sense that Mudrooroo’s protagonist needs to re-order his life if he is to move forward. Having reassuringly found the key to his Aboriginality in his dream, he remains powerless to escape the material reality of his marginalised social position, but is not devoid of hope when he is arrested and returned to a prison cell. The importance of this scene lies not simply in its cultural relevance but may also be read as a reflexive comment on the author’s efforts to escape the entrapment of western narrative conventions. It reflects the paradox of Mudrooroo’s ultimate dependency on an ‘alien’ mode of representation, the precise nature of which offers a fundamental tool of opportunity for the manner and production of his counter-narrative exploration of the literary landscape. The imaginary, unnamed ‘author’ of *Wild Cat Falling* returns to the same hostile territory some twenty-three years later in *Doin Wildcat: A*
*Novel Koori Script*, which the author published under the pseudonym, Mudrooroo Narogin.

The story both intrudes upon and unsettles the representations of past events as recorded in the antecedent text, but is a continuation of the Wildcat trilogy project nevertheless. In her study of *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony*, Leigh Gilmore argues that:

> For many writers, autobiography’s domain of first-person particularities and peculiarities offers an opportunity to describe their lives and their thoughts about it; to offer, in some cases, corrective readings and to emerge through writing as an agent of self-representation, a figure textual to be sure but seemingly substantial, who can claim “I was there”.

(Gilmore, 2001, 9)

Although these books are not autobiographies, *Doin Wildcat* offers a ‘corrective’ reading of its predecessor and points directly to a consolidation of identity between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ protagonist. The meanings and ideas of the previous narrative are reproduced anew for a different audience in a different context, space and time. Readers’ attention is focused on the function of thought, of ‘personal’ history and the dream-like quality of life. Self and memory are interlocked as the Wildcat hero is shown to have changed as a result of his experiences in the many
intervening years. His is very much a subjective account of past events that is open to interpretation and questioning – just one version of the representation of reality among others.

There is never any doubt that the character is the same as the one who ‘lived’ through the events of *Wild Cat Falling*. In a move that returns readers to the earlier text, much like his creator, the unnamed protagonist’s memories remain inextricably linked to the experience of institutionalisation. Such memories have altered with the passage of time but they continue to define the character’s identity – a reminder that the conscious self is a paradox – an ever-shifting story between socially imposed trauma and the mercurial nature of the mind. Narrating from the remove of later adulthood, a more subdued but still headstrong protagonist exemplifies the concept of the autobiographical self as “the subject of its own representation” (Gilmore, 2001, 9) when he says:

They put yuh in these little rooms an then after a time, too long a time, they take yuh out, an yuh’re changed, all different inside. That’s what they did to me. They locked me away in this tiny cell, left me for a month an then came an took a new me out. A quieter an more passive me; a meaner an nastier me too. Well, fuck em, I say! (18)
Since *Doin Wildcat* tells the story of the script writing for the production of a film based on *Wild Cat Falling*, the former may be read as both a parody and a deconstruction of the latter. To borrow a concept from Simon Dentith, *Doin Wildcat* “holds up a mirror to its own fictional practices so that it is at once a fiction and a fiction *about* fiction” (Dentith, 2000, 14). The book thus engages with the notion that writing (language) in all its forms cannot precisely mirror the world. Simultaneously, the text reveals that, in reality, we are all bound to and by the rhetorical powers of persuasion that language holds. In the course of the narrative, the imaginary author calls into question the assumed ‘truths’ of the first tale, a strategy which both questions the authority of authorship and draws attention to the constructed nature of all literary texts, whether autobiographical, fictional or historical. As Mudrooroo has it, history “is the past reconstructed for an ever-increasing series of presents.

Its importance lies not in its exposition of ‘truth’ but as a device which orders society and gives meaning to a collectivity” (Mudrooroo, 175). However, there is nothing reverential in the character’s futuristic return to a past reality that revives feelings he would rather forget:

….. fuck it, this ol place is givin me the shits, givin me all those feelins that ave just lain inside of me ready to take old.

