1992

Towards a Hybrid Discourse: The Poetry of Mudrooroo

Justin MacGregor

Follow this and additional works at: https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi

Recommended Citation

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au
Towards a Hybrid Discourse: The Poetry of Mudrooroo

Abstract
The Song Circle of Jacky and Dalwurra: The Black Bittern are probably Mudrooroo’s most successful post-colonial works. In the texts he produces a form and a content that do not subsume or marginalize an/Other; instead he liberates his writing from colonial discourse and generates a hybrid form that accepts and inscribes difference. While there may be some minor slippages in language and form that repeat the marginalization of colonial discourse, both texts produce a hybrid discourse that includes Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals, escapes the vortex of the Manichean Allegory and undermines binary classifications. The Song Circle of Jacky and Dalwurra produce a hybrid discourse that combines two distinct archives, the Aboriginal and the non-Aboriginal, by speaking from the space where European and Aboriginal discourses ‘spill into each other’. 1

This serial is available in Kunapipi: https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol14/iss1/6
only cut and pasted, throwing out ‘stories that kind of went off on tangents’ (p. 108). The narratives of the different informants were different in essential ways, however, and had to be handled differently: ‘In Mum’s case, because she’s so articulate, virtually what is written is what she said, word for word. She wrote her own story, and I just put it together. But with my grandmother, sometimes I would ask her a question, and older Aboriginal people will answer you, but not always verbally. ... So I had to decide, do I include this or do I leave it out. ... but I think what I learned when I was writing it was that you don’t have to be explicit to say something’ (pp. 108-9).


JUSTIN MACGREGOR

Towards a Hybrid Discourse: The Poetry of Mudrooroo

The Song Circle of Jacky and Dalwurra: The Black Bittern are probably Mudrooroo’s most successful post-colonial works. In the texts he produces a form and a content that do not subsume or marginalize an/Other; instead he liberates his writing from colonial discourse and generates a hybrid form that accepts and inscribes difference. While there may be some minor slippages in language and form that repeat the marginalization of colonial discourse, both texts produce a hybrid discourse that includes Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals, escapes the vortex of the Manichean Allegory and undermines binary classifications. The Song Circle of Jacky and Dalwurra produce a hybrid discourse that combines two distinct archives, the Aboriginal and the non-Aboriginal, by speaking from the space where European and Aboriginal discourses ‘spill into each other’.

The Song Circle of Jacky is probably Mudrooroo’s most political text in that it directly addresses contemporary Aboriginal concerns. In the thirty-five poems that comprise the song circle, Mudrooroo deals with the Aboriginal struggle for land reparations, the failure of the Australian government to negotiate fairly over Aboriginal rights, the pain of Aboriginal history, and the continuing oppression of Aboriginals by the majority
society. While the contents of the poems are overtly political, Mudrooroo also expresses his political concerns by producing a poetic discourse and language that are post-colonial.

The Song Circle of Jacky is a slight variation on traditional Aboriginal discourse: instead of producing an oral song circle he is producing a written one. The written poem circle is both a new and an older discourse: the Aboriginal totems are ancient but their inclusion in a written art form makes them new. Mudrooroo is merging Aboriginal oral poetry with non-Aboriginal written poetry so that he can speak to both groups at the same time, so that his poetry can become an example of the successful negotiation that can take place between the two groups. While Mudrooroo is concerned with the 'cultural oppression [of Aborignals] in contemporary Australia', he also wants to discover a means of perpetuating his cultural identity, a means of expressing his Aboriginality. Perhaps by (re)presenting Aboriginal suffering and pain to non-Aborignals, and by turning this anger into political action, Mudrooroo believes that this oppression can be overcome and finally rejected. While the poetry 'reveals, probes and shapes the landscapes of dispossession and denial', it also suggests that this landscape can belong to the past by creating a hybrid art form. However, the continuing oppression, imprisonment and rejection of Aboriginals by the Australian political system suggests that this hope may be in vain.

