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and Barbara Schmidt-Haberkamp

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Darkness Subverted

Aboriginal Gothic in Black Australian Literature
and Film

With 33 figures

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Introduction: Resistance to the Un-Australian

The Australian mind seems to be obsessed with the invocation of its ›un-national‹: apart from newspaper headlines, advertisements on television,¹ or signs tacked to lamp-posts in suburban Sydney, even the Macquarie Dictionary shows a preoccupation with the ›un-Australian‹. Having introduced the lemma only as recently as 2001 in their Federation edition, the lexicographers already updated it in the subsequent 2005 edition by adding a fourth entry to account for the increased use of the word in the popular domain: »violating a pattern of conduct, behaviour, etc., which, it is implied by the user of the term, is one embraced by Australians«.² Despite this zeal for determining the un-national, little attention has been paid to its positive counterpart, thus making it easier to exclude people on grounds of their ›un-Australianness‹ than to welcome a national diversity.

Especially Australia's indigenous and female population as well as its citizens of non-British descent face constant contempt because of their alleged ›otherness‹. Yet notions of Australian identity as exclusively male and Anglo-Celtic are more and more contested, and even though only the last few decades witnessed the rise of indigenous artists, their voices now challenge Anglo-centric ideas of national identity loud and clearly. Concerned with questions of Aboriginality, they reject white constructions of Aboriginal people as the demonized ›other‹ and deconstruct Anglo-Celtic myths of Australianness by combining both European literary modes and indigenous cultural traditions. Among those artists who have used this technique are Vivienne Cleven, Beck Cole, Tracey Moffatt, Mudrooroo, Kim Scott, Sam Watson, and Alexis Wright, who all apply a hauntingly European mode of narration in their works, that of Gothic fiction. While Vivienne Cleven in her novel *Her Sister's Eye* of 2002 resurrects the dark secrets of a rural country-town's past, Mudrooroo's vampire trilogy, consisting of *The Undying* (1998), *Underground* (1999), and *The Promised Land* (2000), rewrites Western canonical classics and revamps Australian legends and historical details. Like Vivienne Cleven, Alexis

1 For more examples, see Judith IRELAND, »What is the Cause of Australia's Un-doing?« *Sydney Morning Herald* 15 Mar. 2005: 13.

2 »un-Australian,« *Macquarie Dictionary*, 4th ed. (2005).

Wright in her *Plains of Promise* (1997) is concerned with the phantoms of past horrors, while Kim Scott in *Benang: From the Heart* of 1999 tells the story of a modern-day Moreau and his vicious eugenicist experiments, and Sam Watson's novel *The Kadaitcha Sung* (1990) recounts the immemorial battle of good against evil. While Beck Cole's film *Plains Empty* of 2005 grapples with the spookiness of a mining town's isolation and indifference, Tracey Moffatt's films *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* (1990) and *beDevil* (1993) visualize white and black relationships and the ghosts produced by them. By turning to and deconstructing some of the classics, legends, and phantoms of the past which all helped form current notions of Australianness as a male and Anglo-Celtic issue, those works all expose the exclusiveness and ideological instability of the ›un-Australian‹ and its binaries.

For some twenty-odd years, Russel Ward's book *The Australian Legend* of 1958 defined Australian identity. According to him, the typical Australian is a rough and practical white bushman, loyal to his mates and suspicious not only of authority but also of women.³ Created in the 1890s by the Heidelberg school of painters and contributors to the *Bulletin* like Henry Lawson and A.B. (›Banjo‹) Paterson, this image is still promoted as one of Australian authenticity in today's magazines: ›Banjo Paterson celebrated shearers, drovers, and life in the outback with poetry that still defines how Australians see themselves – and how the world sees Australia‹.⁴ The same picture comes to mind when recalling Paul Hogan's immensely popular performance as Michael J. ›Crocodile‹ Dundee: he strangles a crocodile with his bare hands and thus conveys to the world just the very type of Australian Ward depicted. Yet only a small number of Australians actually meet Ward's criteria, which exclude the urban population, more recent immigrants of non-Anglo-Celtic descent, women, and, most of all, Aboriginal people. While male whites, even those living in urban centres, usually do not oppose this representation of the ›typical Australian‹, other groups have voiced substantial objections. Together with the Australian Values Study Survey of 1983,⁵ Richard White raised the question of Australianness anew. In his 1981 study *Inventing Australia*, White challenges Ward's assumptions and states that there is »no ›real‹ Australia waiting to be uncovered. A national identity is an invention«.⁶ Invented within a European framework of enlightenment ideas, it has been artificially imposed on Australia from the outside,

3 Cf. Russel WARD, *The Australian Legend*, 1958, rev. ed. (Melbourne: Oxford UP, 1978) 16–17.

4 Roff SMITH, »Australia's Bard of the Bush,« *National Geographic* Aug (2004), 15 Sept. 2004 (<http://magma.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0408/feature1/>) subtext in the table of contents.

5 The data collected by the Roy Morgan Research Centre was used to evaluate fundamental values in Australia compared to those in other countries, cf. *Australian Values Study Survey*, Studies No. 375 & No. 422 (Australian Social Science Data Archive, 1983).

6 Richard WHITE, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity 1688-1980* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1981) viii.

influenced by the intelligentsia and those with economic power, and thus, he argues, a ›real‹ Australia will never be arrived at.⁷

In the 1980s, discussions of nationhood became increasingly occupied with ideas of multiculturalism, describing, in the words of Stephen Castles et al., »a comprehensive ideology of what Australia was supposed to be and to become.«⁸ For them, multiculturalism had by the end of the 1980s become »the dominant discourse in the attempt to define the nation«,⁹ a statement contemplated in their study *Mistaken Identity: Multiculturalism and the Demise of Nationalism in Australia* of 1988. Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra, on the other hand, in 1991 already speak of migrant writing as being »postmulticultural«,¹⁰ while Graham Huggan in his recent study on Australian literature identifies a certain »multiculturalism fatigue«.¹¹ This box of Australianness, it seems, is harder to close than its ancient Pandorian predecessor: questions of Australian identity have only recently made it again into the political arena and also the public mind, starting with the failed 1999 referendum on Australia's independence from Britain. Recent surveys conducted by the sociologists Philip Smith and Tim Phillips¹² as well as a study commissioned by the Business Council of Australia as part of their planning project ›Aspire Australia 2025‹,¹³ or the 2006 conference of the Cultural Studies Association of Australasia, which convened in early December 2006 and was concerned with the ›UnAustralian‹,¹⁴ all show this issue's burning importance. Especially the recent debate on a compulsory citizenship test and whether or not knowledge of Australian values should be required of immigrants¹⁵ stirred up a hornets' nest.

7 Cf. White ix–x.

8 Stephen CASTLES et al., »Mistaken Identity,« 1988, *Images of Australia: An Introductory Reader in Australian Studies*, ed. Gillian Whitlock and David Carter (St. Lucia: U of Queensland P, 1992) 129.

9 Castles et al. 136.

10 Bob HODGE and Vijay MISHRA, *Dark Side of the Dream: Australian Literature and the Postcolonial Mind*, Australian Cultural Studies (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1991) 202.

11 Graham HUGGAN, *Australian Literature: Postcolonialism, Racism, Transnationalism*, Oxford Studies in Postcolonial Literatures (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007) 110; in this last chapter of his study, Huggan gives an overview of the debates surrounding multiculturalism and its effects on contemporary Australian literature, see Huggan, *Australian Literature* 108–44.

12 Cf. Philip SMITH and Tim PHILLIPS, »What is ›Australian‹? Knowledge and Attitudes among a Gallery of Contemporary Australians,« *Australian Journal of Political Science* 35.2 (2000): 203–24 and Philip SMITH and Tim PHILLIPS, »Popular Understandings of ›UnAustralian‹: An Investigation of the Un-National,« *Journal of Sociology* 37.4 (2001): 323–39.

13 BUSINESS COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA, *Australian Cultural Norms and Values*, Research Paper, Scenario Planning Project ›Aspire Australia 2025‹ (2006), 28 Sep. 2006 (http://www.bca.com.au/upload/Research_Paper_-_Australian_Cultural_Norms_&_Values.pdf).

14 *UnAustralia*, Cultural Studies Association of Australasia, Dec. 2006, 1 Feb. 2007 (<http://www.unaustralia.com>).

15 For a discussion paper on the test, see DIMA, ed., *Australian Citizenship: Much more than a Ceremony* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2006), 28 Sep. 2006 (http://www.citizenship.gov.au/news/citizenship-test/DIMA_Citizenship_Discussion_Paper.pdf) 13; the debate itself has

What seems to be a debate among white Australia concerning its foreign other always also implies a quest for identity for Black Australians and the part they play within a predominantly white society. Even though aspects of their Aboriginal heritage have entered Australian cultural productions and are en vogue as signifiers of Australia abroad,¹⁶ didgeridoos or dot paintings displayed in stores nevertheless have a jarring note about them, as they use Aboriginality, sharply contrasted with a European-derived normativeness, as an exotic commodity to sell Australia. The binary opposition of ›self‹ and ›other‹ at work here is, according to Frantz Fanon, who revises Hegel's master-slave dialectic for a postcolonial context, the very basis upon which the colonizer constitutes white supremacy and black inferiority and which determines black identity as nothing else but the result of white inscriptions into its ›other‹.¹⁷ A similar dichotomy forms the basis of particularly Gothic fiction, which was originally designed to reflect the bourgeoisie's struggle against the evils of aristocracy. Yet it was the growing empire which provided the most enduring Gothic monsters and settings: the alien landscapes of the colonies replaced the ruined mansions and castles and villainous aristocrats turned into bloodthirsty savages while mysterious practices such as Obeah or Voodoo sent shivers down the spines of European readers; every binary opposition inherent in the Gothic mode could be projected onto the opposition of white settler vs black native.

Given the techniques it used to silence its ›other‹, Gothic fiction hardly seems to be an apt medium for Aboriginal purposes, but instead of refusing it as the master's mode, some Aboriginal artists re-membered its subversive origins and usurped its European tradition in order to transform it into a uniquely Aboriginal Gothic. Fleshing out the writing-back paradigm outlined in Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin's *The Empire Writes Back* of 1989¹⁸ with meaning, the works chosen for this thesis create a very different version of Australian history and identity than that of Anglo-Celtic origins. Yet it would be misleading to classify the artists' counter-discursive strategies as a simple opposition to the master discourse: as Richard Terdiman points out, the very fact that it is singled out as the dominant discourse by a counter-discourse reinforces rather than undermines the dominant discourse.¹⁹ Although Terdiman applied the term to French literature of the

been extensively covered by national media, see for example Phillip COOREY, »Citizenship Debate tests Leaders,« *Sydney Morning Herald* 15 Sep. 2006: 4.

- 16 The 2006 brochure of Tourism Australia, for example, shows the smiling face of an Aboriginal child.
- 17 Cf. Frantz FANON, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 1952, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove P, 1967) 110, 170.
- 18 Bill ASHCROFT, Gareth GRIFFITHS, and Helen TIFFIN, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, 1989, 2nd ed., New Accents (London: Routledge-Taylor & Francis, 2002).
- 19 Cf. Richard TERDIMAN, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985) 65.

19th century exclusively – for him, this was the classic moment of counter-discourse²⁰ – it has been adopted by postcolonial critics to describe the way in which writers challenge the dominant discourse and which »characterize[s] the theory and practice of symbolic resistance«.²¹ A more refined picture of the diverse discursive manoeuvres within postcolonial works arises if Ashcroft's writing on postcolonial transformation and transformative resistance is taken into account:

But the most fascinating feature of post-colonial societies is a ›resistance‹ that manifests itself as a refusal to be absorbed, a resistance which engages that which is resisted in a different way, taking the array of influences exerted by the dominating power, and altering them into tools for expressing a deeply held sense of identity and cultural being.²²

Like the concept of postcolonial counter-discourses, Ashcroft regards the intertextual consumption and appropriation of canonical texts as vital in order to expose their cultural assumptions.²³ For him, though, it is crucial that the text no longer centres on the canonical original but displays its very own creative potential which it achieves through a transformation of the original.²⁴

The works chosen for this study, Vivienne Cleven's *Her Sister's Eye*, Beck Cole's *Plains Empty*, Mudrooroo's vampire trilogy, Kim Scott's *Benang: From the Heart*, Sam Watson's *The Kadaitcha Sung*, Alexis Wright's *Plains of Promise*, and Tracey Moffatt's *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* and *beDevil*, all engage dialogically with the Gothic by reworking this genuinely European discourse, devouring its inherent attitudes, and ultimately transforming it into an Aboriginal Gothic with the help of their own cultural heritage. In doing so, they expose the ideological shortcomings of European Gothic texts as well as of the ›typical Australian‹ and replace it with a more complex picture of Australian identity. Several other works by Aboriginal artists which feature a Gothic component have nevertheless not been included in this study on different grounds: although Melissa Lucashenko's *Killing Darcy* (1998) focuses on a dark mystery of black-white relations, it does not, as a young-adult novel, consistently pursue the subject matter further beyond a satisfactory explanation of the events. Similar reasons lead to the exclusion of two novels by Philip McLaren, *Sweet Water – Stolen Land* of 1992 and *Scream Black Murder* of 1995, as both aim at solving a crime and finding a serial killer, respectively,

20 Cf. Terdiman 66.

21 Bill ASHCROFT, Gareth GRIFFITHS, and Helen TIFFIN, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge–Taylor & Francis, 2000) 56.

22 Bill ASHCROFT, *Post-Colonial Transformation* (London: Routledge–Taylor & Francis, 2001) 20.

23 Cf. Ashcroft, *Post-Colonial Transformation* 33 and Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Key Concepts* 56–7.

24 Cf. Ashcroft, *Post-Colonial Transformation* 33–4.

and only display Aboriginal motifs as background decorations. Archie Weller's *The Day of the Dog* (1981) is, even though it de-Gothicizes Aboriginality, a rather social-realist novel, while his *Land of the Golden Clouds* (1998) is a science-fiction novel set in post-apocalyptic Australia. And although the latter indeed features a subterranean race of vampire-like bat-people reminiscent of Wells's Morlok, it does not combine non-Aboriginal with Aboriginal aspects. Instead, it creates a future world consisting of the clumsy remnants of non-Aboriginal cultures contrasted with a timeless Aboriginal culture which outlasted every destructive force.

Although Australian Aboriginal people belong to what has been termed the ›Fourth World‹, a »tiny internal colon[y]«, and »are fated always to be minority populations in their own lands«,²⁵ it seems appropriate to approach the subject from a postcolonial point of view and to analyse the works within the framework of postcolonial criticism. Yet it is necessary to be aware of the dangers the term postcolonial/postcolonialism implies: apart from obvious controversies focusing on the chronology suggested by the prefix ›post‹ or the limitations which should be imposed on the use of the term,²⁶ it has to be kept in mind that ›postcolonialism‹ is a concept which originated in the Western world, constructed by Western minds and chiefly employed with regard to *European* colonization. One of the most influential interpretations of the term is that of Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, who use the expression »to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day.«²⁷ Albeit very broad, their definition provides a useful basis for the study and analysis of colonial discourses and the imperial subject's responses to these discourses.