Yuh know, they weren’t content to buy me books, get me to
write the script an all that, but I ave to be invited to me ol prison ome of many long years – some ome – an now to be a ome for no one any more, except this filim mob taking advantage to do a little time. (Narogin, 1988b, 4)

Throughout the ‘re-makes’ of his story, the Wildcat character once again travels through different senses of reality over both time and space to unearth the elusive fragments of his memory. The turning points in his complex personal history are explored along the way – the separation from his mother, institutionalisation, imprisonment, then release with “no one [and nowhere] to go to” (Narogin, 1988b, 83) and his ultimate return ‘inside’.

Much like any other community of different minds and ways of belonging, Aboriginal culture has its own tensions related to the meaning of freedom and identity. The character’s experiences are imaginary personal accounts, but they act as metaphorical signifiers for the fluctuating fortunes of a once sovereign, Indigenous collectivity. The Wildcat figure remains nameless. The structure of his identity is a meaningless paradox in the broader social domain where his external and internal self is recognised and judged by the colour of his skin – the signifying label for Aboriginality in Australia. As a man of colour, the character is situated outside the realm of the dominant discourse.
Paradoxically, however, he is central to the discriminating narrative codes that precede and construct him. But he is also at the centre of Mudrooroo’s story – his imaginary ‘life’ the kernel of a work of art. The Aboriginal character is recognisable by how he is interpolated in social discourse, but also by virtue of the author writing about him once again and, by association, about himself in a discrete mode of narrative self-reconstruction. For when Mudrooroo brings his nameless Wildcat character ‘back from the dead’, he also writes a form of self-memorial, or resurrection, that lends substance to an earlier personal investment in the determination of his Aboriginal identity.

As indicated earlier, from its beginnings, fascination with names and naming practices are a signature of Mudrooroo’s life and literary project. The historicised character in *Doin Wildcat* speaks from a number of different positions, but he is never identified by a fixed title that may ‘territorialise’ or limit the meaning of who he is or where he belongs. To be without a name implies illegitimacy, displacement and marginalisation, but it is to remain undefined and unfettered – a move which positions the protagonist outside social norms and practices. In terms of the naming and claiming practices of Australia’s colonial history, Aboriginal identity is a point of reference for the system of naming – of imposition – itself. Mudrooroo answers his own question when he asks: “What after all is an
Indigenous Australian, a person of many names, too many of which have been unwarrantably imposed. To name is not only to define but to own” (Mudrooroo, 11). The practice of ‘naming and claiming’ whether applied to regions, to streets or to individuals, constitutes a demoralizing form of dislocation and exile. It is a way of re-ordering the world, of setting up new lines of demarcation between peoples, be they social, cultural or geographical in the re-construction of Australian identity and belonging.

In the light of recent recuperation of the term ‘black’ from its place in a historical system of negative equivalents, it is significant that, throughout the trilogy, the nameless character is the wearer of dark, 1960s-style ‘bodgie’ clothing. Healy observes that in the creation of his Wildcat character, Mudrooroo “steals an interesting set of shapes that had for nearly two hundred years in Australia remained invisible: the colour black, the country black, the predicament black in a very white difficult Australia” (Healy, 1991, 23). What the protagonist wears acts as an accessory in the self-construction of his identity as someone (and something) other than what he is and as a reminder of the prejudicial social conditions which black Australians generally continue to endure. The clothing is at once a symbol of communication with, and a protection against the ramifications of an unsought, if likely, engagement with the ‘light’—with white Australia. The character belongs and enjoys reprieve in
the dark, a thing the white man fears. In the day, he feels naked and cast out (Mudrooroo, 61, 82).