In the opening of his song circle Mudrooroo exposes the differences between European and Aboriginal conceptions of time. The first poem of the song circle locates Jacky, the Aboriginal figure that Mudrooroo uses as a kind of narrator, for the reader:

Jacky him been sit listening to the wind;
Jacky him been walk listening to the wind;
Jacky him been sit talking to the wind;
Jacky him been walk following the wind.

The tenses of these lines suggest a view of time that differs from that of the non-Aboriginal majority of Australia: tenses are played with and altered so that the relation of the present to the past is unclear. This alteration creates a place for an Aboriginal understanding of time as fluid, and the past as ever-present, within the framework of non-Aboriginal written poetry. As Mudrooroo has noted, '[i]n traditional [Aboriginal] society, the past, the remote dreaming past, spilt over into the present and served to shape the future'. In his song circle Mudrooroo's narrator, Jacky, has the past spill over into the present.

Despite Mudrooroo's desire to be 'faithful to his own experience as an Aborigine' he never forgets that most of his readers will probably be non-Aborignals. As a result of this situation, Mudrooroo uses the perceived strangeness and difference of Aboriginal culture as a means of engaging the non-Aboriginal reader. In 'Song One', Mudrooroo uses this perception
of Aboriginal culture by presenting the Aboriginal from the perspective of a European spectator:

Jacky’s features worn and craggy,  
The face of the cliff behind his place,  
Worn and fissured with the care of his race (Jacky, p. 11)

Some critics may argue that the problem with this description of an Aboriginal is that it can reinforce existing images of the indigene as noble, savage or simply ‘other’ to the European Eye/I; that the naturalistic imagery can also reinscribe stereotypes and subsume an Aboriginal perspective.  

However, Mudrooroo avoids this reinforcement by merging non-Aboriginal images of the Aboriginal with totems that are alien to the majority society. In ‘Song One’, he writes that Jacky was ‘Circumcised into the Rain Dream, born from the Lizard’ and speaks ‘Of the Frog Dream mated with the Dog’ (Jacky, p. 11). While most Aboriginals would be aware of such non-Aboriginal ideas as Heaven, Hell, the Crucifixion of Christ and the like, non-Aboriginals are not equally aware of Aboriginal symbols and referents. By mentioning the Frog Dream, the Rain Dream, the Lizard and the Dog, and by presenting the majority’s image of the Aboriginal, Mudrooroo draws attention to two poles of Australia; he produces a discourse that incorporates both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. When Mudrooroo writes ‘Jacky Jacky, he no fool; Jacky Jacky, he kurdaitcha man!’ (Jacky, p. 13), he is placing the differing perspectives of Jacky produced by these two poles of Australia opposite each other while containing them within the same line of poetry.

In order to include both poles of reference, Mudrooroo (re)presents Aboriginal pain and suffering to attack non-Aboriginal complacency over Aboriginal issues. Consequently, Mudrooroo’s poems detail many instances of Aboriginal oppression: he refers to the ‘wages of flour, sugar and tea, and women bought for a drink’ (Jacky, p. 11) that are a part of Aboriginal history; how the Australian government has only given Aboriginals ‘the right to die’ (Jacky, p. 19); how poverty has created a situation whereby Aboriginals can be found in ‘your jails’, in ‘dark doorway[s]’, at the location of a ‘screaming siren’, sleeping in a ‘grassless’ park, and ‘drinking life away’ (Jacky, pp. 35-6). Even the title of his text, The Song Circle of Jacky, draws attention to the marginalization of Aboriginals: ‘Jacky’ is a derogatory name used by non-Aboriginals to describe Aboriginals.  

These images can be analyzed to reinforce an interpretation of the Aboriginal as an alcoholic criminal or a prostitute who is responsible for his or her own fate; but Mudrooroo assigns blame to the non-Aboriginals who invaded Australia for the Aboriginal condition in the present day. He reminds the non-Aboriginal reader that ‘[w]e never surrendered, or sold to you’ and that Aboriginals are only dependent on ‘welfare cheques’ be-
cause they have never been compensated for the loss of their land (Jacky, p. 22). Only through reparations and the economic equality that these entail can Aboriginals end the cycle of oppression.