Unlike the field of postcolonial studies, which has by now become well-established in academic institutions, the Gothic has until recently still been confined to the attic of academia. Even though early studies of the Gothic, Edith Birkhead's *The Tale of Terror* and Eino Railo's *The Haunted Castle*, date back to 1921 and 1927, respectively, and it has been made acceptable to some extent by J.M.S. Tompkins's study *The Popular Novel in England* of 1932, Montague Summers's *The Gothic Quest* of 1938, and Devendra P. Varma's *The Gothic Flame* of 1957, it was only as late as the 1970s that Gothic criticism gained a more prominent position in the academic world. During that time, particularly studies of the female Gothic were published, most notably Ellen Moers's *Literary Women* (1976), Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), and Juliann Fleenor's essay

25 Noel Dyck, »Aboriginal Peoples and Nation-States: An Introduction to the Analytical Issue,« Introduction, *Indigenous Peoples and the Nation-State: ›Fourth World‹ Politics in Canada, Australia and Norway*, ed. Noel Dyck, Social and Economic Papers 14 (St. John's: Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial U of Newfoundland, 1985) 1.

26 For a discussion of the controversies surrounding the use of the term, see Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Key Concepts* 186–92.

27 Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back* 2.

collection *Female Gothic* (1983). Since then, Gothic criticism on a wide variety of topics has flourished.²⁸ David Punter's seminal work *The Literature of Terror* of 1980, together with its amendment of 1996, introduced aspects of class and materialism into Gothic studies. This approach was later expanded by Patrick Brantlinger in his *Rule of Darkness* of 1988 and again taken up by David Punter in his *Postcolonial Imaginings* of 2000 in order to cover questions of empire and the Gothic. A collection of 2003 bearing that very title and edited by Andrew Smith and William Hughes then takes the issue a step further and examines the use of Gothic conventions in colonial texts and those produced within a postcolonial situation from a distinctly postcolonial-studies point of view. Other publications applying a postcolonial reading to Gothic texts include a special issue of *Gothic Studies* of 2003, also edited by Hughes and Smith, and a special issue of *Postcolonial Studies* (2000), edited by Ken Gelder. Like *Empire and the Gothic*, these special issues comprise several «case studies» of postcolonial texts which contain Gothic elements and use them for their cause. The first to establish the close link between postcolonial and Gothic studies, however, was Judith Newman, who is concerned with »the ideological consequences of the transfer of a European genre to a colonial environment.«²⁹ Prior to her essay, postcolonial texts with a Gothic twist, first and foremost Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, had been analysed as belonging to the European Gothic tradition without considering their postcolonial context and even denying it its place within a Caribbean Gothic tradition, which is said to be non-existent.³⁰ Geographically, most contemporary criticism centres on the Caribbean, followed by Canada and India, whereas Australia seems less appealing to Gothic scholars. But the situation has changed dramatically from the early 1990s, when researchers met with smiles when talking about their interest in Australian Gothic,³¹ to 2009: until today, Australian Gothic has spawned three PhD theses, Gerry Turcotte's »Peripheral Fear« of 1991, Alexandra Rombouts's »Admitting the Intruder« of 1994, and Romana Ashton's »Antipodean Gothic Cinema« of 2005, and Australia is among the few countries which have an entry of their own in *The Handbook to Gothic Literature*, edited by Marie Mulvey-Roberts, and in the more recent *Routledge Companion to Gothic*, edited by Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy. Still, most studies dealing with Australian Gothic are concerned with it

28 See for a comprehensive overview of Gothic criticism Donna HEILAND, *Gothic and Gender: An Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell, 2004) 180–6.

29 Judith NEWMAN, »Postcolonial Gothic: Ruth Praver Jhabvala and the Sobhraj Case,« 1994, *Modern Gothic: A Reader*, ed. Victor Sage and Andrew Lloyd Smith (Manchester: U of Manchester P, 1996) 171.

30 Cf. Anthony LUENGO, »Wide Sargasso Sea and the Gothic Mode,« *World Literature Written in English* 15 (1976): 229.

31 Cf. Gerry TURCOTTE, »Footnotes to an Australian Gothic Script: The Gothic in Australia,« *Antipodes* 7.2 (1993): 127, an article in which he tells of several encounters of the patronizing kind.

as a Gothic colony, as numerous essays show: Andrew McCann, in particular, has written on Marcus Clarke and his connection to the Gothic,³² and the essays contained in Stephanie Trigg's *Medievalism and the Gothic in Australian Culture* of 2006 deal with a variety of colonial authors, as for instance Peter Otto's »Romantic Medievalism and Gothic Horror: Wordsworth, Tennyson, Kendall, and the Dilemmas of Antipodean Gothic« or David Matthews's »Marcus Clarke, Gothic, Romance«. An early example of scholarship on the (not only colonial) Gothic in Australia is Jim Davidson's »Tasmanian Gothic« of 1989. In his entry on Australian Gothic in *The Handbook to Gothic Literature*, Gerry Turcotte remarks that »the Gothic has been useful for helping to establish a local Australian voice«³³ and that as such it has produced a variety of male and female authors who self-consciously employ the Gothic to discuss contemporary Australian society and its values. Furthermore, a range of migrant writers who »have used [the Gothic] to speak of their sense of exclusion and dislocation, as well as to comment on the condition of disjunction produced in a country which devalues non-Anglo-Celtic experience«³⁴ has also discovered the Gothic. Especially the Mabo decision in 1992 has led to a new white uncertainty regarding the Anglo-Celtic position in a postcolonial Australia, a trait examined in detail by Ken Gelder and Jane M. Jacobs in their *Uncanny Australia* of 1998 and their essay on postcolonial ghost stories (1999). This haunting sense of not-belonging was also the incentive for the 2006 ASAL conference entitled *Spectres, Screens, Shadows, Mirrors* and for awarding Andrew McGahan the 2005 Miles Franklin Award for *The White Earth*.

Aboriginal authors, however, are rarely found among those who use Gothic conventions in their works, and critical responses to an indigenous Gothic are even scarcer. On a global scale, only single case studies of works written by indigenous authors throughout the English-writing world have been published. The main focus here, however, has been on works written by North American authors such as Leslie Marmon Silko, Gerald Vizenor, Thomas King, and Eden Robinson as well as on the concept of »trickster writing«.³⁵ Another important aspect of recent

32 Cf. Andrew McCANN, »Marcus Clarke and the Gothic Commodity,« *Southern Review* 31.3 (1998): 282–96, Andrew McCANN, »Colonial Gothic: Morbid Anatomy, Commodification and Critique in Marcus Clarke's *The Mystery of Major Molineux*,« *Australian Literary Studies* 19.4 (2000): 399–412, Andrew McCANN, »Textual Phantasmagoria: Marcus Clarke, Light Literature and the Colonial Uncanny,« *Australian Literary Studies* 21.2 (2003): 137–50, and Andrew McCANN, »Unknown Australia: Rosa Praed's Vanished Race,« *Australian Literary Studies* 22.1 (2005): 37–50.

33 Gerry TURCOTTE, »Australian Gothic,« *The Handbook to Gothic Literature*, ed. Marie Mulvey-Roberts (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998) 18.

34 Turcotte, »Australian Gothic« 17; a very recent example is Christos Tsiolkas's controversial *Dead Europe*, in which the Australian protagonist, son of Greek immigrants, embarks on a destructive journey through a decadent Europe and brings to life long-buried ghosts.

35 For Leslie Marmon Silko's use of the Gothic, see Scott P. SANDERS, »Southwestern Gothic: On the Frontier between Landscape and Locale,« *Frontier Gothic: Terror and Wonder at the Frontier in*

occupation with native Canadian writing is the trope of haunting, as essays by Warren Cariou and Jodey Castricano, both contained in a special issue of the *University of Toronto Quarterly* on haunting, show.³⁶ Australian Aboriginal Gothic, on the other hand, has been discussed by only a handful of scholars so far: there is Clare Archer-Lean's PhD thesis »Cross-Cultural Analysis of the Writings of Thomas King and Colin Johnson (Mudrooroo)« of 2002, part of which is concerned with the Gothic in Mudrooroo's writing, »Postcolonial Gothic as Gothic Sub-Version?«, a recently published conference-paper by Françoise Kral, in which she examines both Mudrooroo's writing and Alexis Wright's *Plains of Promise*, and Gerry Turcotte's recent essay, entitled »Vampiric Decolonization«, on Mudrooroo's vampire trilogy. Apart from these texts, which not only analyse the literary texts, but give a basic theoretical introduction into what can be understood as »indigenous Gothic«, other authors, though they recognize the Gothic qualities of the fiction they write about, do not contextualize their subject as a specifically »Aboriginal Gothic«. Those texts include Maureen Clark's article »Terror as White Female« on Mudrooroo's vampire trilogy, Annalisa Oboe's essay »Metamorphic Bodies and Mongrel Subjectivities in Mudrooroo's *The Undying*« on Mudrooroo's *The Undying*, an essay by Wendy Pearson, also on Mudrooroo's *The Undying* and entitled »I, the Undying«, and two texts by Gerry Turcotte, »Mission Impossible« and »Remastering the Ghosts«, which also deal with Mudrooroo's vampire trilogy. The other works chosen for this study have, apart from dramatic review-titles, not received much critical

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- American Literature*, ed. David Mogen, Scott P. Sanders, and Joanne B. Karpinski (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1993) 55–70, for Gerald Vizenor's, see Alan R. VELIE, »Gerald Vizenor's Indian Gothic,« *MELUS* 17.1 (1991-1992): 75–85 and Louis OWENS, »Grinning Aboriginal Demons: Gerald Vizenor's *Bearheart* and the Indian's Escape from Gothic,« *Frontier Gothic: Terror and Wonder at the Frontier in American Literature*, ed. David Mogen, Scott P. Sanders, and Joanne B. Karpinski (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1993) 71–83, for Thomas King's Gothic, see CLARE ARCHER-LEAN, *Cross-Cultural Analysis of the Writings of Thomas King And Colin Johnson (Mudrooroo)*, diss. Queensland U of Technology, 2002 (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen P, 2006), 28 Dec. 2005 (<http://adt.library.qut.edu.au/adt-qt/uploads/approved/adt-QUT20040513.120811/public/>), and for Eden Robinson's, see Jennifer ANDREWS, »Native Canadian Gothic Refigured: Reading Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach*,« *Essays on Canadian Writing* 73 (2001): 1–24. The concept of trickster writing is examined in Gerald VIZENOR, »Trickster Discourse: Comic Holotropes and Language Games,« *Narrative Chance: Postmodern Discourse on Native American Indian Literatures*, ed. Gerald Vizenor (Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1993) 187–211, Wendy ROHRBACHER, »(Re)Invention and Contextualization in Contemporary Native American Fiction,« MA thesis, U of Alaska, 1999, 9 Feb. 2007 (<http://towerofbabel.com/sections/tome/nativeamericanfiction/>), Richard LANE, »Performing Gender: First Nations, Feminism, and Trickster Writing in Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach*,« *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 9.1 (2003): 161–71, and Archer-Lean 197–241.
- 36 While Cariou is concerned with the return of Native ghosts, cf. Warren CARIOU, »Haunted Prairie: Aboriginal »Ghosts« and the Spectres of Settlement,« *University of Toronto Quarterly* 75.2 (2006): 727–34, Castricano offers a case study of Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach*, cf. JODEY CASTRICANO, »Learning to talk with Ghosts: Canadian Gothic and the Poetics of Haunting in Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach*,« *University of Toronto Quarterly* 75.2 (2006): 801–13.

attention as far as the use of the Gothic tradition and its transfiguration into an Aboriginal Gothic is concerned. Thus the present study seeks to fill this void by giving a comprehensive account of the history and use of the Gothic in Australia, which details the development of the European Gothic of the eighteenth century to the Aboriginal Gothic of today with its usurpation, appropriation, and eventual transformation of the master discourse; a theoretical concept which will then be substantiated by the analysis of selected works by Australian Aboriginal artists.

I. Aboriginal Gothic

Although its attitude towards the dominant discourse of the eighteenth century and its literary and philosophical sources are well-known, critics are divided on a precise definition of the Gothic, with attempts ranging from socio-cultural approaches, which limit Gothic fiction to the Gothic novel proper of the late eighteenth century, to describing the Gothic in terms of recognizable Gothic themes and narrative strategies.¹ Yet the very act of defining Gothic fiction is inconsistent with its transgressive nature, as a definition always also implies the setting of boundaries and limitations. Accordingly, the Gothic spectre-like avoids any classification as either genre or mode. In the terminology John Frow uses in his work on genre, he defines »*mode* in the adjectival sense as a thematic and tonal qualification of ›colouring‹ of genre«, whereas »*genre* or kind [denotes] a more specific organisation of texts with thematic, rhetorical and formal dimensions«. ² The two terms are, however, not static entities but are varying and constantly shifting in history, thus exhausted genres may live on in new modes or, reversely, modes may create new genres in a process of what Rick Altman terms »genrification«. ³ Although the development of Gothic fiction is often considered as originating with a genre, the Gothic romance, which then has cast off its generic restrictions and continues to live on as a mode, applied to various other genres, ⁴ the Gothic once more evades the confines of any definition or classification due to its hybrid status as both noun and adjective and its history of literary variety. For the purpose of this thesis, however, I will treat the Gothic as being a mode which continues to endow genres with a certain set of menacing stock elements and unstable characteristics of which the interrogation of boundaries, binaries, and identity are particularly

1 For an account of the different approaches to defining Gothic fiction and his own elaboration, see David PUNTER, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day* (London: Longman, 1980) 18–21 and 404–405.

2 John FROW, *Genre, The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge–Taylor & Francis, 2006) 67; emphasis in the original.

3 Rick ALTMAN, *Film/Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1999) 53.

4 The example of Gothic fiction is used by both Frow 66 and Alastair FOWLER, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1982) 109.

useful in an Australian Aboriginal context. Such a mapping of an Aboriginal Gothic with its transformative creativity needs to address ideological questions of appropriating a European discourse and to draw parallels to other techniques employed by postcolonial writers with which they express their search for identity in a world shaped by imperialism, before the concept of an Aboriginal Gothic can finally be grasped in its entirety. Yet at first, a historical exploration of Gothic fiction in general and Australian Gothic fiction in particular is required, tracing the Gothic tradition back to its eighteenth-century cultural and societal roots.

One of the most striking peculiarities of Gothic fiction is its double nature of subversion and submissiveness, challenging society's values and beliefs while at the same time reinforcing those very values it opposes. This characteristic has its origin in the intellectual background against which Gothic fiction emerged: having entered into the heart of the cultural battlefield that was the eighteenth century, Gothic fiction was influenced by a number of contradictory literary and theoretical movements. On the one hand, there was a strong preeminence of reason and rationality sparked by Enlightenment thought which also reached out to literature in the form of the novel with its emphasis on realism. Additionally, the eighteenth century saw the height of Augustanism, advocating reason and structural clarity as well as harmony. In the middle of the century, however, opposite literary tendencies arose and questioned the paradigms argued for by Augustan or realist writers. Among those tendencies one can find sentimentalism with its pathos and extreme emotionality as well as the Graveyard School of poetry or Edmund Burke's ideas on the sublime. While poems like Edward Young's »Night Thoughts« of 1742–1745 or Thomas Gray's »An Elegy written in a Country Church Yard« of 1751 were early precursors of the Gothic with regard to content, Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* of 1757 developed the aesthetic principles underlying Gothic fiction. In his study, he argues that terror, with death as its king, and pain are the sources of the sublime and thus of artistic grandeur – but only if experienced from a safe distance, an important aspect to which I will return in later discussions of the Aboriginal Gothic: »When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are, delightful [...]«.⁵ Incorporating various aspects of this bricolage of contradictory cultural phenomena,⁶ Gothic fiction finally emerged as a sanctioned counter-discursive strategy, envisioning Enlightenment's dark ›Other‹.