The predominance of the idiomatic language of the bohemian beatnik in *Wild Cat Falling*, shifts to a form of Aboriginal English in *Doin Wildcat* which, after *Master of the Ghost Dreaming*, Mudrooroo has described as his “most Aboriginal text” (Shoemaker, 42, 1993b). Ostensibly, the dominance of colloquial discourse enables the hero to tell his story in a way more readily identifiable and understood by the Aboriginal community and promotes a notion of cross-cultural involvement. But the gesture may also be read as providing an illusion of intimacy and compliance with the needs of Aboriginal readers – one that is closed rather than open to expressions of diversity. Mudrooroo transforms orality into a ‘bastard’ English language structure in which letters are often omitted from or added to the words he writes. This assumes a black and a white readership sufficiently sophisticated to negotiate a ‘translation’ of a mode of representation which, effectively, ‘standardises’ contemporary Aboriginal speech patterns and denies difference. As MacGregor argues:

Mudrooroo’s counter-discourse does not leave room for the inclusion of difference so that an Aboriginal writer can use Koori English and/or Received English. Mudrooroo […] homogenizes Aboriginal discourse and denies the possibility

As noted earlier, in his 1992 introduction to Wild Cat Falling, Stephen Muecke observes that at the time Mudrooroo’s first novel was produced, the author took confidence in the idea of his beatnik hero as a kind of outcast from society with whom he could identify. However, the ‘bodgie’ or beatnik-style clothing the character prefers and in which he feels ‘comfortable’, could also be read as the outward manifestation of an inward desire to belong in 1960s white society. The appropriation of bodgie fashion by adolescents – the discourses of delinquency, deviance and resistance to authority it represents – is predominantly understood as a white form of protest against their own kind of social victimisation. Spurred on by the Beatles ‘invasion’ of that era, bonds were forged within white, working class groups through the expression of particular forms of dress, hairstyles and language. The appropriation of these fashions by the Wildcat figure also suggests, however, that “to be born black in Australia is to be born powerless, to be born into the negativities of blackness” (Mudrooroo, 174) as set by the assimilation rules of white Australian culture. There is no simple answer to these contradictions. As Marcia Langton notes, in the Australian context, such inconsistencies constitute a layering of historical cultural practices which have the potential to make it
“hard to locate Aborigines on any level, least of all in person” (Langton, 1993, 24) or in terms of the legitimacy of Aboriginal belonging.

Langton further suggests that “‘Aboriginality’ […] is a field of intersubjectivity in that it is remade over and over again in a process of dialogue, of imagination, of representation and interpretation” (Langton, 1993, 33). It is of some consequence that, on the cover of the 1988 edition of *Doin Wildcat*, there appears the image of a defiant wildcat. The cat is touched by the passive glow of the moon, a symbol of Aboriginal identity which, like the moon itself, continues to suffer regular modifications to its shape. As personified by the protagonist, however, the black wildcat with which he identifies also exemplifies the strengthening of an almost destroyed culture. As Mudrooroo states, in their “urge for self-determination and self-management” (Mudrooroo, 107), Australia’s Indigenous people are in process of cultural reconstruction. They are sorting through the debris of the past and flinging away the memories they no longer need as a means of remembering a forgotten way home. For *Doin Wildcat*’s hero, this is a matter of priority not for white, but for black Australians:

[this is] nothin to do with yuh [white Australia], only ow suddenly yuh start to grow up, what’s the word, mature an yuh start to sort through yer past, an fling away what yuh
don’t need any more…. Yuh can’t carry the weight of the world on yer shoulders forever, an then some of the things I done, I done cause of me, not cause of the world. (Narogin, 1988b, 82)

As suggested in the opening remarks to this chapter, the existence of a single, Western based model of the nature and construction of the world is language-dependent and ideologically determined. In Foucauldian terms, that model’s concepts are intimately connected to the discourses and forms of knowledge to be found in narrative texts, whether literary or historical. Both are informed by definite, discursive rules that create meaning and ‘authorise’ their ‘truths’. Foucault writes:

we are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth. This is the case for every society, but I believe that in ours the relationship between power, right and truth is organised in a highly specific fashion. (Foucault, 1980, 93)