To avoid the marginalization of Aboriginals in his poetry Mudrooroo seeks to centre Aboriginal discourse. In ‘Song Twenty Six’, he insists upon the difference of Aboriginals, their values and their own constructions of reality:

This hooked throwing-stock of peninsular land,
Bunjil fashioned it.
With beak and claw he scored the earth,
The waters rose,
To enclose the shape,
For Eaglehawk to see
As he flew high.
Scattering,
To drift down upon the land,
The seedlings of the Bunurong,
To grow from earth as bird from nest.  (Jacky, p. 39)

This poem presents and centres an Aboriginal creation myth. The totems of Bunjil, Eaglehawk and Bunurong resist easy classification and interpretation because they are alien to non-Aboriginals. Thus, outside readers, ‘though not unsympathetic ... cannot read the obvious, cannot connect signifier and signified into sign’.9 The poetry allows non-Aboriginals to question why they are unable to connect signifier and signified into sign, why they are marginalized by the poems when Aboriginals are not, why they are now ‘othered’ while reading a song circle that (re)presents Jacky’s point of view. The poetry contains an answer to their question: because Aboriginal signs have been repressed and denied by the majority discourse.

By becoming ‘othered’ in this way, non-Aboriginals can begin to see themselves and their experience through the eyes of the ‘other’ that they have been ignoring and marginalizing, through the eyes of the Jacky they have been oppressing. Mudrooroo looks at the non-Aboriginal construction of the office and sees people sitting in ‘fat salary chairs,/Waiting for their superannuation couches’ (Jacky, p. 42) and, more importantly, he looks at non-Aboriginal Australians and reveals that they do not belong:

Many come from there,
Elsewhere,
Go on being Australian.
Aborigines pass a bottle,
Sort out kinship groupings,
How Jacky fits as a relative;
Whites go on and on,
A people a long way from home.  (Jacky, p. 17)
This poem inverts the post-colonial concern with place and displacement. In the poem the Aboriginals become the people who belong, who have a sense of place, while the non-Aboriginals become the people who are actually displaced, who do not belong. Later in the cycle Mudrooroo will go even further in his (re)placement of Aboriginals in Australia. In ‘Song Thirty-Four’, Mudrooroo is not only detailing many instances of oppression; much more important – particularly in regard to the decolonization of the indigenous mind – is the catharsis which Jacky undergoes. He returns to the source of his culture and thus actually becomes the geography of Australia so that his ‘flesh shivers with thousands of tracks and figures and signs’ (Jacky, p. 49). In this poem Jacky undergoes a transformation from alienation to a sense of belonging; he is returned to his centre. As Mudrooroo’s audience is primarily non-Aboriginal, however, this centring of Aboriginals as the landscape of Australia is not articulated in order to tell Aboriginals that their discourse is superior to that of non-Aboriginals; instead it is an attempt to tell non-Aboriginals that they need to alter their discourse to create a place in their society for the people they have displaced.

The nature of Mudrooroo’s hybrid poetic discourse is such that he recognizes how a homogenizing discourse that does not allow for heterogeneity is responsible for many of the problems faced by Aboriginals. Veronica Brady says that

Johnson is playing a game of hide and seek, not just with the enemy without, European culture, but with an enemy within, a self which is part accomplice in its own destruction, part antagonist to it, necessarily involved with a culture in which he finds no place save that of the outsider.10