5 Edmund BURKE, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 1757, ed. Adam Phillips, The World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990) 36–7.

6 A detailed analysis of the diverse backgrounds of Gothic fiction can be found in Punter, *The Literature of Terror* (1980) 22–60.

It is Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* of 1764 which is usually referred to as the first Gothic novel published in Britain,⁷ and with its medieval setting, its haunted castle, and supernatural elements it indeed provided the model for later Gothic novels. Distancing the medieval past from the enlightened present served a dual purpose in *The Castle of Otranto*, as current social and political shortcomings could be alluded to under the guise of Manfred's excess, while eighteenth-century values were, at the same time, reinforced:⁸ the readers were reassured of their own moral lifestyle precisely because the threats presented stemmed from a world alien and remote to theirs. This world was occupied by fainting heroines battling malevolent aristocrats in the crypts of their decaying castles which were situated in the wild and mountainous locations of Catholic Europe, and it has changed only little over the past centuries. New eras saw the rise of new strands within Gothic fiction, and while the innocent heroine, chased through subterranean passages by the evil scoundrel, still serves as a major signifier of the Gothic, subsequent centuries introduced a range of new elements, shifting to interior villainy and urban settings. The mad scientist, the mass murderer, or the *doppelgänger* are as familiar nowadays as vampires, ghosts, and zombies, and, despite their difference, medieval castles and labyrinthine streets evoke the same feelings of unease, of being lost and at the mercy of the suppressed ›Other‹ who has transgressed the boundaries and turned »virtue [...] to vice, reason to desire, law to tyranny«.⁹

The figure of this repressed ›Other‹, representing society's dark underside, looms especially large in what has been called imperial Gothic.¹⁰ Whether in the form of Martians invading Britain, as in H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds*, or as an unknown danger lurking behind colonial frontiers, this ›dark self‹ features as one of the greatest threats in imperial Gothic fiction. It is the anxiety of ›going native‹, of losing one's European self, that is at the core of imperial Gothic fiction, the fear of civilization reverting to barbarism or savagery,¹¹ of which Kurtz in Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* provides an outstanding example. Not surprisingly, the figure of the Gothic ›Other‹ soon became filled with the colonized

7 David Punter mentions *Ferdinand Count Fathom* of 1753 by Tobias George Smollett as the first novel which proposes terror as subject, cf. Punter, *The Literature of Terror* (1980) 45.

8 Cf. Fred BOTTING, *Gothic, The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge–Taylor & Francis, 1996) 52.

9 Botting 10.

10 Patrick Brantlinger suggests to confine imperial Gothic to a period between 1880 to 1914, which is roughly analogous to the heyday of the British Empire; cf. Patrick BRANTLINGER, »Imperial Gothic: Atavism and the Occult in the British Adventure Novel, 1880-1914,« *English Literature in Transition (1880-1920)* 28 (1985): 243–52; a slightly edited version of this essay was later included in Patrick BRANTLINGER, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988).

11 Cf. David PUNTER and Glennis BYRON, *The Gothic*, Blackwell Guides to Literature (Malden: Blackwell, 2004) 48–9 and Brantlinger, »Imperial Gothic« 246.

subject, the savage at the Empire's very doorstep. Literary discourses in particular, as Terry Goldie has shown, have served to establish a semiotic field of the indigene in which the words used suggest the Gothic and associate the indigene with Satanic powers.¹² Thus establishing what Abdul JanMohamed has called the ›Manichean Allegory‹ of colonial literature,¹³ imperial Gothic texts construct the indigene in the manner of well-known Gothic dichotomies of good vs evil and white vs black, projecting the familiar superiority of the enlightened subject unto the colonial encounter. In this respect, imperial Gothic served the purpose of justifying colonialism as well as affirming and perpetuating the colonizers' discourse of legitimate power.

In an Australian context, however, the term imperial Gothic must be replaced with that of colonial Gothic, as the term imperialism, which for Edward Said ›means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory‹,¹⁴ is more apt to describe the Gothic fiction originating from the centre of the Empire itself, whereas the Australian situation is one of actual colonialism, which Said, who here distinguishes between ideology and practice, defines as ›the implanting of settlements on distant territory‹.¹⁵ Australia's antipodean place at the, from a European point of view, ›other‹ side of the world made it a Gothic place in itself, populated with monsters and full of alien and uninviting landscapes. Pictured as the archetypal other since antiquity, the antipodes were imagined as the home of cynocephalae, cyclopes, blemmyae, sciapods, or of literal antipodeans.¹⁶ Such perceptions of a *terra australis* balancing the northern hemisphere also figure prominently in medieval maps, where it was banished to the margins of the *mappae mundi*,¹⁷ and literature ranging from Ctesias's romances of around 400 BC to dys- and utopias of Early Modern Times to novels of the 18th century.¹⁸ It was this setting as Europe's ›other‹ and later the cruelties of the convict system that made Australia a seemingly easy prey for Gothic writers. Yet early Australian writers shunned Gothic fiction nonetheless because, as Gerry Turcotte argues, they saw the need to demonstrate the superiority of civilization

12 Cf. Terry GOLDIE, *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literatures* (Montreal: McGill–Queen's UP, 1989) 87.

13 Cf. Abdul JANMOHAMED, ›The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature,‹ *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985): 59–87.

14 Edward SAID, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books–Random House, 1993) 9.

15 Said 9.

16 Illustrations of this per/re-versed world can be found in Hartmann SCHEDEL, *Nuremberg Chronicle* (Nuremberg, 1493), 28 Jan. 2008 (<http://www.beloit.edu/nurember/index.htm>) path: Book Contents–Folios, XII recto and XII verso.

17 Cf. Simon RYAN, *The Cartographic Eye: How Explorers saw Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) 108.

18 Cf. David FAUSETT, *Images of the Antipodes in the 18th Century: A Study in Stereotyping*, *Cross/Cultures* 18 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995) 1–19.

over nature and hence rejected a mode which »celebrated [...] the impossibility of [the colony's] success«. ¹⁹ Additionally, the fact that Gothic terrors were virtually pressing too close to be enjoyable caused a turn to realist and neoclassical values instead. ²⁰ With the popularity of the Gothic in Europe gradually making its way to the colony, however, Gothic fiction was soon embraced as a possibility to express the colonial experience of isolation, disorientation, and hardship: »The Gothic [...] has from its inception dealt with fears and themes which are endemic in the colonial experience: isolation, entrapment, fear of pursuit and fear of the unknown«. ²¹ As a subversive counter-discourse, the Gothic was also used as a means to place the colony and its literary production in opposition to the imperial centre. And although Australian Gothic, according to Turcotte, eventually remained dominated by and caught within Eurocentric traditions, failing to break completely free from its continental parent, ²² it nevertheless gave a uniquely Australian flavour to the themes, settings, and cast of Gothic fiction, a characteristic for which Turcotte uses the metaphor of the Gothic edifice: whereas the structure appears as a testament to its traditional heritage, it is the design which incorporates local materials and gives it an Australian blend. ²³

One of the best-known writers of Australian Gothic in the nineteenth century is Marcus Clarke, who with his novel (*For the Term of*) *His Natural Life*, first published in book form in 1874, established the particularly Australian theme of convictism within Gothic fiction. By Gothicizing the not-so-distant past of the Australian convict system instead of inventing fictional Gothic monsters, Clarke legitimizes an Australian claim for history, substituting the feudal mansion with the most obvious signifiers of British imperialist rule, the garrisons and prisons of Australia. ²⁴ Convictism indeed was a standard motif employed by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Gothic writers despite its being the source of British prejudices against Australia(ns), examples being Caroline Leakey's *The Broad Arrow* of 1859, ›Price Warung's *Tales of the Convict System* of 1892, and William Gosse Hay's *The Escape of the Notorious Sir William Heans* of 1919. Apart from the Gothic inherent in the convict experience, however, the Australian landscape is a trope many colonial Gothic writers turned to in their works. The isolated station at the outskirts of civilization or the menacing bush with its threat of losing one's

19 Gerry TURCOTTE, »Peripheral Fear: A Comparative Study of Australian and English-Canadian Gothic Fiction,« diss., U of Sydney, 1991, 69–70.

20 See for the necessity of terror being experienced at a certain distance to be delightful Burke 36–7.

21 Turcotte, »Peripheral Fear« x.

22 Cf. Turcotte, »Peripheral Fear« 45.

23 Cf. Turcotte, »Peripheral Fear« xviii.

24 Cf. Turcotte, »Peripheral Fear« 124 and David MATTHEWS, »Marcus Clarke, Gothic, Romance,« *Medievalism and the Gothic in Australian Culture*, ed. Stephanie Trigg, Making the Middle Ages (Carlton: Melbourne UP, 2006) 9.

way feature prominently in Australian colonial Gothic, as Turcotte remarks.²⁵ Writers who give such an account of the Australian landscape as a frightening and Gothic locale include Henry Kendall, Barbara Baynton, whose *Bush Studies* of 1902 describes, in the words of Gerry Turcotte, »the arid and desolate land, the dangerous vagrants, the women besieged by nature and by men«,²⁶ and even Henry Lawson, whose stories are not inherently Gothic, but display a genuinely Gothic quality in their description of the Australian bush according to Turcotte.²⁷ Another prolific writer of Gothic fiction was Rosa Praed,²⁸ whose oeuvre includes traditional vampire novels (*The Brother of the Shadow: A Mystery of Today* of 1886 and *The Soul of Countess Adrian: A Romance* of 1891) and novels dealing with the occult (*Affinities: A Romance of Today* of 1885, *The Body of his Desire: A Romance of the Soul* of 1912, and *The Mystery Woman* of 1913) as well as short stories depicting ur-Australian fears of foreign monsters and of getting lost in the bush, such as her 1891 stories »The Bunyip« or »The Sea-Bird's Message«, respectively. Especially the bunyip became a rich source for writers of colonial Gothic literature and colonial ghost stories in particular, since traditional British monsters did, as Robert Holden remarks, not survive the voyage to Australia.²⁹ Being Australia's only monster and an eerie inhabitant of the inhospitable bush, the bunyip is often set against ›correct‹ ghostly examples of the old world in the very popular Australian colonial ghost story.³⁰ But despite the nature and the convict past, a feature which makes Jim Davidson describe especially Tasmania as »Australia's very own little gothic [sic] repository«,³¹ providing enough material for Gothic encounters, it was, owing to the Gothic's permanent concentration on the subject, the figure of the indigene that was most feared. If not written out of colonial literature at all, it featured as »Hell's worst fiends«,³² as Charles Harpur calls Australia's indigenous inhabitants in his »Creek of the Four Graves« of 1845, or as »nothing but a sneaking, filthy, thievish, murdering vagabond – a very Cain, whose hand is against every man, and every man's hand against him« in A. J. Boyd's *Old Colonials* of 1882.³³ Working as a metaphor for white society's literal ›darker self‹, the indigene stood for everything

25 Cf. Turcotte, »Australian Gothic« 12–13.

26 Turcotte, »Australian Gothic« 15.

27 Cf. Turcotte, »Australian Gothic« 15.

28 Cf. McCann, »Unknown Australia« 37–50.

29 Cf. Robert HOLDEN, »Invaded by Monsters: A New Exhibition, *Bunyips*, opens at the National Library,« *National Library of Australia News* February (2001): 13.

30 Cf. Ken GELDER, Introduction, *The Oxford Book of Australian Ghost Stories*, ed. Ken Gelder (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994) xiii.

31 Jim DAVIDSON, »Tasmanian Gothic,« *Meanjin* 48.2 (1989): 310.

32 Charles HARPUR, »The Creek of the Four Graves,« 1845/1853, *Australian Verse: An Oxford Anthology*, ed. John Leonard (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) 194.

33 A. J. BOYD, *Old Colonials*, 1882 (Sydney UP, 1974) 219.

lying outside or being suppressed in Australia's white settler society.³⁴ This strategy not only served as a means to justify colonization and colonial exploitation as a whole, but also supported the legal fiction of *Terra Nullius* by paying the prize of a semiotic and legal annulment of Australia's Aboriginal people.

It is this very invention of an uninhabited land along with the fiction of an Aboriginal absence which is behind many colonial Gothic stories and their postcolonial counterparts: where Rosa Praed once dreamed of the extinction of Aboriginal people in order to romanticize them and mourn their absence³⁵ and colonial ghost stories re-enacted colonization through the depiction of *Domi Nullius* and their shadowy occupants,³⁶ the postcolonial mind is driven by the return of previous inhabitants and the uncanny experience of being *un*-settled.³⁷ This ›neocolonial uncanny‹, as Warren Cariou terms it with regard to the recent revitalization of native ghosts in Canadian literature who question the legitimacy of white settlement,³⁸ then makes the haunted house stand for the Australian nation, whose ›ghosts are the collective anxieties of white settlement‹.³⁹ Such an understanding of the term ›uncanny‹ is owed to Sigmund Freud's work on »Das Unheimliche«, in which he contrasts the meaning of the German word ›heimlich‹ with its opposite, ›unheimlich‹, words which have, misleadingly, been translated into English as ›homely/native‹ and ›uncanny‹. Freud uses »unheimlich« as the opposite of everything which is »heimlich, heimisch, vertraut«⁴⁰ and goes on to contemplate »daß das Unheimliche das Heimliche-Heimische ist, das eine Verdrängung erfahren hat und aus ihr wiedergekehrt ist.«⁴¹ Therefore, Freud concludes, the ›unheimliche‹ is frightening not because it is *unfamiliar* but rather because it is *all-too familiar*.⁴² Here, the concept of the repressed returning is given a psychoanalytical basis which explains why this concept has gained momentum in studies of the Gothic in ge-

34 Cf. Penny van TOORN, »The Terrors of *Terra Nullius*: Gothicizing and De-Gothicizing Aboriginality,« *World Literature Written in English* 32.2/33.1 (1992/1993): 87–8.

35 Cf. McCann, »Unknown Australia« 49.

36 Cf. Gelder, Introduction xii.

37 Cf. Ken GELDER and Jane M. JACOBS, »The Postcolonial Ghost Story,« *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History*, ed. Peter Buse and Andrew Scott (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999) 188.

38 Cf. Cariou 727.

39 David CROUCH, »National Hauntings: The Architecture of Australian Ghost Stories,« *Spectres, Screens, Shadows, Mirrors*, ed. Tanya Dalziel and Paul Genoni, spec. issue of *JASAL* (2007): 2.

40 Sigmund FREUD, »Das Unheimliche,« 1919, *Psychologische Schriften*, ed. Alexander Mitscherlich, Angela Richards, and James Strachey (Frankfurt a. M.: S. Fischer, 1970) 244; the English translation sums these up as »familiar« in Sigmund FREUD, »The ›Uncanny‹,« 1919, *Art and Literature*, trans. Angela Richards, ed. James Strachey and Albert Dickson, The Penguin Freud Library 14 (London: Penguin Books, 1990) 341.

41 Freud, »Das Umheimliche« 268; »that the uncanny [*unheimlich*] is something which is secretly familiar [*heimlich-heimisch*], which has undergone repression and then returned from it [...]«, Freud, »The ›Uncanny‹« 368; emphasis in the original.