In their telling and re-telling, the ‘truths’ of the Wildcat stories create a picture of an Aboriginal reality lost along the way, the narrative of a different past once lived by Indigenous Australians with a different set of rules of being and belonging in the world. That way of life, whatever it may have once been, has ended. It has been transformed into something
other than itself. White society took Wildcat’s memory and, by implication, the history of his people, changed it and made it its own. As he says: “It’s is story, after all” (Narogin, 1988b, 105). “Yuh never can tell ow it’ll turn out when they get through with it. It might be like this an then again it mightn’t. I ain’t got any control over it” (Narogin, 1988b, 43). The re-constituted character now has a more suspicious way of relating to the world in which he finds himself. His confronting dialogue prompts a questioning of the means by which historical narrative is constructed and verified by those who control the means of its production. It is also a reflective comment on the pressures put upon non-white writers to submit to producing texts that are expected to conform to mainstream dictates. In Mudrooroo’s words: “these dictates are pushed by white researchers onto us so that we acquiesce in producing texts which in effect support the ideologies and mechanisms of oppression characteristic of conquest and colonization”. (Mudrooroo, 140)

The lapses and embellishments of memory that surface in *Doin Wild Cat* make no claim to an objective access to history or to a single ‘truth’. To borrow a concept from Hodge and Mishra, the author’s agenda “arises out of the present as it interrogates the past, shaped by [his] understanding of current issues and debates about the social and political forces that have converged” (Hodge and Mishra, 1990, 6). As the Wildcat figure says:
It’s not the right peter, but then what is the right peter for what never appened, though it appened in the book an’ll appen in the filim. Any cell’l do for that tea bucket thing, that wish thing […] Given im enough time to glance up an get the burnin liquid full in the mush […] But it never appened, never appened like that. I never done it to him. Only gammon, a lie. (Narogin, 1988b, 19-20)

The protagonist’s confession that he had written about something that never happened at all symbolises the systematic whitewash of the ‘officially’ recorded sequence of events of Australia’s colonial past and involves the remembrance of the loss of a sense of pride. His admission may be read as a comment on the self-vilification processes inherent in Australia’s assimilation policy whereby Indigenous people were made to feel ashamed of their culture and heritage and denied it as a consequence (This issue is addressed with great sensitivity in Sally Morgan’s novel, My Place, in which the author shares with her readers the wont of her grandmother, Daisy, to deny both her Aboriginality and past experiences as a victim of Australia’s assimilation policy). On another level, the narrator modifies the ‘tea throwing’ scene between Wild Cat Falling and Doin Wildcat to show that writers of history or autobiography are no less immune from social demands and conventions than are writers of fictional texts. All are artists who “want to play the ero in their own little drama”
but, unavoidably, each must work within the subjective parameters of a given social reality when re-defining and re-presenting past circumstances and events.

The inner conflict shared by many Aboriginal people means they have little option but to engage in at least two versions of social reality – one that corresponds to a desire to challenge authority and another that understands the grim consequences of acting on such a wish. *Doin Wildcat*’s protagonist literalises that conflict in the following passage:

> We ad eard those scary tales of blokes getting bashed up in the punishment block. Thud, thud of fists sodden onto armless flesh. If I ad’ve really dropped the tea on that screw, it would’ve been me for sure – thud, thud, sodden flesh shudderin under fists and boots. (Narogin, 1988b, 15-16)

Underpinning this dilemma are at least two dimensions of reality that function as ‘truth’, neither of which limits the character to a single system. Rather, each plays with the mind in ways that work to contain him within the rules and behaviours that (re)produce the system itself. The narrator’s sense of the real is clearly attuned to the instincts necessary for his survival in prison – a distinctively hierarchical community controlled by a master and slave mentality that echoes the reality beyond prison walls. As he puts it, “the social classes are rigid here. Screws [are] the contemptible masters, tough cons the bosses next in line, stool pigeons the
outcasts. In the case of Mudrooroo’s young hero, the wish to make his mark and avoid meaningless existence within a “formless mass”, translates into moments of wished-for, but perhaps imagined, bravado. The outcome of the tea throwing event that either did or did not happen is fourteen days (not) spent by the protagonist in solitary confinement in which “memories and nightmares haunted him until he hardly knew which was which” (Mudrooroo, 8). By the end of this punishment, real or otherwise, the paradox of life in a prison environment had become integral both to his self-construction and to his self-disintegration. As he puts it: “this atmosphere got me down when I first came in but now it had become part of me. I became emptiness gas-filled with the grey cloud. After solitary the prison accepted me as I had never been accepted outside. I belonged” (Mudrooroo, 15). In other words, the character is completely institutionalized. Prison is the site that defines his sense of self and place and where he feels he “was nearer belonging than anywhere” (Mudrooroo, 118).