Indeed, Mudrooroo is aware that many Aboriginals have forsaken their heritage and perpetuated their own destruction: he sees the ones that are part of the Australian government as people who ‘sit in Canberra town,/ Drinking whiskey and being neat,/ Air conditioned against the heat’ (Jacky, p. 42), because they can no longer stand their own heritage and its environment; he knows that far too many Aboriginal men send their wives ‘to modelling schools/ Where they learn how to hide their Koori legs’ (Jacky, p. 42), because they want their wives to look like white women; he is aware that many ‘passionate young men./Never having passed the manhood tests’, sit quietly in their homes (Jacky, p. 42); and that too many parents tell their children to ‘Stay out of shadows, try to appear white,/ Don’t show the darkness,/ Ever-present as your Aboriginality’ (Jacky, p. 38). While Brady believes that Mudrooroo is fighting an enemy within, a self that is partially culpable, I believe that Mudrooroo does not blame Aboriginals for their participation in their own destruction: Mudrooroo is aware that the majority discourse is responsible for these scenes, that this discourse has constructed the Aboriginal self as self-
defeating through devices such as the Manichean Allegory, through binary classifications.

While Mudrooroo’s poetry contains few of the ungrammaticalities that he sees as an integral component of Aboriginal writing,11 his poems do draw attention to the constructed and fallible nature of language and discourse. Mudrooroo ironically points out: ‘[t]hey call us terrorists, we – the terrified’ (Jacky, p. 28). The majority discourse uses labels to ‘other’ individuals who do not seek to perpetuate its definition of society; but people who are terrorists to the majority may actually be terrified to themselves, to the minority. Mudrooroo’s poetry shifts the perspective from the non-Aboriginal majority to that of the Aboriginal minority.

In the last few poems of The Song Circle of Jacky, Mudrooroo reveals his own belief that an incorporative, multicultural education will allow a hybrid discourse to exist. In ‘Song Thirty’, a young girl asks, ‘[w]hat’s a Naboriginal ... a Nunkanbah ... a Nembaluk ... an Unguru’ (Jacky, p. 43); she also tells her mother that her class heard an Aboriginal speaker who ‘[t]old us Captain Cook was bad,/ Only came to steal this land’, that ‘we had spoilt the ground,/ Said that time would condemn us for our crime’ and that because of this she is ‘too scared to cry,/ I don’t want our land to die’ (Jacky, p. 43). Whether the girl is Aboriginal or not is irrelevant; the important thing is that she is learning to question a monolithic and homogenizing discourse and to wonder if there are other interpretations of the world, other discourses that might also exist. The girl’s race does not matter so long as she has an understanding of the different cultures and perspectives that must negotiate to define Australia in the future. To Mudrooroo, this little girl is a reminder that ‘[t]he next generation’, whether Aboriginal or not, ‘is heavy’, that the world can ‘flower this spring’ (Jacky, p. 50) and become, once again, ‘[l]ifegiving earth’ instead of ‘deathgiving dirt’ (Jacky, p. 48). Through negotiation, a hybrid discourse like Mudrooroo’s song circle can come into existence and hopefully allow for heterogeneity and difference. Mudrooroo’s poetry casts Aboriginal discourse in non-traditional written forms in the hopes of making something new, something of both worlds, something hybrid.

One of the most interesting aspects of Mudrooroo’s Dalwurra: The Black Bittern is its very existence. Mudrooroo wrote a Bicentennial Gift Poem for Australia entitled ‘Sunlight Spreadeagles Perth in Blackness’ but he could not find a publisher for it in the year of the bicentenary.12 This particular poem, which is highly critical of various Australian institutions, became representative of the marginalization of Aboriginals. ‘Sunlight’ combines the cultural matrix of the Australian majority into a new structure; the poem takes what is known and recognized in order to look at it through other eyes: the deaths of Margaret Tucker, Robert Walker, John Pat and other Aboriginals are discussed openly;13 King Willy, the narrator and an Aboriginal universal figure, mocks ‘organized time’ by living in ‘this glad tomorrow today’ of his Dreamtime;14 Aboriginals are seen as people
Justin MacGregor