42 Cf. Freud, »Das Umheimliche« 263–4 and Freud, »The ›Uncanny‹« 363–4.

neral and been embraced as an apt tool for describing the contemporary Gothic experience in settler colonies in particular. A current example of this uncanniness of postcolonial Australia is Andrew McGahan's *The White Earth* of 2004,⁴³ which is hailed as »quintessentially Australian« and a »national allegory«,⁴⁴ and which is a classic Gothic tale at the same time: there is, on the one hand, a decaying mansion with its sinister housekeeper familiar from the European Gothic, while on the other the sorry remnants of a variety of Australian myths lurk around. The haunting quality of this novel emanates from the ghostly presences of Aboriginal absences – and that it is the subdued past of colonization which returns to haunt the present.

Apart from contemporary ghost stories concerned with unsettlement and displacement, postcolonial Australian Gothic touches upon a variety of different tropes and fears. After having lain almost dormant, apart from solitary and, as Gerry Turcotte terms them, »extraordinary«, examples, for several decades, the 1960s and 1970s were dominated by new male voices, as for example Peter Carey or Louis Nowra, whose works question the mores of Australian society at large. The 1980s, then, saw the rise of a range of female writers such as Janette Turner Hospital or Gabrielle Lord, who re-discovered the Gothic as a means to challenge patriarchal values.⁴⁵ Yet whereas Gerry Turcotte interprets contemporary Australian Gothic fiction, which for him »is central to the development of a post-colonial literature«,⁴⁶ from a postcolonial perspective, Alexandra Rombouts criticizes his approach as too narrow and instead suggests a socio-political reading of contemporary Gothic texts. But arguing in favour of »examin[ing] the connections between these texts and larger fears and uncertainties expressed by Australian writers about the contemporary construction of their society, and their world«,⁴⁷ Rombouts offers an equally confined analysis, as she excludes the postcolonial perspective, which informs Turcotte's study, altogether. Taken as complementing each other, however, both theses offer a comprehensive view on recent Gothic fiction in Australia.

Despite their different approaches to contemporary Australian Gothic fiction, both studies devote a chapter each to the use of Gothic conventions in the works of Kate Grenville and the late Elizabeth Jolley, two of the numerous feminist writers, including Barbara Baynton, Christina Stead, Barbara Hanrahan, and Carmel Bird, who articulate the female experience with a Gothic voice. Again, Gerry Turcotte is concerned with the postcolonial implications of »retrieving female writing from

43 Andrew MCGAHAN, *The White Earth* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2004).

44 Aviva TUFFIELD, »Tilling a Land of Buried Secrets,« rev. of *The White Earth*, by Andrew McGahan, *The Age* 15 May 2004: Review 5.

45 Cf. Turcotte, »Australian Gothic« 15–17.

46 Turcotte, »Peripheral Fear« ii.

47 Alexandra ROMBOUITS, »Admitting the Intruder: A Study of the Uses of the Gothic in Five Contemporary Australian Novels,« diss., U of Queensland, 1994, 5.

Patriarchal control«⁴⁸ and analyses *The Well* of 1986 as an example of Jolley's way to speak the female body in Gothic terms.⁴⁹ Alexandra Rombouts, on the other hand, discusses Jolley's novella, which relies on the European Gothic in its depiction of the well while at the same time it introduces a menacingly Australian Gothic when detailing the women's everyday life in rural isolation, in terms of its subversion of accepted literary traditions about women in Australia.⁵⁰ Both readings, however, acknowledge and scrutinize the, dubiously successful, construction of Australian women as first whores and later obedient wives as outlined in Anne Summers's seminal study *Damned Whores and God's Police* of 1975.⁵¹ Another female writer who in a similar vein challenges patriarchal traditions is Kate Grenville, who for Turcotte has in particular dealt with language itself and its relation to colonialism and feminism.⁵² In her novel *Dreamhouse*, which is analysed by Rombouts, she subverts familiar versions of romance and invites her readers to look beneath the surface of Australian family life, thus challenging conventional and stereotypical certainties of an Australian world view.⁵³

Though identifying significant differences in the use of the Gothic in the novels of female writers on the one hand and their male contemporaries on the other,⁵⁴ Alexandra Rombouts nevertheless also recognizes similarities in their strategies: for her, representations of Australia as Gothic undermine an Australian nationalism which is grounded on a reality made up of myths, and »[...] the familiar traditions and assumptions about the classless nation, family, the city, the suburbs, are destabilized«.⁵⁵ In her discussion of Tim Winton's novella *In the Winter Dark*, she sees a transformation of well-trod paths of Australian literary conventions about mateship and the bush into a Gothic nightmare, which in her reading is a critique of those very attitudes and traditions it is based on.⁵⁶ Far from a bush setting is the last novel in Rombouts's study, Peter Carey's *The Tax Inspector* of 1991, which turns to child abuse, the city, and decay's modern counterparts pollution and corruption in order to expose the slow death of the Australian nuclear family and its way of life.⁵⁷ Like the other novels analysed in her study, Rombouts reads *The Tax Inspector* as challenging established readings of Australian culture which originated in an imperialist Anglo-centric understanding of nation.

48 Turcotte, »Peripheral Fear« 230.

49 Cf. chapter VII of Turcotte, »Peripheral Fear« 230–56.

50 Cf. Rombouts 33.

51 Cf. Anne SUMMERS, *Damned Whores and God's Police*, 1975, rev. ed. (Ringwood: Penguin Books Australia, 1994).

52 Cf. Turcotte, »Peripheral Fear« 259.

53 Cf. Rombouts 191, 208.

54 Cf. Rombouts 11.

55 Rombouts 258.

56 Cf. Rombouts 112–14.

57 Cf. Rombouts 241.

The unveiling of the uncanny within the familiarity of Australian life is also an important motif in many Australian Gothic films. Romana Ashton identifies five different strands of Gothic traditions in Australian cinema after 1970, the antipodean colonial Gothic, the antipodean urban Gothic, the antipodean suburban Gothic, the antipodean rural Gothic, and the antipodean Sci-Fi car crash Gothic.⁵⁸ For her, the antipodes, and in particular Australia with its worship of sports and other physical activities, have been constructed in terms of uncultured barbarism not unlike the construction of the Goths in eighteenth-century Britain,⁵⁹ an identity many Australian films seek to subvert via its Gothicization. As Ashton shows in her study, the Australian Gothic film overturns different values and traditions that make up an ›Australian identity‹, questioning comfortable notions of national culture.⁶⁰ Yet although she discusses the antipodean colonial Gothic cinema and points out how the Gothic is used to explore Australia's colonial beginnings,⁶¹ she fails to consider its postcolonial implications. For Jonathan Rayner, on the other hand, »[t]he ›horror of personality‹ contained in the portrayal of the secretive and fallen family also encompasses a horror of nationality, [which is] based in a simultaneous abjection of the land and guilt in its acquisition«,⁶² conjuring the postcolonial ghost story's uncanny unsettledness on the big screen. And just like its written counterparts, the Australian horror film casts Aboriginal people, if they appear at all, in the role of the bloodthirsty savage: in his essay on cinematic representation of Aboriginal people, Peter Krausz counts 50 films (of about 1.000 feature films in total) showing Aboriginal people, and identifies an ongoing tradition of »evil hordes stalling white Australia's attempt to colonize the country [and] menacing types in the background«⁶³ in the 1930s to »[t]he use of Aboriginal myths and legends to further stories of violence and fear«⁶⁴ in the 1980s. Perversely, Australia's Aboriginal people and their cultural heritage are disemboweled in the horror film by assigning them a supernatural sphere which has been imagined within a *Western* tradition and *Western* understandings of the ›Dreaming‹.⁶⁵

58 Cf. Romana ASHTON, »Antipodean Gothic Cinema: A Study of the (postmodern) Gothic in Australian and New Zealand Film since the 1970s,« diss., Central Queensland U, 2005, 12 Oct. 2006 (<http://library-resources.cqu.edu.au/thesis/adt-QCQU/uploads/approved/adt-QCQU20060921.111449/public/02whole.pdf>) table of contents.

59 Cf. Ashton 92.

60 Cf. Ashton 120.

61 Cf. Ashton 136.

62 Jonathan RAYNER, »›Terror Australis: Areas of Horror in the Australian Cinema,« *Horror International*, ed. Steven Jay Schneider (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2005) 112.

63 Peter KRAUSZ, »Screening Indigenous Australia: An Overview of Aboriginal Representation on Film,« *Australian Screen Education* 32 (2003): 90.

64 Krausz 94.

65 Cf. Alan MCKEE, »White Stories, Black Magic: Australian Horror Films of the Aboriginal,« *Arajara: Aboriginal Culture and Literature in Australia*, ed. Dieter Riemenschneider and Geoffrey V. Davis, *Cross/Cultures* 28 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997) 200–1.

Notwithstanding the continuing silencing and demonization with the help of the master discourse of a European-derived Gothic tradition, some Aboriginal artists engage dialogically with the Gothic. The importance of interrogating European discourses in a postcolonial context is emphasized by Helen Tiffin, who writes that

[p]ost-colonial counter-discursive strategies involve a mapping of the dominant discourse, a reading and exposing of its underlying assumptions, and the dis/mantling [sic] of these assumptions from the cross-cultural standpoint of the imperially subjectified »local«. ⁶⁶

Yet the transfer of a European literary mode in general and the Gothic in particular into an indigenous context poses questions of severe ideological consequences: similar to the situation in so-called colonies of occupation, where the native subjects were oppressed by white imperialism although their right to the land was acknowledged, Australian Aboriginal writing faces the problem of »how to adapt European theory and forms to [its] own ends without being controlled by them«. ⁶⁷

The writing-back paradigm propagated by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin in their study *The Empire Writes back* was at first hailed as the holy grail of postcolonial studies and a synonym for powerful liberation from the literary restraints of empire, but it soon became clear that, in the words of Byron Caminero-Santangelo, »[...] it defines the relationship between Western and non-Western literatures in binary, oppositional terms [...]« ⁶⁸ – a situation reminiscent of colonial attitudes which postcolonial literature sought (and still seeks) to overcome. As Caminero-Santangelo further argues, the writing-back approach also always implies a combating stance of postcolonial literature which is always embodied in a counter-discursive critique of the colonial original, a position which »severely limits the range of purposes and the transformative power of postcolonial reinscription of European literature«. ⁶⁹ The dilemma at work here seems irreconcilable: on the one hand, postcolonial reworkings of European originals need well-known sources in order to function properly and to help the reader participate in the game of similarities and modifications, yet on the other hand, this very dependency on and centrality of the Western literary canon and its characters, plots, and ideas is their greatest flaw. For Barbara Schmidt-Haberkamp, this relegation »[...] to the status of a mere reaction to imperial textuality [leads to postcolonial literatures becoming] a kind of

66 Helen TIFFIN, »Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse,« *Kunapipi* 9.3 (1987): 23.

67 Margery FEE, »The Signifying Writer and the Ghost Reader: Mudrooroo's *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* and *Writing from the Fringe*,« *Australian and New Zealand Studies in Canada* 8 (1992): 20.

68 BYRON CAMINERO-SANTANGELO, *African Fiction and Joseph Conrad: Reading Postcolonial Intertextuality* (Albany: State U of New York P, 2005) 12.

69 Caminero-Santangelo 15.

second-class creativity that derives its impetus from the Western canon«. ⁷⁰ Judith Newman offers a very similar argument in her essay on the postcolonial Gothic, as for her a rewriting can give the impression that »non-metropolitan cultures« can only rework the original without displaying any creativity of their own, reinforcing the colonial discourse rather than producing a fertile and challenging counter-discourse and thus turning back instead of »forward to confront the legacies of Imperialism in the present«. ⁷¹ Yet another cultural deficiency is the fact that such reworkings privilege a colonial education and aim at Western/Westernized readers, as John Marx claims. ⁷² This opinion is shared by Ivor Indyk, who is concerned with the situation of black Australian writing. For him, it is important to consider the problem that the Aboriginal writer may, instead of appropriating the form s/he seeks to subvert, end up appropriated by the white form, supporting white values and perspectives. ⁷³ In his paper delivered at the first national conference of Aboriginal writers in 1985, Mudrooroo takes a similar stand and calls for Aboriginal novels to stop copying white Australian novels and to rediscover instead »the various facets of Aboriginal life, community, and culture«. ⁷⁴ He further develops his point in his first study on Aboriginal literature, demanding independence from European influences for Aboriginal writing in order to create a unique and authentic Aboriginal style. Yet, as he himself concedes, such a demand is almost impossible to meet, as black Australian writing is situated within a white Australian society. ⁷⁵ The objection raised here is not only a cultural problem but also an institutional one: in what Penny van Toorn refers to as the »patron discourse«, minority writers must conform to criteria made up by the majority audience and adhere to editorial guidelines and, even less appealing, tastes set up by white institutions. ⁷⁶

Other critics, although they recognize the pitfalls of an unreflected view on postcolonial reworkings, bring to mind their benefits. In her recent study on adaptation, for example, Linda Hutcheon uses the metaphor of stories travelling across

70 Barbara SCHMIDT-HABERKAMP, »The Writing-Back Paradigm Revisited: Peter Carey, *Jack Maggs*, and Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*,« *Fabulating Beauty: Perspectives on the Fiction of Peter Carey*, ed. Andreas Gaile, *Cross/Cultures* 78 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005) 247.

71 Newman 172.

72 Cf. John MARX, »Postcolonial Literature and the Western Literary Canon,« *Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*, ed. Neil Lazarus, *Cambridge Companions to Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 92.

73 Cf. Ivor INDYK, »Assimilation or Appropriation: Uses of European Literary Forms in Black Australian Writing,« *Australian Literary Studies* 15.4 (1992): 249.

74 MUDROOROO, »White Forms, Aboriginal Content,« *Aboriginal Writing Today: Papers from the First National Conference of Aboriginal Writers held in Perth, WA, in 1983*, ed. Jack Davis and Bob Hodge (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1985) 28.

75 Cf. MUDROOROO, *Writing from the Fringe: A Study of Modern Aboriginal Literature* (Melbourne: Hyland House, 1990) 42.

76 Cf. Penny van TOORN, »Discourse/Patron Discourse: How Minority Texts command the Attention of Majority Audiences,« *SPAN* 30 (1990): 103.

cultures, a process for which she borrows the anthropological term of indigenization, and emphasizes the importance of agency this term implies: »people pick and choose what they want to transplant to their own soil. Adapters of traveling stories exert power over what they adapt.«⁷⁷ She also calls attention to the *context* of every reworking,⁷⁸ a parameter first introduced by Julia Kristeva in her work on intertextuality in the late 1960s in which she refers to Mikhail Bakhtin's thoughts on dialogism and that any textuality is constructed within a larger social and cultural context.⁷⁹ Inspired by the »*ideologiekritische Sprengkraft*« of Bakhtinian writing against authoritarian monologism, as Manfred Pfister explosively calls the subversive potential of Bakhtin's ideas on dialogism,⁸⁰ Kristeva then develops a first theory of intertextuality: »any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of *intertextuality* replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least *double*«. ⁸¹ She then adds a distinctly discursive aspect to her concept of intertextuality: »The concept of text as ideologeme determines the very procedure of a semiotics that, by studying the text as intertextuality, considers it as such within (the text of) society and history«. ⁸² In his ground-breaking work on a structuralist poetics of intertextuality, Gérard Genette proposes similar criteria to distinguish between different types of what he subsumes under the term transtextuality rather than intertextuality and which he defines as »all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts«. ⁸³ He then goes on to outline his five-part classification of transtextuality which incorporates the term intertextuality but limits its scope to obvious quotations, allusions, and plagiarism. Instead, he concentrates on what he labels hypertextuality: »By hypertextuality I mean any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that

77 Linda HUTCHEON, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge–Taylor & Francis, 2006) 150.

78 Cf. Hutcheon 141–67.

79 See for introductory remarks on Bakhtin's thoughts on textuality Manfred PFISTER, »Konzepte der Intertextualität,« *Intertextualität: Formen, Funktionen, anglistische Fallstudien*, ed. Ulrich Broich and Manfred Pfister, *Konzepte der Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft* 35 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1985) 1–5 and Graham ALLEN, *Intertextuality*, *The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge–Taylor & Francis, 2000) 27–8, 36.