The heavy reliance on memory and feelings in *Doin Wildcat* suggests that the truth-revealing capacity of the senses are at work both to explore and to legitimate the hero’s right to inhabit a certain cultural space. For the protagonist, “only feelins are true – feelins is all that matters” (Narogin, 1988b, 5, 14). Writing later in *A Dialogue on Indigenous*
Identity: Warts ‘n’ All, Darlene Oxenham and others use the word ‘kindredness’ to describe an intuitive ‘knowing and feeling’ that [they] believe exists amongst and between Aboriginal people – it is a shared ‘feeling’ in the course of interactions and form of recognition of other (unknown) Aboriginal people. (Oxenham et al, 1999, 72)

Perhaps this explains, at least to some extent, why it is that ‘feelings’ and numerous derivatives of that word are repeated and elaborated upon throughout Doin Wildcat. Oxenham and others also propose however, that the “fundamental determinant of ‘Aboriginal’ is [biological] descent and [stress] the need to prove identity through descent” as a means of providing certainty in today’s political climate (Oxenham et al, 1999, xiv). They go on to argue, however, that whilst there are as many different and complex ways of belonging as Aboriginals as there are for non-Aboriginal Australians, although invisible and unable to be proven, an inherent sense of ‘kindredness’ nevertheless provides a common link between Indigenous people.

The different pictures the Wildcat character now carries in his mind of his time in ‘Freo’ bear no relation to reality and have become illusions. The Fremantle prison of his memory ‘lives’ on only “in [his] novel and now in the script, it lives on more or less a part of [him]” (Narogin, 1988b, 28). It is the writing down of the story of the events of prison life that
makes it real, not the ‘truth’ of the writing or the physical existence of the gaol itself. What was once ‘real’ to him – the distinction between the imaginary and the real – has been erased and is no longer what it used to be, leading him to ask:

whereas all that ugeness gone; where as all that cavernous space vanished to? Where but into those years I ad added on to me youth. The prison was built in the 1880’s an it is small an cramped an narrow, never uge an spacious. But if it once ad seemed to me, then ow small I must’ve bin; ow small to have found agoraphobia in this claustrophobia. (Narogin, 1988b, 18)

Publication of *Doin Wildcat* was followed four years later by the final installment of the trilogy, *Wildcat Screaming*. Once again, *Wildcat Screaming* reaches back to the beginning, that is to say, to *Wild Cat Falling*, to tell the story of the protagonist’s experiences during his long-term imprisonment for the shooting and wounding of a police officer. This time, however, the character calls himself ‘Wildcat’ (Mudrooroo, 117) and prison has become “the land of the living dead” (Mudrooroo, 134) – a place where “the dead walk” (Mudrooroo, 10). Such descriptives allow a glimpse of the author’s interest in the vampiric – one that he develops more fully in subsequent texts.
At age 19, Wildcat is “now an old lag, moved up into the world, become an adult and made it to the main (prison) yard” (Mudrooroo, 1992) *Wildcat Screaming*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 18. All further references will be to this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text). His ‘hot’ feelings and memories are left behind as the author departs from *Doin Wildcat*’s idiomatic speech and experiments with a narrative voice that reproduces the tropes of Aboriginal oral tradition. *Wildcat Screaming* reverts to the ‘cold’ language of *Wild Cat Falling* with a realist narrative form and biting satire that are well suited to the novel’s indictment of the judicial practices of white Australia and the influence of the media on such practices.