'Imprisoned, jailed, beaten and buggared/Inside for defying the whiteness';¹⁵ Aboriginals are also seen as 'Stockman / Fruitpicker / Casual worker / Farm hand / Castoff / Bludger / Fringedweller, / Land owner and land holder:/ The ones who never had to arrive';¹⁶ urban centres are viewed through eyes that 'cannot say that this city is ugly, or ... that it is unique' but that can say 'it is pretty, framed by the blue of sky and river';¹⁷ and Aboriginals 'wander disowned and owning' while their metropolis 'fills with a crowd lost in a haze of jet lag from Europe'.¹⁸ Hugh Webb believes 'Sunlight' uses a method of bricolage that 're-locates significant cultural objects into a different position within the semiotic ensemble while seemingly using the same overall repertoire of signs'.¹⁹ I would go further and say that these signs are transliterated from a non-Aboriginal majority discourse into a hybrid discourse.

In the very same year that 'Sunlight' was rejected by publishers, Mudrooroo received a grant from the Western Australian Government to write a poem celebrating the bicentenary. Rather than taking the opportunity to publish 'Sunlight', Mudrooroo chose to write Dalwurra; and instead of using the poem to condemn Australian society, he took the opportunity to write a song cycle like The Song Circle of Jacky, that attempts to create a new discourse that can include an Aboriginal past and present without subsuming either. In Dalwurra, Mudrooroo's post-colonial discourse does not challenge centrality as much as it redefines the centre to include the margins, it does not invert the hierarchy of colonizer and colonized as much as it works outside of a hierarchical mode of thinking.

Mudrooroo begins Dalwurra with an introduction that seeks to locate the poem cycle of the black bittern for readers who are unaware of Aboriginal myths and oral traditions. In his introduction, Mudrooroo explains how the song cycle 'is inspired by the eastern Arnhem Land song genre Manikay' and that 'we are not talking about a simple bird, but a Wangarr, or totemic, or Dreaming ancestral being who inter-relates with other Dreaming beings on his journey'.²⁰ Mudrooroo notes how the poems or songs trace his own journeys through Singapore, India, England and Thailand using the black bittern as a totemic symbol.

Unlike the non-Aboriginal forewords to Aboriginal texts that Mudrooroo finds problematic,²¹ Mudrooroo's introduction serves to 'other' non-Aboriginal readers and prepare them for his poems. Mudrooroo completed The Song Circle of Jacky with the suggestion that education can help to free Aboriginals from their marginal subject positions and his introduction is an example of the kind of education that can accomplish this liberation. Providing translations for words or ideas in the body of a text can give the receptor culture the higher status and continue the process of colonialism.²² It is significant, however, that Mudrooroo provides the definitions and explanations for his poetry before the poem cycle has been read; by providing an explanation of his poems in an introduction, Mudrooroo is attempting to educate non-Aboriginal readers so that they can
gain access to the significance of the poetry, so that they can 'read the obvious' and 'connect signifier and signified into sign'. His introduction is a road map, a guide book into what he believes will be unknown territory for most of his readers.

The black bittern is a non-migratory bird and while it serves as an excellent metaphor for Mudrooroo's 'anguish at leaving his home' (*Dalwurra*, p. 7), it also serves as an excellent metaphor for the non-Aboriginal reader about to enter his text. Non-Aboriginals have rarely left the confines of their own discourse and Mudrooroo is preparing them for entry into a new way of seeing and defining and shaping the world. He does not replace one centre with another, but opens up this centre through education to include the margins, to make it hybrid. In this way Mudrooroo is allowing for the counter-assimilation of non-Aboriginals into Aboriginal culture; his texts are producing a hybrid subject position for readers to occupy.

In order to accomplish this inclusion without giving the receptor culture the higher status, Mudrooroo uses a multiplicity of definitions to approximate Aboriginal signs without fixing them, in English, as one thing or another. In discussing the *Manikay*, Mudrooroo writes that this word 'may be defined as a clan song series alluding to ancestral beings' (*Dalwurra*, p. 7). This definition reveals that *Manikay* may be a clan song series and it also may not be because translations are only approximations. Mudrooroo is approximating what the *Manikay* may be but he leaves the final definition of what it is to be discovered by the actual act of reading his text: with Mudrooroo's introduction as an interpellating road map, the *Manikay* will become whatever the reader decides when s/he arrives at the end of the poem cycle.