80 Pfister, »Konzepte« 6.

81 Julia KRISTEVA, »Word, Dialogue, and Novel,« 1969, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez, ed. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1980) 66; emphasis in the original.

82 Julia KRISTEVA, »The Bounded Text,« 1969, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez, ed. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1980) 37.

83 Gérard GENETTE, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, 1982, trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1997) 1.

of commentary«. ⁸⁴ Any discursive, modal, or generic relationships between texts, on the other hand, are referred to as architextuality by Genette. ⁸⁵ Putting these rather broad theories of intertextuality into a methodological framework helpful for literary analyses, Ulrich Broich and Manfred Pfister speak of ›*Einzeltextreferenz*‹ and ›*Systemreferenz*‹, respectively: whereas the term ›*Einzeltextreferenz*‹ describes a marked intertextuality between one text and other, specific, previous texts, ⁸⁶ the term ›*Systemreferenz*‹ refers to intertextual relationships between one text and any literary diction or genre it enters into dialogue with. Although he limits his understanding of ›*Systemreferenz*‹ proper to literary dictions or genres, Pfister nevertheless concedes that a broader understanding of the term would include a discursive level as well. ⁸⁷

And it is precisely because of the consideration of and emphasis on the social and historical context first theorized by Kristeva that her approach offers a useful tool for the analysis of postcolonial literature – a much more useful tool than a strict limitation to literary influences only in a Bloomian sense of intertextuality could offer, as Byron Caminero-Santangelo argues. ⁸⁸ For him, »[t]he voice of the postcolonial author comes out not just through the revision of the European classic, but, just as important, through its engagement with the larger social (colonial) text that supposedly speaks through the classic«. ⁸⁹ The idea of ›context‹ then brings to mind yet another dimension of the postcolonial experience, that of non-European influences on postcolonial writers. Apart from any rewriting of European sources and any dialogue with historical contexts, the immediate cultural and political context in which every work of art is created also provides an impetus which should not be neglected in an analysis of postcolonial texts. ⁹⁰ Therefore, the object of any revisionist postcolonial discourse is not only the imperial centre but also the periphery itself, both in the form of writing back to a much older artistic tradition and by constructing a complex intertextual relationship to other postcolonial works. For Norbert Schaffeld, this phenomenon of »diverse, even sometimes opposing strategies« of postcolonial reworkings are best descri-

84 Genette 5; emphasis in the original.

85 Cf. Genette 1.

86 Cf. Ulrich BROICH, »Zur Einzeltextreferenz,« *Intertextualität: Formen, Funktionen, anglistische Fallstudien*, ed. Ulrich Broich and Manfred Pfister, *Konzepte der Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft* 35 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1985) 48–9.

87 Cf. Manfred PFISTER, »Zur Systemreferenz,« *Intertextualität: Formen, Funktionen, anglistische Fallstudien*, ed. Ulrich Broich and Manfred Pfister, *Konzepte der Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft* 35 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1985) 53–5.

88 Cf. Caminero-Santangelo II; a similar view is expressed by Zach WEIR, »How Soon is Now? Reading and the Postcolonial Present,« *Postcolonial Text* 2.4 (2006): 3, 6.

89 Caminero-Santangelo II.

90 See for an exemplary analysis Frank SCHULZE-ENGLER, »Cross-Cultural Criticism and the Limits of Intertextuality,« *Across the Lines: Intertextuality and Transcultural Communication in the New Literatures in English*, ed. Wolfgang Kloß, *Cross/Cultures* 32 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998) 16.

bed with the term appropriation, which for him also always includes »an idea of agency«⁹¹ – just as the term adaptation does for Linda Hutcheon.

Many case studies on postcolonial appropriations of the Gothic support this point of view, as for example Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert demonstrates, who looks at the Caribbean to show how postcolonial writers, especially Haitians, reverse former models of the ›other‹ and thereby call attention to their situation.⁹² According to her, they enter, often through parody, into an interplay with English and continental Gothic by de-Gothicizing the formerly Gothicized and by emphasizing the subversive power of, for instance, Voodoo. For Ken Gelder, this serves two ends: first, Voodoo figures as a counterculture against the white colonizer, but on the other hand, it has developed into a metaphor for the effects the current political reality of oppressive Haitian regimes has on Haiti and the Haitians.⁹³ Another Gothic element skilfully incorporated into a national Haitian literature is the figure of the zombie, with which, according to Paravisini-Gebert, writers comment on the loss of identity and strength of the Haitian people.⁹⁴ Yet not only Haitian, but Caribbean literature in general is an often-quoted example for the successful appropriation of Gothic fiction and its subversive possibilities.⁹⁵ In this context, academics especially emphasize how the Gothic's preoccupation with a troubling past and its ghostly presences are revived and creolized in Caribbean writing in order to create a counter-memory which advances a postcolonial critique of slave history and opposes a recorded European history.⁹⁶ Andrew Smith and William Hughes also argue in favour of a fruitful postcolonial Gothic and support this by referring to how Enlightenment views of rationality helped to construct colonialism's racial hierarchies and to exclude everything considered as ›other‹; and just like Enlightenment's antagonist Gothic fiction, which is fascinated by non-human characters, postcolonial writing challenges the dominant discourse, an analogy

91 Norbert SCHAFFELD, »I need some Answers William: Shakespeare and Post-Colonial Drama,« *Shakespeare's Legacy: The Appropriation of the Plays in Post-Colonial Drama*, ed. Norbert Schaffeld, Reflections: Literatures in English outside Britain and the USA 14 (Trier: WVT, 2005) 3.

92 Cf. Lizabeth PARAVISINI-GEBERT, »Colonial and Postcolonial Gothic: The Caribbean,« *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002) 233.

93 Cf. Ken GELDER, »In ›The Forest of Human Becoming‹: Haitian Voodoo, Culture and Counterculture,« *Paradoxa* 17 (2002): 91.

94 Cf. Paravisini-Gebert 241–3.

95 Cf. Faye RINGEL, »Reclaiming the Invisible World: Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*,« *Into Darkness Peering: Race and Color in the Fantastic*, ed. Elizabeth Anne Leonard (Westport: Greenwood P, 1997) 131.

96 Cf. Graham HUGGAN, »Ghost Stories, Bone Flutes, Cannibal Countermemory,« 1998, *The Horror Reader*, ed. Ken Gelder (London: Routledge–Taylor & Francis, 2000) 359 and Sarah Phillips CASTEEL, »Gothic Gardens in Mootoo, Pineau and Condé,« *Diasporic Spectrality: Minorities and Cultural Assertions in Canada, Australia and Beyond*, ed. Gerry Turcotte and Gaetano Rando, spec. issue of *Australasian Canadian Studies* 23.2 (2005): 56, 64.

which in their view draws postcolonial authors to the Gothic as well as allows for a postcolonial reading of Gothic fiction.⁹⁷

As has been pointed out above, and shown by the many case studies of the postcolonial Gothic mentioned here, the limitation of postcolonial literature to a literature which is merely able to counter the colonial master-discourse through writing back to the allegedly still dominant imperial centre denies it its true creative potential. In an indigenous Australian context, this creative potential is best exemplified in what Mudrooroo has termed ›*maban reality*‹, a concept which he develops in his article ›Maban Reality and Shape-Shifting the Past‹ and further elaborates on in *The Indigenous Literature of Australia: Milli Milli Wangka*, his second study on Australian Aboriginal literature.⁹⁸ Playing a vital role in the development and for the understanding of an Aboriginal Gothic, this concept is closely related to ›magic realism‹, the discussion surrounding which shall be briefly outlined here.

Coined by German art critic Franz Roh in the 1920s, the term ›*magischer Realismus*‹, translated as magic realism, was again taken up by Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier in the 1940s, who referred to it as ›*lo realismo maravilloso*‹, i.e., marvellous realism, and until today continues to describe a certain technique of writing whose features have been outlined by critic Angel Flores in 1955.⁹⁹ It is commonly defined in terms of the oxymoron it consists of, fusing its two aspects, the magical and the realist, into a new perspective of the world, thus offering alternative ways and new approaches to reality.¹⁰⁰ Against this view of the magic being incorporated into reality, however, much the same criticism has been levelled as against a postcolonial Gothic: the term itself, as some critics claim, is grounded in a European perspective, hence assuming that magic, i.e., the irrational, by definition belongs to indigenous/non-European cultures, whereas rationality, and thus the only true reality, is European.¹⁰¹ Liam Connell transfers this criticism into a hierarchic pattern when he states that the term magic realism implies a Western progressiveness and modernity which is sharply contrasted with a mythical primitiveness of non-Western societies, a hierarchy which only serves to reinforce a certain set of prejudices against non-European modes of thinking.¹⁰² Denying a

97 Cf. Andrew SMITH and William HUGHES, ›Introduction: The Enlightenment Gothic and Postcolonialism,‹ Introduction, *Empire and the Gothic: The Politics of Genre*, ed. Andrew Smith and William Hughes (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 1–2.

98 Cf. MUDROOROO, ›Maban Reality and Shape-Shifting the Past: Strategies to sing the Past our Way,‹ *Critical Arts* 10.2 (1996): 1–20 and chapter six of MUDROOROO, *Indigenous Literature of Australia: Milli Milli Wangka* (Melbourne: Hyland House, 1997) 89–105.

99 See for an overview of the origins of magic realism Maggie Ann BOWERS, *Magic(al) Realism, The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge–Taylor & Francis, 2004) 8–19.

100 Cf. Bowers 1–4.

101 Cf. Bowers 84.

102 Cf. Liam CONNELL, ›Discarding Magic Realism: Modernism, Anthropology, and Critical Practice,‹ *ARIEL* 29.2 (1998): 95.

hierarchical structure, Stephen Slemon on the other hand regards magic-realist texts as a combination of two opposite narrative modes neither of which wins or succumbs to the other but rather converses dialogically with its ›other‹,¹⁰³ again negotiating issues of postcolonial self and identity.

Although this discussion is strongly reminiscent of the debate concerning a postcolonial Gothic, the relationship between magic realism and the Gothic is a contested one due to the latter's proximity to the fantastic.¹⁰⁴ According to Amaryll Chanady, the most controversial point of contact is their respective treatment of the supernatural: while the fantastic's dominant worldview is that of enlightened rationality which introduces but ultimately rejects the supernatural, magic realism accepts the supernatural as part of its world.¹⁰⁵ Lucie Armitt goes so far as to call magic realism a counter-discourse of the Gothic, suggesting that whereas magic realism is often read as a postcolonial discourse, the Gothic tends to be read as an Anglo-European tradition.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, she extends the general criticism concerning the supernatural and argues that in Gothic texts, ghosts are the central source and focal point of the narrative.¹⁰⁷ Other critics like Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris on the other hand see strong parallels between magic realism and the Gothic, saying that magic-realist writers depart from realism to follow epic, romance, and Gothic traditions.¹⁰⁸ And like the Gothic, magic realism is suited to explore and transgress boundaries of various kinds, boundaries whose resulting dichotomies are to be fundamentally refashioned in magic realism.¹⁰⁹ According to Jean-Pierre Durix, this opposition between the fantastic and magic realism is even just another European fabrication which is based on a European understanding of the fantastic as something detached from and protesting against

103 Cf. Stephen SLEMON, »Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse,« 1988, *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham: Duke UP, 1995) 409.

104 Despite Tzvetan Todorov explicitly excluding the Gothic from the fantastic, cf. Tzvetan TODOROV, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, 1970, trans. Richard Howard (Cleveland: The P of Case Western Reserve U, 1973) 41–2, other critics discuss Gothic works in terms of the fantastic and recognize similar categories and subversive preoccupations with the self and ›other‹, cf. Neil CORNWELL, *The Literary Fantastic: From Gothic to Postmodernism* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990) 45–6 and Rosemary JACKSON, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, New Accents (London: Methuen, 1981) 53.

105 Cf. Amaryll Beatrice CHANADY, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved versus Unresolved Antinomy* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1985) 10–12, 23.

106 Cf. Lucie ARMITT, »The Magical Realism of the Contemporary Gothic,« *A Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter (Malden: Blackwell, 2000) 308.

107 Cf. Armitt 315.

108 Cf. Lois Parkinson ZAMORA and Wendy B. FARIS, »Introduction: Daiquiri Birds and Flaubertian Parrot(ie)s,« Introduction, *Magical Realism: Theory, History, and Community*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham: Duke UP, 1995) 2.

109 Cf. Zamora and Faris, »Introduction« 5–6.

the real world, while magic realism allows the fantastic to become one alternative reality among others, thus acknowledging its hybrid cultural status.¹¹⁰

Concerning Aboriginal Australia, a more appropriate term would be ›*Aboriginal realism*‹, as Eva Rask Knudsen demands, for »the distinction between the two opposing modes of the term is not so central to a cultural insider as it is indeed to a non-Aboriginal outsider«. ¹¹¹ This alternative reality of indigenous Australians is referred to by Mudrooroo as ›*maban reality*‹, a phrase derived from the Aboriginal shaman figure, the maban. For Mudrooroo, maban reality denotes a uniquely Aboriginal reality which is contrasted with white scientific reality imposed on the various Aboriginal peoples of Australia through imperial power. He argues that the project of colonialism helped to establish a European natural reality based on European scientific thought as the dominant reality, displacing other realities, among them maban reality, from their rightful places within the world.¹¹² Accepting the supernatural as part of everyday reality, maban reality acts as counter-reality, grounded in the earth or country, to a rational worldview and the demands of a European realism. As such, it recaptures and continues traditional Aboriginal narrative structures and at the same time questions the validity of European claims to a universal truth.¹¹³ If this maban reality then permeates the European Gothic tradition, a uniquely Aboriginal Gothic arises.

In its simplest forms, Aboriginal Gothic is nothing more than an imitation, either a plain reversal of Gothic roles or an Aboriginal story delivered in the European Gothic fashion, an example of which is the Arnhem-Land story of Namorrodor at ABC's *Dust Echoes* web page¹¹⁴ – as Tom E. Lewis in his introduction to *Dust Echoes* says: »We are telling our stories to you in a way you can understand«. ¹¹⁵ Yet a full usurpation, digestion, and transformation of the European Gothic into an Aboriginal Gothic is not complete until a cultural matrix foreign to a European audience is created, which for Samia Mehrez lays at the heart of postcolonial translation: not able to convey certain cultural subtexts due to its lack of cultural knowledge, the colonizer's language is dominated by the previously silenced language and culture

110 Cf. Jean-Pierre DURIX, *Mimesis, Genre and Post-Colonial Discourse: Deconstructing Magic Realism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998) 80–2.