In the early 1990s, the media of the day produced racist discourses from which emerged imaginary constructions of Aboriginal identity as ‘naturally’ recidivist. As Paul Sheiner notes, some of the most powerful images in the *West Australian*, for example, focused on:

the young male urban Aboriginal, exploiting a fear that was already powerfully linked to youth discourse in Australia, easily accessed and worked into stories about crime. Along with the sociological or mood piece, this type of writing created the scenery or background on which the more specific
Janaiah 175

picture of the violent, recidivist car thief was drawn. (Sheiner, 256, 1993)

Fanned by those media reports, a perceived increase in the level of violence and crime in urban centres generally was connected to young Aboriginals in particular. Such practices became a racialised “process of judging a person rather than punishing a particular action” (Sheiner, 1993, 257). Mudrooroo was to suggest some years later that similar practices had been in place “from the beginning of the invasion, and at present the gap seems to have widened in spite of all the talk about reconciliation” (Mudrooroo, 11).

While feelings and memories, particularly those relating to injustice, are important, it is the hard ‘reality’ of British law upon which Australian society is based. Colonialism’s institutional discourses consist of all the cultural baggage needed to support and maintain a system of domination. Such discourses impose subject positions that instil a sense of dislocation that is experienced as a daily reality by Indigenous and non-indigenous Australians alike. In a diverse society such as Australia, peoples’ realities and ways of belonging have been formed and transformed both socially and historically by the discourses of European colonialism. The relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures has moved
through various enunciative modalities of ‘protection’ and ‘assimilation’ to arrive at the current regime of ‘welfare’ colonialism.

The dependency characteristics of colonised societies, such as Australia, constitute a ‘progressive’ re-ordering of an historically-produced, imaginary reality to meet the continuing racist social formations of nation building that exist today. These characteristics manifest themselves in many young Aboriginals who find themselves in an ambiguous in-between social and cultural position – belonging to a nation within a nation in which they are never free. Often socially excluded and stripped of everything that makes them what they are, they “live all alone […] in a jail within a jail” (Narogin, 1988b, 71) and often leave one kind of prison only to enter another (Mudrooroo, 14). The result is: “not to ave bin in trouble is what [they] don’t know about, just as they don’t know ow to set about livin a normal life an never feelin the need to be constantly on guard” (Narogin, 1988b, 12).

Adam Shoemaker observes that *Wildcat Screaming* is “explicitly based upon the British philosopher Jeremy Bentham’s concept of the ‘Panopticon’ which allows for the surveillance of many by very few” (Shoemaker, 1993a, 117). In his *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault notes that the architecture of Bentham’s ‘Panopticon’ is such that cells become “like so many cages, so many small theatres, in
which each actor is alone, perfectly individualised and constantly visible” (Foucault, 1979, 200). Foucault goes on to argue that, for the prison inmate, such “visibility is a trap […] He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication” (Foucault, 1979, 200), a descriptive that fits precisely, the colonised subject. For Foucault, the prisoner is a pawn in the “automatic functioning of power” – constrained by “the principle of his own subjection” (Foucault, 1979, 203).

Little needs to be said about the power relations existing inside Mudrooroo’s fictional prison – about the insupportable inequities of racial prejudice which reflect the social reality beyond its walls. Shoemaker has covered this aspect well in his Mudrooroo: A Critical Study. The huge discrepancy between the sizes of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations in Australia means, however, that this particular ‘reality’ translates to the surveillance of the few by the many. In Mudrooroo’s authorial discourse, however, the narrator of the Wildcat Trilogy is represented as the observer, not the observed – the ‘only one’ who reflects, comments on and adds to a previous version of his past experiences. Once again, Wildcat remembers the events of the past differently – or excuses lapses of memory – and also provides an innovative interpretation of the ‘materiality’ of the fictional characters, actions and events of his long term in prison. Along the way, he reveals certain details of his family
background that appear to converge on the author’s personal experience. For example, much like his creator, Wildcat cannot recall his father (Mudrooroo, 9). Over the course of the narrative, readers also learn that Wildcat’s great-grandfather, “was at the battle of Pinjarra” (Mudrooroo, 8-9, 135, 137), a ‘fact’ which finds resonance in the backgrounds of both the author and his fictional character (The author’s great-great grandfather was involved in events that led to the so-called battle of Pinjarra. The actual event is discussed in Chapter VIII).