Mudrooroo also uses several English translations of one Aboriginal word in order to expose how translations only approximate the actual sign. In his introduction a *wangarr* is defined as a 'totemic or Dreaming ancestral being' (*Dalwurra*, p. 7; emphasis mine). By using more than one word to define an Aboriginal concept, Mudrooroo is exposing how translations, and all other uses of language, are constructed and thus inexact because of the nature of the referent; as long as the cultural and societal interpellations that have constructed words and given them their meaning are unknown, then the definition will remain incorrect. Mudrooroo's introduction generates an approximation of an Aboriginal word so that the reader can then gain access to some specific examples of this word in *Dalwurra*; this approximation will allow the non-Aboriginal reader to adjust and construct the sign gradually. Eventually, through poem cycles like *Dalwurra*, the idea of a *Manikay* will be understood by non-Aboriginal society and a definition of the word 'Manikay' will enter a hybridized majority discourse.

While Mudrooroo provides some translations of Aboriginal concepts and words in his introduction, he occasionally leaves some of them untranslated. Mudrooroo refers to some Aboriginal totems or ideas without ex-
plaining what they are: he says that the coffin refers to ‘the Djambidj song cycle’ (Dalwurra, p. 7); that the Singaporean Dragon can be equated ‘with the Waugyal of Nyoongah mythology’ (Dalwurra, p. 7); and that Dalwurra ‘mistakes the Paddy Bird for a Jiribu’ (Dalwurra, p. 8). By leaving some words untranslated or unexplained, Mudrooroo hints at the vast body of Aboriginal mythology and culture that cannot be contained by one text, by one song cycle; Mudrooroo leaves some of his culture unsaid and, in so doing, suggests that a true understanding of the sign cannot occur without cross-cultural education to enable and produce a hybrid, cross-cultural discourse.

As a result of this goal, Mudrooroo’s song cycle is not an example of traditional Aboriginal culture. While Penny Van Toorn is right in suggesting that Mudrooroo is undertaking a counter-assimilation,23 I do not believe that the counter-assimilation is of non-Aboriginals into Aboriginal society through an Aboriginal reading position; in other words, Mudrooroo is not creating a position for non-Aboriginals in a traditional oral Aboriginal society as much as he is producing a new discourse that combines Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal perspectives and referents. His counter-assimilation is into a hybridized, post-colonial discourse. John Ryan may see the song cycle as ‘a powerful statement of ... the validity and richness of the writer’s own Aboriginal heritage’,24 but I would argue that the departures that inevitably result in the transcription from an oral to a written culture mean that traditional Aboriginal culture can never be realized in a written format.25 Thus an Aboriginal reading position is itself not a part of traditional Aboriginal society; instead it is a part of a hybridized discourse in which an Aboriginal perspective is included alongside that of non-Aboriginals.

This departure from traditional Aboriginal oral expression has resulted in some criticism being directed at Mudrooroo. In Writing From the Fringe, he notes that Aboriginals criticise poetry that does not have the ‘rich rhythms of traditional Aboriginal society’ and that Dalwurra, ‘based on traditional song texts has been criticised by Aborigines precisely because of this’.26 While this song cycle is definitely a declension from traditional song texts, it still produces a space for Aboriginal culture in Australia. As Diana Brydon has noted ‘[a]ll living cultures are constantly in flux and open to influences from elsewhere’27 and Mudrooroo is generating a new Aboriginal mode of expression:

This poem cycle shows how Aboriginal song cycles may form the basis of inspiration for poems in English, though there is a vast difference between traditional Manikay and such modern inspirations...What I have tried to show is that they may form the inspiration for modern poetry, or song. (Dalwurra, pp.9-10)

Dalwurra is something old recast as something new; it is Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal; it is genuinely Australian because it includes, combines
and allows for the various elements of that society to express themselves without reproducing the marginalization of colonial discourse; it is post-colonial.