111 Cf. Eva Rask KNUDSEN, *The Circle and the Spiral: A Study of Australian Aboriginal and New Zealand Maōri Literature*, *Cross/Cultures* 68 (Amsterdam: Publisher, 2004) 226–7.

112 Cf. Mudrooroo, »Maban Reality and Shape-Shifting the Past« 1.

113 Cf. Mudrooroo, *Milli Milli Wangka* 96–8.

114 Cf. »Namorrodor,« *Dust Echoes: Ancient Stories, New Voices*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2007, 16 Aug. 2008 (<http://www.abc.net.au/dustechoes/dustEchoesFlash.htm>) path: Namorrodor. The story of Namorrodor is one of twelve Aboriginal stories edited for interactive purposes and was one of the first four stories produced in 2004. The website then underwent a significant change in 2007, adding another eight stories together with extensive teaching material.

115 *Dust Echoes: Ancient Stories, New Voices*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2007, 16 Aug. 2008 (<http://www.abc.net.au/dustechoes/dustEchoesFlash.htm>) path: Study Guide–Introductory Study Guide.

of the colonized.¹¹⁶ Hence Western assumptions of superiority are challenged and the workings of discursive representations are questioned through blending the Gothic mode in its European tradition with the myths and customs of Aboriginal culture. Clare Archer-Lean, however, in her PhD thesis argues that Aboriginal artists rather reframe the European Gothic than to »simply create a hybridised Indigenous/non-Indigenous space [...]. Rather, Indigenous themes construct the imaginative boundary framing [...] Gothic images themselves«. ¹¹⁷ In this respect, I strongly disagree with Archer-Lean's reasoning: to define the use of Gothic conventions by Aboriginal authors in terms of limiting boundaries is to disregard the basic characteristic of Gothic fiction, which is the probing and ultimately transgression of boundaries. Denying the Aboriginal artist the one aspect which lies at the heart of a postcolonial Gothic deprives the work of its subversiveness and thus of its possibility to challenge the master-discourse of colonialism. In Aboriginal Gothic, the subversive and transgressive qualities of the European Gothic are unearthed and turned against the most notorious Gothic perpetrator, the white invader, *just because of its being merged* with Aboriginal culture and relating the Gothic to a much broader postcolonial context. The following analysis will now show the many guises this Aboriginal Gothic can take.

116 Cf. Samia MEHREZ, »Translation and the Postcolonial Experience: The Francophone North African Text,« *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London: Routledge, 1992) 128–30.

117 Archer-Lean 96.

II. Aboriginal Appropriations

1. Re-Biting the Canon: Mudrooroo's Vampire Trilogy

a. Classics Rewritten

i. *Bram Stoker's Dracula*¹

Beginning a study of Aboriginal Gothic with Mudrooroo's vampire trilogy of all works seems odd and rather inappropriate, if not offensive, in the wake of Victoria Laurie's article »Identity Crisis«² and the fierce debate about Mudrooroo's/Colin Johnson's right to Aboriginality it entailed. A contested issue in its own right, Aboriginality and Torres Strait Islander status is, for administrative purposes and to establish eligibility for services and programs, only open to indigenous people, defined by three criteria which have first been devised by High Court judge Sir William Deane. In his reasoning in *Commonwealth v Tasmania*, he states that »[b]y ›Australian Aboriginal‹ I mean [...] a person of Aboriginal descent, albeit mixed, who identifies himself as such and who is recognized by the Aboriginal community as an Aboriginal«.³ These criteria also loom large in the discussion of Mudrooroo's heritage, and it was chiefly his claim to a matrilineal affiliation with the Bibbulmun people of Western Australia which has led to his being accused of having deliberately mis-appropriated an Aboriginal identity – and of having committed a cultural fraud.⁴ Responses to Laurie's uncoverings range from denying Mudrooroo

1 All quotations from and comments on *Dracula* refer to Bram STOKER, *Dracula*, 1897, ed. Maurice Hindle, rev. ed., Penguin Classics (London: Penguin Books, 2003); this edition is referred to in the text as (*D p*).

2 Victoria LAURIE, »Identity Crisis,« *The Australian Magazine* 20–21 July 1996: 28–32.

3 COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA v State of Tasmania, HCA 21, High Court of Australia, 1 June 1983, Deane par. 50.

4 For a description of the hoaxful(l) situation within the Australian literary scene into which the Mudrooroo-debate burst, see Maureen CLARK, »Mudrooroo: A Likely Story: Identity and Belonging in Postcolonial Australia,« *diss.*, U of Wollongong, 2003, 21–2.

any rights to Aboriginality, including his chosen name,⁵ to balanced assessments of what constitutes an Aboriginal identity. For Nina Smidt, many contributions to this discussion reduce the complex issue of ›identity‹ to mere biological/genealogical categories and fail to take into account notions of a *cultural* identity.⁶ Similarly, Mary Ann Hughes criticizes tendencies which narrow Aboriginality to a, by white bureaucratic standards, accurately defined ›true‹ Aboriginality, and exclude other, different, experiences, a strategy which for her is just another tool used by Anglo-Celtic critics to further objectify Aboriginal culture.⁷ Apart from any questions surrounding his biological inheritance, it cannot be denied that Mudrooroo has lived inside Aboriginal culture, experienced white discrimination, and fought for equality and justice for more than four decades, which, as Eva Rask Knudsen rightly observes, »is something literary hoaxes tend to lack«.⁸ His works are, even though ostensibly not written by an Aboriginal writer of maternal Bibbulmun descent, still to be considered informed by Mudrooroo's cultural identity which has been shaped by his very own Aboriginal life and experiences, and thus his vampire trilogy can still be read in terms of an Aboriginal Gothic.

Mudrooroo's latest works, which constitute his vampire trilogy and continue his earlier *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* of 1991,⁹ which itself is a reworking of *Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* (1983), are examples of a sophisticated intertextuality both in ›Einzeltext-‹ and ›Systemreferenz-‹ respects: they are written back to a number of so-called canonical classics as well as to a variety of other hypotexts in a disturbing reworking of the Gothic tradition itself. And although both *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* and *Doctor Wooreddy* already show Gothic traits and are also concerned with the transformation of Western discourses of colonialism, they will not be analysed in detail in this study as the Gothic there plays only a minor role. It is only in Mudrooroo's vampire trilogy that the Gothic takes centre stage for the first time in that it explicitly preys on European traditions of the Gothic in order to use it as gruesome key in its transformation of this particular discourse of the ›other‹ into an Aboriginal Gothic. The first

5 Maureen Clark, for example, refers to him as Colin Johnson throughout her dissertation out of respect for Nyoongar Elders, see Clark, »A Likely Story« ii.

6 Cf. Nina SMIDT, »Die Suche nach *Aboriginality*: Untersuchungen zu literarischen Identitätskonstruktionen am Beispiel der ›schwarzaustralischen‹ Autoren Sally Morgan und Mudrooroo Narogin,« diss., U of Hamburg, 2003, 186.

7 Cf. Mary Ann HUGHES, »The Complexity of Aboriginal Identity: Mudrooroo and Sally Morgan,« *Westerly* 43.1 (1998): 27.

8 Eva Rask KNUDSEN, »Mission Completed? On Mudrooroo's Contribution to the Politics of Aboriginal Literature in Australia,« *Missions of Interdependence: A Literary Directory*, ed. Gerhard Stilz, *Cross/Cultures* 58 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002) 330.

9 All quotations from and comments on *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* refer to MUDROOROO, *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* (North Ryde: Collins/Angus & Robertson–HarperCollins, 1991); this edition is referred to in the text as (MG p).

volume of this trilogy, *The Undying* (1998),¹⁰ introduces the vampire Amelia, the female vampire from London's East End who sails to Australia and wreaks havoc among both white settlers and indigenous inhabitants, and the Aboriginal group trying to battle her invasion of Australia: Jangamuttuk, Ludjee, and their son George, who, as is later revealed, is in effect the son of a Christian missionary, as well as their Afro-American friend Wadawaka. They are later joined by Waai, the shaman of another tribe they encounter on their journey. In a re-enactment of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the story unfolds around familiar Gothic tropes of vampires and werewolves, interspersed with traditional Aboriginal and Australian oral and literary structures. The second volume, *Underground* (1999),¹¹ then transports the main protagonists into the realms of the underground, there staging several stories of ancient mythology, whereas the last volume again returns to the surface and to canonical classics such as Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* and William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* in a journey to *The Promised Land* (2000).¹² On their way, the protagonists not only find themselves side by side with some of Western literature's most canonical characters, but are also involved with remarkable events and figures of Australian colonial history. Presented as traditional Aussie yarns, these well-known stories are told with a twist in Mudrooroo's vampire trilogy and embedded within both white and Aboriginal Australian cultural traditions, joining the written word with orality and contesting notions of Australia as a nation without history.

One of the most popular characters of Gothic writing, the vampire, like the zombie in Haitian writing, plays an important part in (post)colonial discourses. Deriving from antiquity, the figure of the vampire has developed into a much-used symbol of parasitism: it prolongs its own life by sucking the victim's blood. The penetration of the jugular vein is too obvious a sexual theme to go unnoticed, as is the very act of killing the victim by sucking it dry, connoting every possible kind of exploitation. In a postcolonial context, the feeding on the victim's identity and its replacement by a vampiric, thus infected, one is a most prominent metaphor,¹³ and its best-known literary equivalent is the character of Count Dracula.

10 All quotations from and comments on *The Undying* refer to MUDROOROO, *The Undying* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson–HarperCollins, 1998); this edition is referred to in the text as (UD p).

11 All quotations from and comments on *Underground* refer to MUDROOROO, *Underground* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson–HarperCollins, 1999); this edition is referred to in the text as (UG p).

12 All quotations from and comments on *The Promised Land* refer to MUDROOROO, *The Promised Land* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson–HarperCollins, 2000); this edition is referred to in the text as (PL p).

13 Even in anthropology, the vampiric metaphor is a theme of current research, as one of Prof Janet Hoskins's research interests is »postcolonial Gothic discourses of the body, and specifically the idea of the extraction of blood as a symbol of colonial exploitation and global inequities in access to technology.« see *USC Anthropology - Janet Hoskins*, University of Southern California, 2002, 4 Sept. 2004 (<http://www.usc.edu/dept/elab/anth/FacultyPages/hoskins.html>).

Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, published in 1897, features a Transylvanian count who comes to England in order to feed on English blood. According to Stephen D. Arata, the text expresses an imperial power's fear of reverse colonization, of being invaded by an Eastern force,¹⁴ which is even emphasized by the fact that Dracula starts his London business in the East End, then creeping into the Western parts of town (cf. *D* 31, 282). As Van Helsing remarks, Dracula came to London exactly because it was the »place of all the world most of promise for him« (*D* 341). His ultimate goal then is the destruction of the nation's identity by infecting the individuals with his vampiric disease: once the English blood is infected, the English race will die out and give way to the conqueror.¹⁵ Such narratives of reverse colonization¹⁶ have one thing in common: it is the threatened British nation that defeats its would-be conqueror and finally triumphs, having averted the peril of invasion and extinction, a fate colonial authors in turn far too eagerly imposed on Aboriginal people when romanticizing them as a »vanished race«.¹⁷ In *The Undying*, Mudrooroo takes up the subject of imperialism raised in *Dracula*, when the East-End she-vampire Amelia, interestingly an anagram of Lamiae, the female vampires of antiquity, is shipwrecked off the Australian coast and preys upon the Aboriginal people. George, the story's Aboriginal narrator, is infected by her and turns into a vampire himself, despite the efforts of his family and friends.

The figure of the vampire is closely modeled upon Stoker's *Dracula* in both shape and behaviour. Amelia's master, who has left her, seems to be a perfect imitation of the count:

[His eyes] glowed an eerie red, piercing my soul with a fire which was cool rather than overheated. [...]

[...] he said in a rich educated voice with a lingering foreign accent. [...]

[...] His clothes were well cut and a rich dark cape flowed from his shoulders. If only his eyes weren't so unsettling. [...]

[...] I was fascinated by the pale gauntness of his face in which his eyes burnt as if from a tortured soul, directly into mine. (*UD* 71–2)

This description evokes pictures of Bela Lugosi and Christopher Lee, who inspired modern versions of *Dracula* with their screen performances. Every possible cliché associated with the vampire of popular films is embodied in Amelia's strange

14 Cf. Stephen D. ARATA, »The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization,« *Victorian Studies* 44 (1990): 623.

15 Dracula himself tells Jonathan Harker that he belongs to a »conquering race« (*D* 36).

16 Narratives such as Stoker's *She* (1887) and *The Jewel of Seven Stars* (1903) as well as Wells's *War of the Worlds* (1898), whose Martians, like Dracula, feed on English blood, or Marsh's *The Beetle* (1897) belong to this category.

17 Cf. Andrew McCANN, »The Literature of Extinction,« *Meanjin* 65.1 (2006): 51–2.

master. Amelia herself, however, has taken on the habits assigned to Dracula: she must rest in her earth, which she has brought from England (cf. *UD* 66), and she cannot abide the direct sunlight (cf. *UD* 76, 90), though it does not kill her instantly (cf. *UD* 117–8);¹⁸ the crucifix holds the count at bay (cf. *D* 33, 326) and causes Amelia pain and injuries (cf. *PL* 39). Just like Dracula, she wants to adjust to her new situation and learn how to fully use her powers in the new land: »[...] when I have learnt to fully master my present state this dependence [on her native soil] will lessen« (*UD* 66); Van Helsing states that Dracula is learning through experiment and thus increasing his powers (cf. *D* 322–3). Another similarity between the two characters is the ability to shape-shift into a bat: George first encounters Amelia as a bat (cf. *UD* 62), and Dracula pays his victims a visit while in the same shape (cf. *D* 255).

Apart from obvious likenesses in appearance and habit, the storyline itself includes many parallels between *The Undying* and *Dracula*. The count starts his British affairs at Whitby, where his ship, the *Demeter*, is shipwrecked in a storm (cf. *D* 85–90). Amelia Fraser is equally shipwrecked on the Australian shore, with a »vessel aptly named the *Kore*« (*UD* 66), like Dracula having fed on the crew to survive the journey. Interestingly enough, the Greek goddess Demeter is the mother of Persephone, who was widely known as *Kore* in ancient Greece. By this means, Amelia is presented as the legitimate heir of Count Dracula, the Eastern invader.¹⁹ Her reason for coming to Australia is quite similar to that of the count as well: she needs a fresh supply of blood (cf. *UD* 91), just like Dracula leaves for London due to his land being »barren of people« (*D* 340). Both want to harvest the people, as Van Helsing's metaphor of »the multitude of standing corn« (*D* 340) and Amelia's recollection of »how [she] milked the cattle penned thereupon [on board the *Kore*]« (*UD* 90) suggest. To accommodate him/herself to England and Australia, respectively, the vampire needs a servant, a servant of the native population. Dracula and Amelia Fraser find such a servant in the traitorous Renfield. Dracula lures his Renfield into his service by promising him eternal life (cf. *D* 113, 298) – a reward Renfield himself squanders when he fights Dracula for the sake of Mina Harker –, and Amelia follows in his footsteps to secure her Renfield's [*sic*] loyalty to her: »If you serve me well, perhaps one day I will allow you to sup on their blood as I do« (*UD* 97). Yet the crude abbreviation of the name and Amelia's only indecisive promise of eternal life suggest a slightly different assessment of racial status in

18 Stoker's count is able to survive in full daylight, too, although his powers are diminished and he has to remain in the shape he has assumed before dawn (cf. *D* 255); for the sake of visual effects, however, the vampire on screen »[turns] first to gorgonzola and then to bones and sawdust«, John SUTHERLAND, *Is Heathcliff a Murderer? Great Puzzles in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996) 234.