For the first time, readers are introduced to the character Robbi Singh. Singh, who is portrayed as Wildcat’s fellow inmate and the prison ‘librarian’, is perhaps the novel’s most interesting character. Singh is the mastermind behind the money-making scheme upon which the novel depends for its ability to sustain narrative momentum. However, Singh and his game, the rules of which are described below, are also the Catalysts for the introduction of the Aboriginal Detective, Watson Holmes Jackamara – a character who ‘reappears’ in The Kwinkan.

In Screaming Jackamara is portrayed as an ex-army man turned detective (Mudrooroo, 91). He has “a keen mind and thirst for adventure” (Mudrooroo, 95) and takes his place among the author’s growing list of Aboriginal heroes, both historical and modern. Jackamara’s role is to infiltrate the prison system, investigate and untangle the workings of Robbi
Singh’s Panopticon Prison Reform Society. The Society “has been set up from within the prison with active support and connivance by a senior officer in the penal service” (Mudrooroo, 92), a move that gestures towards the corruption that exists both inside and outside prison walls.

In Mudrooroo’s discourse of racialised persecution, the reality that surveillance is now a central aspect of Western society becomes the basis of a game that is well organised and contains an anarchical element involving a desire for wealth among those who have nothing to lose and everything to gain. Shoemaker outlines the rules of the game, which operates under the ironic auspices of the “Panopticon Prison Reform Society”, as follows:

By purchasing ‘a cell’ for 150 pounds, investors have the opportunity to earn 1200 pounds when they rise through the ranks to the exalted position of ‘Seer’. At the same time, new convicts have to be fed into the system and existing prisoners are ‘reformed’ by taking on greater positions of responsibility, such as ‘Warder’ or ‘Chaplain’ [...] The prison becomes a blatant capitalist scam as the worst time-share or pyramid-selling venture. (Shoemaker, 1993a, 118-19).

The irony of Mudrooroo’s ‘Panopticon’ game is that its rules demand that the game itself operate as a form of tracking device. Moreover, it defines a
specific line of behaviour operating among the imaginary prison inmates, which draws upon the reality that credibility comes with affluence and power. Whilst surveillance permeates everything and its influence is far from neutral, so too does the consumerist mentality upon which Western capitalism is based.

An analogy may be drawn here between articulations of colonial disciplinary power, the economics of publishing, and the emergence of a realist narrative form of literature that reproduces colonialism’s discourses of control. Ideas of the real are constructed in and through forms of representation that are relative only to who is in charge. The fabrication of ‘truth’ remains the business of the would-be-dominant mythographers whose own realities are merely a reflection of inherited opinion. Understanding well the role of writing in the production of knowledge, the discourses of authority maintain a form of surveillance over the work of minority writers such as Mudrooroo, containing new forms of reality wherever possible within the boundaries of western literary tradition. The author has his Wildcat character connect the act of writing to the need/will to survive in a way that implies cultural compromise on his part. However, it is with a measure of cunning that in doing so he escapes the tyranny of a dominant white culture that would ‘write’ his life both within and without prison walls:
that book was me ticket to the outside, bradda. It ad to please em, so the endin was an appy one for em. Little Jacky so sorry for shootin the policeman – well Jacky was sorry cause ee was in Freo for an eternity an a day. So ee wrote that book, nice white social workers elped im, […] an the book got written, then published […] There aint many ways to skin a rabbit, but I found one and used it […] Rabbits ave to find a way to live too! (Narogin, 1988b, 113)