The changes that the Manikay and traditional Aboriginal culture are undergoing are reflected by the changes that affect Dalwurra during his journey. Before the black bittern leaves Australia, he is 'wandering his beaches and creeks,/ Restless, sitting and gazing' and 'he rises,/ Flying westward into the sun where the clouds huddle,/ Accede and recede as he flies away from his home' (Dalwurra, p. 13). When the black bittern returns, his perceptions have been altered: he is still 'Wandering the beaches and creeks' but now he is 'searching' (Dalwurra, p. 65) and they are no longer 'his' beaches; Dalwurra is no longer solitary, instead he is 'As one of a flock' (Dalwurra, p. 65); and now he does not gaze elsewhere or rise to fly westward; rather he 'rises to settle amidst the spinifex grass,/ To settle among the bushes and rocks of his home' (Dalwurra, p. 65). Dalwurra's journeys through the cultures of India, England, and parts of Asia have altered his perceptions of his own culture; in a similar manner, contact with non-Aboriginals has altered Aboriginal culture so that it is no longer what it was. Mudrooroo finishes his final poem by having Dalwurra 'stamp out the log-coffin of sweet honey' (Dalwurra, p. 65) and here the coffin is a sign 'redolent not only of death', as it is for most non-Aboriginals, but also a sign 'of rebirth and initiation' (Dalwurra, p. 7). Dalwurra has moved from an old discourse to a new one, and the song cycle that tells of his journey and initiation is one whose form is an example of that new discourse.

The poem cycle that Mudrooroo produces escapes the vortex of the Manichean Allegory by examining Aboriginal culture in relation to several alien cultures. Throughout the cycle, Dalwurra is exposed to many different cultures: Singapore with its 'unnatural rock', 'computer caverns', and the 'acid sputum of [its] silicosis time' (Dalwurra, pp. 15, 16, 23); the Himalayas and its dragon, 'Karpo Druk./ Its head eating the land', who has been '[p]ainted by mad lamas' (Dalwurra, pp. 27, 29); India and its gods who give him the 'task' of guiding the river Rungeet (Dalwurra, p. 31); Calcutta with its people 'everywhere' who are seen as 'vast flocking birds of different species' (Dalwurra, pp. 39, 8); Scotland and a farmer who believes that '[l]and answers all' (Dalwurra, p. 47); West Indians who are filled with 'revenging thoughts' because of the 'white Pacific crimes' (Dalwurra, p. 52); and Thailand, where Kinnara 'laugh[s]' at him and taunts Dalwurra with cries of 'sabi, sabi' (Dalwurra, p. 63). As Kateryna Arthur has noted, the result of these encounters 'is a dispersed and a scattered view of many places and many histories often incongruously yolked together'.28 It is true that the various cultures Mudrooroo refers to have arisen from different times and places to form different cultural matrixes. The specific components of these matrixes are all unique and different so any comparison between them would appear to be incongruous. I would
argue, however, that these places and histories are 'yolked' together con­
gruously because all cultures are in flux, ceaselessly adapting, and, more
importantly, constantly exposed to other cultures that may spill into them.
This exposure and the adaption it entails unites cultures by placing them
in the same global context. Mudrooroo is viewing his Aboriginal culture
not from the one perspective of the Imperial Eye/I but through one cul­
ture after another in order to free his culture from binary classification, to
place it in a multicultural context. While his other texts have usually been
constructed in opposition to the Imperial Eye/I, Dalwurra is constructed
within a global context. This global context allows for heterogeneity and
hybridity by attempting to escape the Manichean Allegory and its black/
white, me/you binaries. Binary oppositions have been the primary means
of representing difference and justifying its subordination. Mudrooroo
places many different global cultures in his poem in order to conceive of
difference outside of a binary oppositional framework.