19 As Jangamuttuk remarks, the British refer to themselves as having come from a land that »lies to the East« (*UD* 109), although their way must have been round the Cape of Good Hope.

the two novels: whereas it is Dracula who is the foreigner and thus in principle inferior to his British ›servant‹, Amelia's Aboriginal Renfiel has no social status whatsoever neither within the colonial system nor in Aboriginal society and needs not be treated as an equal even though she depends on him.

Apart from this, there are more significant differences between *Dracula* and *The Undying* despite the many similarities within the plot: in a briefing, Dracula's enemies compare the vampire's powers with their own abilities (cf. *D* 252–6), and the devices to either deter or kill a vampire listed by Van Helsing include garlic, the crucifix, a bunch of wild roses on his coffin, and, of course, the wooden stake through his heart (cf. *D* 256), all of them commonly known in European folklore.²⁰ Unfortunately, the group of indigenes who battle the vampiric forces invading their land is not familiar with European folklore, yet they are acquainted with creatures like Amelia: »You're one of those bloodsuckers,« the woman [Ludjee] says within my mind« (*UD* 121). The Australian equivalent to European vampires is the Yara Ma Tha Who, as a story collected by David Unaipon tells: »[The Yara ma tha who] sucks the blood from the victim and leaves him helpless upon the ground.«²¹ Even the dire consequences of being captured and swallowed by this creature resemble those of being bitten by a vampire:

Supposing the same person was caught and swallowed again, or should it happen three times, the first time he was swallowed he would become shorter in stature, the second time shorter still, until the last time he would become and resemble the Yara ma, only in this first stage of transformation the victim's skin would become very smooth, with visible signs of hair on the body and head. They would remain thus for a short time and then long hair would begin to cover the body very thickly indeed. *And in this way the people were gradually changing from ordinary human beings into the little mythical beings* [. . .].²²

Yet there is one fundamental difference between the Yara Ma Tha Who and the vampire of European folklore: no means to destroy this Australian kind of vampire are mentioned in the story, as it is a spirit's task to punish him in case of any wrongdoings:

Now, every child is taught that should they be captured, to offer no resistance, because they have a better chance of escape to allow themselves to be swallowed and the Yara ma to spew them out, as it was the custom of all Yara ma to do from

20 See for an exhaustive overview of those folkloristic means Basil COPPER, *The Vampire: In Legend, Fact and Art*, 1973 (London: Robert Hale, 1990) 29–30.

21 David UNAIPON, »Yara Ma Tha Who,« 1924/1925, *Legendary Tales of the Australian Aborigines*, ed. Stephen Muecke and Adam Shoemaker (Carlton: The Miegunyah P–Melbourne UP, 2006) 218.

22 Unaipon, »Yara Ma Tha Who« 219, emphasis mine.

time immemorial. Should the Yara ma fail to do this, then the Spirit of the Wild Fig-tree would slay him by entering into his head through the ear and cause such mumbling noise ending with intense silence, and the Yara ma spirit would leave the rude body and become cold fungus that grows upon the trees which shed a dull glow at night.²³

Thus Ludjee's reaction to Amelia comes as no surprise: »Now, what am I to do with such a devil?« (UD 121). Whereas Jonathan Harker, Quincey Morris, and many generations of cinematic vampire hunters that followed them, can ultimately destroy the vampire, Ludjee is not aware of her powers over Amelia and does not wait for the dawn to put an end to her enemy, as was Amelia's fear (cf. UD 117–18).

As far as the theme of colonization is concerned, *The Undying* also differs considerably from its literary predecessor. The vampire hunters' party in *Dracula* pursues the count back to his native Transylvanian castle, chasing him out of England and thus rescuing the English race from being infected with his vampirism. Due to the insular nature of Australia and the very real dominance of the British over the indigenous population of Australia, the group around Jangamuttuk has no possibility to send Amelia back to England and rid Australia of her presence. At the end of *The Undying*, Amelia escapes the massacre in the British settlement and her own »ceasing« (UD 201–2), only to return as queen of the underworld in the second volume. These discrepancies in the storyline have their nature in the differences in reality between the British and the Aboriginal Australians: the heart of the British Empire was never invaded in modern times, while Australia was settled by the British, who claimed it as *Terra Nullius* and oppressed the indigenous people living there. As I will argue, Mudrooroo unsettles his readers and recalls the suppression of Aboriginal identity exactly by first establishing a recognizable connection between the English classic and his own text only to differ from *Dracula* in so vital a point.

Yet he does not content himself with reversing *Dracula*'s colonial implications, but also voices the silenced sexuality of the Victorian novel, openly establishing the connection between blood and semen only hinted at in *Dracula*: »[...] but when I reach down with my fingers then raise them to my mouth, I taste also your white blood« (UD 192), as compared to »[Mrs Harker's] white nightdress was smeared with blood, and a thin stream trickled down the man's [Dracula's] bare breast which was shown by his torn-open dress« (D 300). Bringing to mind Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject and the threat it presents to the not-so-inviolable entities of the human body and identity,²⁴ Amelia embodies all that which traditional European

23 Unaipon, »Yara Ma Tha Who« 219.

24 Cf. Julia KRISTEVA, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, ed. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1982) 4.

Gothic elides and hides behind »textual euphemism«, as Annalisa Oboe argues.²⁵ Through the figure of this »powerful maternal, blood-sucking seductress[...]«, as Maureen Clark calls her,²⁶ Mudrooroo not only voices his critique of the Western colonial project and its insatiable thirst for violence, but also turns to questioning the ambivalent role of Victorian women at home and in the colonies. In Victorian culture, the woman was confined to the home and, as Coventry Padmore's poem suggests, a mere »Angel in the House« (1854), defined only as men's ›other‹ and in relation to them (mother, sister, wife, or daughter). As such, women were supposed to be chaste and innocent, of »a moral purity that was often figured as asexuality«, and submissive towards men²⁷ – a role Amelia perfectly acts out for her audience, while her thoughts, and later acts, reveal her true nature.²⁸ Curiously enough, the most powerful figure of Victorian times was a woman: Queen Victoria herself. Furthermore, the Women's Rights Movement was established in New York in 1848, opening a new chapter in patriarchal history. Those representations of ›the weaker sex‹, however, are no model for the average middle-class woman: though involved in business activities which were deemed suitable for women, they nevertheless remained behind the scenes.

A real paragon of these Victorian virtues is embodied in Mina Harker, who before her marriage has worked as a schoolmistress, an occupation commonly assigned to Victorian spinsters, and spends her honeymoon in a scarcely romantic convent to care for her broken-down husband (cf. *D* 114–16). She is the rational female protagonist of Stoker's novel, attributed with »a man's brain [...] and a woman's heart« (*D* 250), thus neither invading men's territory nor being overly sentimental.²⁹ For her husband, as for Victorian society in general, Mina is the only true woman: »Faugh! Mina is a woman, and there is nought in common. They [the three vampire women] are devils of the Pit!« (*D* 61).

In *The Promised Land*, the figure of Mina provides nothing more than a supporting character, used to expose the hypocrisy of British moral values: portrayed as a regular telltale who informs her friend Lucy's parents of their daughter's sexual fantasies (cf. *PL* 2, 4), she is presented as a decent and »stodgy« (*PL* 109) Victorian

25 Annalisa OBOE, »Metamorphic Bodies and Mongrel Subjectivities in Mudrooroo's *The Undying*,« *Bodies and Voices: The Force-Field of Representation and Discourse in Colonial and Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Merete Borch et al., Cross/Cultures 94 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008) 231.

26 Maureen CLARK, »Terror as White Female in Mudrooroo's Vampire Trilogy,« *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 41.2 (2006): 126.

27 Kelly HURLEY, »British Gothic Fiction, 1885-1930,« *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002) 199–200.

28 Cf. Mudrooroo, *The Undying* 138–49.

29 The wish that women should not be too rational is also expressed by George Augustus Robinson with regard to Amelia: »Her increasing callousness he found repugnant, especially in one of the weaker sex [...]« (*PL* 135).

woman »with a stern sense of duty« (PL 4). Yet behind closed doors, her decency vanishes: when alone with Lucy, she engages in lesbian sexual activities. They »compar[e] breasts for some time« (PL 3) and Lucy »remember[s] their playful games« (PL 7). It is actually Mina who gains the most pleasure from their »games«: »Mina used to like my [Lucy's] hand doing this to her, but she was so moist« (PL 45). Stoker's novel, on the other hand, clings to the Victorian idea of a ›romantic friendship‹ between women – an ideal which, according to Carolyn Oulton, »enjoyed a high, although sometimes ambivalent cultural status«³⁰ – and silences sexuality to the two-faced degree which was deemed proper in Victorian culture.

Another revealing point of comparison between both novels is their respective treatment of Lucy. In *Dracula*, she is introduced as a »horrid flirt« (D 66), and her letters already hint at her promiscuous and bigamous immorality when complaining about having to choose between three suitors: »Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble?« (D 67). As it was impossible for Stoker to directly raise issues of sexuality, Lucy's indecency is presented through metaphors: first, her ›marriage‹ to four men by way of blood transfusion (cf. D 132–3, 138, 145, 160, 185) and second, her transformation into a vampire, which shows her »voluptuous wantonness« (D 255) – interestingly, as Nina Auerbach remarks, it is only in her vampiric state that Lucy monogamously longs for her fiancé and not for her other suitors as well.³¹ Only the performance of the matrimonial act by her fiancé in a surrogate wedding night by way of driving a stake through her heart finally makes her a virtuous woman – »[...] her face of unequalled sweetness and purity [...] the traces of care and pain and waste [that] marked her truth« (D 231) – and saves her soul, no longer the »foul Thing [sic] that we had so dreaded and grown to hate« (D 231). Mudrooroo's refiguration of Lucy once more reveals Victorian society's hypocrisy so evident in *Dracula*. His »Lady Lucille« – now, in a reversal of the Renfiel(d)-pattern, introduced with her full name instead of *Dracula*'s pet name – is a naïve young woman dreaming of »a young Byron (without the pain)« (PL 5) instead of »an ancient chap who [...] had become a laughing stock« (PL 5). In addition, both her heterosexual and homosexual fantasies and adventures are mentioned openly, even to the extent of describing her pleasure: »That shriek from your wife...‹ Mrs Crawley broke in, [...] ›I have heard such commotions before and they are not exclamations of fright, far from it« (PL 13). Yet the impact of Victorian society on this young woman becomes clear from the beginning. Due to her noctambulism, referred to as »predilection« rather than »sickness« (PL 1), and her frank words (»Like a lot of little fingers rubbing away at my sensitive places, and right under my dress,

30 Carolyn W. de la L. OULTON, *Romantic Friendship in Victorian Literature*, The Nineteenth Century Series (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007) 1.

31 Cf. Nina AUERBACH, *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995) 79–80.

too« (PL 2)), her parents, and her friend Mina, too, speak of her as »a weird little lass« (PL 2). The only possible way to put a stop to her »fancies« seems finding her a husband and thus occupying her with »the obligations of matrimony [instead of with] the reading of narrative fiction« (PL 4).³² As a result, »Lucy surrendered her life [and] found herself the wife of an elderly man« (PL 6), entrapped in her parents' cultural values. This surrender to a life a Victorian woman was predestined to lead shows how Mudrooroo ultimately draws back from completely reversing the original's patterns – a position already occupied by the ambiguously transgressing figure of Amelia. His transfiguration of the character of Mina, on the other hand, leads to an exposure of imperial codes and their inconsistencies whereby he unmasks their strategies of subdual.

ii. William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*³³

Another Victorian novel that is concerned with ideas of both imperialist and generic subordination is William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, whose portrait of Victorian manners and morals Mudrooroo takes as a starting point in his critique of the colonial administration of Australia and its Aboriginal people. In contrast to *Dracula*, *Vanity Fair* does not deal with these issues in the first place, but rather reveals them as a latent and underlying theme. Designed, as Patrick Brantlinger argues, as a domestic realist antithesis to imperial romances,³⁴ the novel takes no interest in presenting political implications of the British Empire's presence in India: the Empire is taken for granted and not questioned on a fundamental level. Thus Thackeray offers an uncritical image of Anglo-India, relying on racial stereotypes as a substitute for political analysis. To him, India only appeared as a scene of British conquest and changeless oriental deceit.³⁵ Although one of the settings of *Vanity Fair* is India, it only remains a background. The native Indians have no voice of their own, and the Indian landscape is nothing but a place of exile. Whenever India is referred to and given consideration as a foreign country rather than a British military base, it is connected with either Joseph Sedley or Peggy O'Dowd. Jos is employed in the East India Company's Civil Service, listed as »collector of Boggley Wollah« (VF 28) and relates his »many interesting anecdotes about that country and himself« (VF 41), among them the famous tiger-hunt in which the

32 Especially the reading of Gothic fiction was deemed indecent, a fact later emphasized by George Augustus Robinson: »[...] some dense Gothic novel such as he had forbidden his own gentle wife to read« (PL 135).

33 All quotations from and comments on *Vanity Fair* refer to William Makepeace THACKERAY, *Vanity Fair: A Novel without a Hero*, 1848, ed. John Carey, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin Books, 2003); this edition is referred to in the text as (VF p).

34 Cf. Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness* 94.

35 Cf. Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness* 105–7.

native mahout of his elephant was killed but did not evoke much pity. Mrs O'Dowd, on the other hand, is described as »one of the greatest ladies in the Presidency of Madras« (VF 502) who »has been received by many native princes« (VF 502). Yet both characters are nothing but caricatures; Jos is a coward both in India and at Waterloo (cf. VF 41, 444), and Peggy a »tattling old harridan« (VF 134) with no sense of style (cf. VF 309). Through these characterizations, India is introduced as the fitting locale for the Empire's least deserving.

None of the characters which are depicted in an Indian surrounding by Thackeray, however, find an equivalent in Mudrooroo's vampire trilogy. There is no Jos Sedley and no Peggy O'Dowd, neither is there a Dobbin, who is »deeply immersed in his ›History of the Punjaub‹« (VF 806), in his texts, suggesting there is no room for the Empire Thackeray envisioned. Rather, that which has provided nothing but an exotic background becomes the centre of attention and is no longer a place for the grotesque; nor is it a place for studies written from the imperialist's point of view.

The second imperial scene of *Vanity Fair* is Coventry Island, the place of exile for Colonel Rawdon Crawley and considered a »hell on earth« which offers a »convenient dumping ground for undesirables« by J. Russell Perkin.³⁶ Apart from suffering from a bad climate, which causes the fatal yellow fever at Swampton to which both Rawdon Crawley and his predecessor fall victim (cf. VF 645, 651, 808), Coventry Island is not further portrayed in the novel, thus working as a substitute for every possible exile far from the Empire's centre. Additionally, Rawdon Crawley is deprived of a voice of his own after he is bought off with the governorship by Lord Steyne and accepts his post at Coventry Island, a position which equals that of the periphery's natives. After the duel to which he challenged Lord Steyne is thwarted, Rawdon is only mentioned either in his position as governor of Coventry Island (cf. VF 651–2, 808), or as a mere memory (cf. VF 776, 795). Literally written out of the novel, his last words mark his final break with Becky: »[...] and I'll never see her again – never« (VF 650).