Perhaps it is in the yet-to-be-told stories of the past, present and future where Mudrooroo sees a glimmer of hope that the Aboriginal people may gain control of their own lives, realities and memories. Of course one might argue that these are only stories. Yet stories have the potential to become memories, memories history, history ‘reality’ – and reality whether authentic or inauthentic, has the capacity to produce the human circumstances of belonging in the world. In ever-changing socio-temporal space, to borrow Catherine Zuckert’s words, “human existence is not historically determined. On the contrary, human beings live historically for the same reason […] that they consequently became concernfully engaged with the people and things in the world around them” (Zuckert, 1996, 46). Suggesting that new realities have the potential to come into being by investigating what remains concealed by the so-called ‘truths’ of a dominant culture, Zuckert invokes: “the orginal Greek understanding of
truth as *a-lêtheia*, literally, that which emerges from oblivion or concealment [...] to contain an implicit recognition of an intrinsic relation between disclosure or revelation and its concealed source.” (Zuckert, 1996, 47)

Whilst there is an inherent connection between the three Wildcat texts, the ‘facts’ disclosed in the first are contradicted by those revealed in the second to illustrate how the remembered actions and feelings of Mudrooroo’s protagonist take place within a field of black/white power relations. The tea-throwing incident discussed above, for example, comes immediately to mind as a fine example of how certain ‘remembered’ episodes can be propelled by a wish to respond positively to an abusive situation. The third volume of the trilogy offers a version of reality that had previously been concealed in both. The probation officer who tells the protagonist “you should be all right. I’ll be behind you all the time” (Mudrooroo, 100) in *Falling*, for example, is later recognisable as the ‘same’ Mr. Robinson who betrays him in *Doin* – the one who “wouldn’telp [im] if [ee] was dyin” (Narogin, 1988b, 90). (Metaphorically at least, the figure is also recognisable as the ‘Mr. Robinson’ of Mudrooroo’s later work, someone who also betrays those he is charged to protect.)

The trilogy is open-ended to suggest a history without stable direction, ‘truth’ or intelligibility. A characteristic of the Wildcat hero’s
reality is that he lives in a hostile world that is beyond his control, its ‘truths’ determined and brought into being by ambiguous words that neither mean what they say, nor say what they mean. In a discursively produced world that pretends to be real, Mudrooroo’s Wildcat Trilogy shows that people’s realities vary over time; that they are indeterminate, open to interpretation and live in the eyes and mind of the writer and the reader. The books raise mystifying, possibly irresolvable questions relating to non-white realities, the answers to which may ultimately be beyond the grasp of colonial thought. They also open the road to a form of artistic freedom in which prevailing writing styles are juggled nimbly, as are concepts of past, present and future remembering. Moreover, the author’s narrative strategy gives the illusory sense that dreams and memories seductively reproduce themselves as different, yet remain somehow familiar when encountered once more in some later time and space.

Dominant Australian narratives have, historically, either written out Aboriginal people completely from the social landscape or, at best, inserted them as interesting background material against which to fabricate the national identity. Mudrooroo’s Wildcat Trilogy clearly defies this practice and is remarkable for the way in which, without compromise, a displaced Aboriginal youth takes centre stage. The author’s Aboriginal hero ‘belongs’ as a dominant force within a written discourse that has
operated not only to marginalize, but also to exclude him from the advantages Australian society has to offer – his fictional story intimately connected with the reality of the author’s own.

Whilst never abandoning the autobiographical mode of expression completely, the author moves away from his tendency to write himself into his fiction in his experimental novel, *Long Live Sandawara*. Glimmers of self-representation are certainly identifiable in *Sandawara* but more particularly, the book extends Mudrooroo’s desire to increase the visibility of Aboriginal peoples in Australia’s various mythologies of nation building. The novel, which is the subject of the next chapter, mixes past with present as the author strives to find a different, more dramatic, means to express the tragic events of Australia’s white history. Along the way, Mudrooroo insists that it is from such tragedies that modern day catastrophic realities of Aboriginal life and death have sprung.