All of the cultures in Dalwurra add up to produce a 'multicultural meta­
myth which shows all cultures to be relative and subject to change'.

As Dalwurra leaves his home, he looks on himself and sees that he is dis­
placed:

Far from home and faltering.
My struggles cause panic –
Thunder to pound my heart,
As lightning I fall far from home,
Terrified from the constant changing
Of the rain pouring down,
Pouring me down into the city. (Dalwurra, p. 14)

This poem expresses the pain of displacement and migration for a creature
that is non-migratory. Like Dalwurra, cultures are constantly 'changing'
and moving far 'from home' as they adapt to a world that is fluid and
multiple. People can, like Dalwurra, learn to migrate and accept difference
or else their terror will pour 'them down'. Cultures can recognize that
they are relative and constructed; only then will they be able to adopt a
hybrid discourse and to include difference in all its forms.

The only apparent problem with Dalwurra occurs after the poem cycle
itself is finished when Mudrooroo includes an essay by the non-Aboriginal
scholar Veronica Brady. While her essay is undeniably supportive and sees
his song cycle as being 'in full possession of its Aboriginal inheritance, so
that there is no need to insist on it', I cannot help wondering why
Mudrooroo felt a need to 'insist' on his work’s validity by including this
essay. Just as Mary Durack’s foreword to Wild Cat Falling could be inter­
preted as saying that ‘now they can write like us’, so can Brady’s essay
be interpreted as saying ‘this is good poetry’. While Mudrooroo’s intro­
duction was a lesson for non-Aboriginals, Brady’s essay seems to under­
mine that lesson by interpreting and justifying his text as ‘an important
moment in the understanding of Aboriginal culture. Though I do not want to compare the racist language of Durack's essay with Brady's, or their very different approaches, it seems that both essays can be interpreted as having the same message for non-Aboriginals: this text is different but it is still acceptable and should still be accepted. In other words, Brady's after/word has the final word on the text and its reception. Mudrooroo is not the final voice of his own text, instead he seemingly defers judgement to another critic, one who is non-Aboriginal.

However, while this may be a valid criticism of the inclusion of Brady's essay as an afterword, it is also possible to see this inclusion as an affirmation of Mudrooroo's poetic discourse. Mudrooroo has attempted to create a place for a discourse that allows the inclusion of both Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals. In a similar fashion Brady's essay is an example of this new discourse: through an awareness of Mudrooroo's Aboriginal totems, Brady is able to offer a valid criticism and interpretation of his text. It is the possibility and need for negotiation, for cross-cultural communication that has been stressed by Mudrooroo's poetry. As long as critics, regardless of race or cultural position, are willing to allow novelistic or poetic discourses to combine and include different referents and different forms, then our essays can become just as hybrid as the texts we are discussing. Mudrooroo does not have the last word because such monolithic, closed conclusions are part of the imperial discourse that he is rejecting. His poetic discourse is not a monologue that speaks with colonial authority, instead it is a post-colonial dialogue that he participates in with Brady and any other reader of his text.

NOTES

3. Ibid., p. 230.
4. Mudrooroo, The Song Circle of Jacky and Selected Poems (Melbourne: Hyland House, 1986), p. 10. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
9. Mudrooroo, Writing From the Fringe, p. 189.
11. Mudrooroo, Writing From the Fringe, p. 58.
15. Ibid., p. 53.
16. Ibid., p. 54.
17. Ibid., p. 57.
18. Ibid., p. 44.
20. Mudrooroo, Dalwura: The Black Bittern, Veronica Brady and Susan Miller, eds. (Nedlands, WA: The Centre for Studies in Australian Literature, University of Western Australia, 1988), p. 7. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
21. Mudrooroo, Writing From the Fringe, p. 34.
26. Mudrooroo, Writing From the Fringe, 136.
31. Mudrooroo, Writing From the Fringe, p. 34.