Mudrooroo's Rawdon Crawley, on the other hand, is sent to Australia as governor of the colony of Westland *together* with his wife (cf. PL 8–9), and by unfolding parts of the narrative around this couple, Mudrooroo uses the familiar strategy of telling what has been neglected and omitted in *Vanity Fair* – the locus of colonial enterprise. Being set in Australia, the story cannot avoid placing the margin in the centre and vice versa, yet both Rawdon and Rebecca Crawley fail to adjust to this situation: they are nothing more but »the remains of past splendour« (PL 193). Still eager to return to London, the metropolis, and its civilized modernity (cf. PL 210, 233), they represent those first colonizers who saw themselves as Englishmen and women

36 J. Russell PERKIN, »Thackeray and Imperialism: A Response to Sandy Morey Norton,« *Narrative* 2.2 (1994): 164.

rather than Australians and referred to Britain as their mother country to which they were once to return. The improbability of such hopes is again embodied in Rawdon and Rebecca, as both characters are portrayed to be completely out of fashion and to belong to a different generation (cf. *PL* 30, 193–4). Like Rebecca herself remarks, »[s]o much has changed in *Vanity Fair*« (*PL* 203).

Apart from imperial criticism, Mudrooroo also considers questions of gender roles implied in *Vanity Fair*. John Carey regards Thackeray's characters as types rather than as individuals and identifies the rake (Rawdon Crawley), the adventuress (Becky), the pure and simple girl (Amelia), the young dandy (George Osborne), and the »gawky Galahad« (Dobbin).³⁷ For Carey, those types later become individuals; they fulfil certain expectations and at the same time defy them, as for instance Becky does: on the one hand, she is condemned by society's morals, but on the other she makes them seem inadequate.³⁸

Pictured as an unscrupulous and ambitious woman, Thackeray's Becky is from the beginning set apart from patriarchal Victorian society when she throws Johnson's *Dictionary* out of the coach (cf. *VF* 14), thus emancipating herself from everything patriarchy stands for: »male authority, social cohesion, respect for precedent«. ³⁹ The results of her act of emancipation are pursued throughout the novel, and Becky is the only woman of its cast who apparently fails to live up to the moral standards of *Vanity Fair*. Due to the lack of parental help, Becky has to secure a husband entirely on her own (cf. *VF* 27, 35, 100), finally winning Rawdon Crawley. As his wife, she manages their financial affairs: »»Gambling,« she [Rebecca] would say, »dear, is good to help your income, but not as an income itself. Some day people may be tired of play, and then where are we?« Rawdon acquiesced in the justice of her opinion [...]« (*VF* 422). She further schemes to reconcile them with Aunt Crawley – and hence with her money to be inherited:

»Do you know what I intend to do one morning?« she said; »I find I can swim beautifully, and some day, when my Aunt Crawley's companion [...] goes out to bathe, I intend to dive under her awning, and insist on a reconciliation in the water. Isn't that a stratagem?« (*VF* 278–9).

All Becky can rely on are her wits and her sex-appeal, two things a woman is denied to publicly exhibit in Victorian society and which leads to the constant and implied questioning of her chastity. Although she protests her innocence when discovered with Lord Steyne (cf. *VF* 623–4), it is never revealed what really

37 Cf. John CAREY, Introduction, *Vanity Fair: A Novel without a Hero*, 1848, by William Makepeace Thackeray, ed. John Carey, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin Books, 2003) xiv.

38 Cf. Carey xxii.

39 Carey xv.

happened (cf. *VF* 625). Yet there are insinuations regarding her sexual virtue in the text, not voiced directly, but mentioned only implicitly as in *Dracula*:

All former delights of turf, mess, hunting-field, and gambling-table; all previous loves and courtships of milliners, opera-dancers and the like easy triumphs of the clumsy military Adonis [Rawdon], were quite insipid when compared with the lawful matrimonial pleasures which of late he had enjoyed. (*VF* 336)

And again in chapter 64:

In describing this siren [Becky], singing and smiling, coaxing and cajoling, the author, with modest pride, asks his readers all round, has he once forgotten the laws of politeness, and showed the monster's hideous tail above water? No! Those who like may peep down under waves that are pretty transparent, and see it writhing and twirling, diabolically hideous and slimy, flapping amongst bones, or curling round corpses; but above the water-line, I ask, has not everything been proper, agreeable, and decorous, and has any the most squeamish immoralist in *Vanity Fair* a right to cry fie? When, however, the siren disappears and dives below, down among the dead men, the water of course grows turbid over her, and it is labour lost to look into it ever so curiously. They look pretty enough when they sit upon a rock, twangling their harps and combing their hair, and sing, and beckon to you to come and hold the looking-glass; but when they sink into their native element, depend on it those mermaids are about no good, and we had best not examine the fiendish marine cannibals, revelling and feasting on their wretched pickled victims. (*VF* 747–8)

The passages quoted reveal Becky's sexuality as directly as possible and describe her as a watery vampire – a fitting role model for Mudrooroo's Amelia. They even allude to female sex organs (»tail«, »slimy«), and contrast Becky with the novel's other female characters, none of which is ever regarded in terms of passion or let alone eroticism. Yet Becky does not only not conform to the standards thought proper for Victorian women, she also neglects the uppermost duty of every woman, that of motherhood: »[Becky] notoriously hated him [little Rawdon, her son], and never saw him« (*VF* 753). Whenever it suits her needs and brings advancement of any kind, however, Becky poses as the perfect mother: »[...] and hemming a shirt for her dear little boy. Whenever Mrs Rawdon wished to be particularly humble and virtuous, this little shirt used to come out of her work-box« (*VF* 514). (*VF* 514). Furthermore, she constantly tries to gain other women's trust by showing her motherly instincts: »She won over a good many by bursting into tears about her boy, and exhibiting the most frantic grief when his name was mentioned, or

she saw anybody like him« (VF 753), a strategy with which she even reconciles Amelia (cf. VF 774–5). Rebecca finally submits to social standards when »[s]he busies herself in works of pity« (VF 808), having booths at fairs »for the benefit of these hapless beings« (VF 808) and putting her name on every charity list. As the narrator remarks, »[...] to be, and to be thought to be, a respectable woman, was Becky's aim in life« (VF 555).

This aspect of Rebecca Crawley, which shows the extent to which she is ultimately bound to fulfil expectations of Victorian manners and morals, is overturned in *The Promised Land* and exposed as a narrative tool of female subordination. Mudrooroo's Becky Crawley does not content herself with charitable ambitions, but rather longs for equality in political matters: »They [incapable men] achieved what no ambitious woman could in such a world« (PL 10). Since a nineteenth-century woman is denied any power in most fields other than the home, the logical consequence of any woman's striving beyond her assigned place carries the danger of social humiliation. Even though Becky has gained political power through her husband's position (cf. PL 103), she is still cut by society: »Merely for taking an interest in politics, she had been exiled to the periphery of all that was modish and powerful in the world« (PL 10), and faces the worst humiliation possible in her opinion, that of total exclusion from society by geographical means. It is therefore not her alleged unchastity which exiles her and leaves her without any friends, but her unwomanly ambitions for power. Becky's decency is neither questioned nor even commented on in *The Promised Land*, but is simply described in blunt words, as lines like »Mrs Crawley might be interested in that [a messenger's penis], but not the governor« (PL 99) or, deciding *Vanity Fair's* most-discussed question in favour of adultery, »Deeper, deeper,« Becky moaned in unison [with George Augustus Robinson]« (PL 229), show. Defying Victorian stereotypes of the innocent and naïve woman, Mudrooroo's Becky is allowed a sexuality of her own – and to voice, suggestively in a letter to Lord Steyne, her needs: »[p]oor, poor little me [...] with a [...] husband who only snores beside me and seldom indulges in his fancy [...]« (PL 202). Yet she is not portrayed as a »New Woman«, whom Becky, like Mina Harker (cf. D 99–100), regards as not living up to her standards: »Sweet Lord, these modern women and their urge to outdo the men. Well, let them. I have my ways of getting beyond them which bring in even bigger dividends« (PL 108). Instead, Mudrooroo uses her to represent the Empire and colonizer of British imperial heydays long gone and, accordingly, has her act out a charade which echoes that in *Vanity Fair*: »When I was there [in London] I was on all the charity lists and I would hold a fancy fair for such poor benighted creatures [the indigenes] and even serve at a stall myself [...]« (PL 195). Feigning the respectable woman rather than the »little minx« (PL 229), she knows how to pretend conformity to prevailing

social standards and even re-enacts her pretence of a mother longing for her son (cf. *PL* 42, 201, 223).

A comparison between Amelia and Becky in both novels also shows how Becky in *The Promised Land* is designed to stand for days of old. In *Vanity Fair*, she is always portrayed as the most entrancing person at parties, outshining her female ›rivals‹ (cf. *VF* 277, 325, 329, 403–4, 556–7). Whenever Becky enters a room, she becomes the centre of attention, a fact that causes Amelia to turn from her former friend. Amelia, according to Carey a »simple girl«,⁴⁰ on the other hand, is portrayed as a rather mousy person (cf. *VF* 125, 277), who goes unnoticed whenever Becky is near; and the only reaction she is able to muster towards Becky's gaiety and condescension is patient endurance: »Our poor Emmy [...] was powerless in the hands of her remorseless little enemy. [...] She sate [*sic*] quite unnoticed in her corner [...]« (*VF* 330). While Becky is a »woman of fashion« (*VF* 330), Amelia is nothing but a »pink-faced chit« (*VF* 100) at whose expense the other laughs and sneers (cf. *VF* 327). Although the vampire Amelia calls herself »a simple girl« (*UG* 125) in the style of Thackeray's Amelia, it soon becomes obvious that she rather sees herself in the role of Becky when she recounts her solitary battle for a better life to Ludjee (cf. *UG* 125). In *The Promised Land* the tables are finally completely turned, as it is Amelia who outdoes her ›rival‹:

The governor's wife stared enviously from one [Amelia] to the other [Lucy]. [...] Lucy giggled when she glanced at the governor's lady. [...] She had not seen a dress so out of fashion, except on older ladies [...]

(*PL* 17–18)

and also »[...] Rebecca swished in, all bulky skirts as faded as her looks« (*PL* 101). Grown old (cf. *PL* 101), Becky has to leave the field to a younger generation who has a different view on the colonial enterprise. The old colonizers like Becky are presented as greedy (cf. *PL* 102), sexually voracious, and without having scruples about exploiting the country and its natives who »existed at the very bottom of the scale of civilisation« (*PL* 12) – and far from morally superior representatives of the Empire. This is also apparent in the unholy union of Becky and George Augustus Robinson, which is strenuously performed in the face of the iron ship, again aptly, called *Great Britain* (cf. *PL* 228–30): the urge behind the colonial enterprise was no higher calling, but a base desire for ›black velvet‹ (*UG* 10). Amelia, on the other hand, sees Australia as the country in which she »gained [...] power« and »was reborn«, casting off the limitations which inhibited her in England (*PL* 226). Yet despite these gradual differences, Ludjee's final remark clearly states

40 Carey xiv.

the devastating effects both kinds of colonizers had and still have on Australia's indigenous population: »she [Rebecca] is just as bad as that Amelia« (*PL* 231). By equalling Becky with the vampiric Amelia, Mudrooroo Gothicizes Thackeray's »gloriously satirical epic of love and social adventure«⁴¹ and subverts its narrative of Empire and morals.

Besides those issues of female morality and the implications of a reversed relationship between Amelia and Becky, Mudrooroo also addresses questions of male and female power distributions. As has already been noted, he uses the characters' relations among themselves to advance his own concerns, and does so with regard to Amelia and George Osborne as well. During their married life, George continues to behave like a bachelor and even wants to elope with Becky (cf. *VF* 331, 801). Persuaded by Dobbin to keep his promise towards Amelia, he regrets that as soon as he is married and consciously humiliates his wife whenever possible: »[...] he chose to fancy that she was not suspicious of what all his acquaintances were perfectly aware – namely that he was carrying on a desperate flirtation with Mrs Crawley« (*VF* 327; see also *VF* 277, 332–3). Though slightly deviating from moral standards, such behaviour is deemed perfectly acceptable in *Vanity Fair*: »Next to conquering in war, conquering in love has been a source of pride, time out of mind, amongst men in *Vanity Fair*, or how should schoolboys brag of their amours, or Don Juan be popular?« (*VF* 327). The way in which George exercises his power over Amelia reflects the different standards Victorian society set for both men and women. Used as a means of subdual, Mudrooroo takes it up and again overturns it. In *The Undying*, Amelia meets Captain Torrens, the brutal polar werebear and impersonation of George Osborne. Married to Jane, a name reserved in *Vanity Fair* for women who remain silent and obedient, like Miss Jane Osborne and Lady Jane Crawley, he treats his wife like a »drudge« (*UD* 134). Confronted with Amelia, the power structures are reversed and he is the one who is subdued. Wearing a brown dress similar to the one Thackeray's Amelia wears on her wedding day (cf. *VF* 244), Mudrooroo's Amelia kills the werebear: »[...] my strength is the equal of his. [...] the brute is dead [...]« (*UD* 148–9). The woman defeats the man, and, in the case of Osborne's namesake George, the Aboriginal narrator, even transforms him to a lapdog in *The Promised Land*, thus challenging traditional gender roles and the distribution of power among the sexes prevalent in Victorian society.

41 Thackeray blurb.

iii. Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*⁴²

Lacking a female character except for that of »Aunt Charity« (*MD* 105), who finds no equivalent in Mudrooroo's texts,⁴³ Herman Melville's novel *Moby-Dick* will be regarded in terms of imperial readings only. Mudrooroo here again turns to a novel with distinct Gothic undertones⁴⁴ to indigenize its colonial implications. The most apparent Gothic feature of the novel is manifested in the colour white, forcefully explained in chapter 42, »The Whiteness of the Whale« (*MD* 204–12): »[...] there yet lurks an elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue, which strikes more of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood« (*MD* 205). This association of whiteness with terror is further elaborated on when related to the white fur/skin of some of the most dangerous predators on earth: here, the colour white and its positive associations, i.e., »celestial innocence and love« (*MD* 206, first footnote), is paired with »intolerable hideousness [and] irresponsible ferociousness« (*MD* 206, first footnote), thus intensifying the terror and gruesomeness of those animals – it is by no means accidentally that Mudrooroo chooses a white polar werebear in *The Undying* as the brutal Captain Torrens's alter ego. Due to Melville's North American origin, this obsession with colour has often been read in the light of North America's racial conflicts. As Marsha Vick points out, »critics over the years have identified in the novel issues of racial superiority, slavery, and brotherhood, in addition to the pursuit of whiteness, as motifs that reflect Melville's concern with race.«⁴⁵ According to Mary Blish, the white whale symbolizes the black race and Ahab's quest the »fury of many mid-nineteenth-century Americans at any threat to the system of slavery«,⁴⁶ whereas Fred Bernard sees in Ahab a black man who is murdered by his white enemy.⁴⁷ For him, the white *Pequod's* – which Arvin identifies as the Gothic's haunted castle⁴⁸ – chase of black sperm whales is a metaphor for the chasing of escaped black slaves by whites, thus the slaughter of whales »metaphorically duplicat[es] the pursuit, capture, and occasional slaughter

42 All quotations from and comments on *Moby-Dick* refer to Herman MELVILLE, *Moby-Dick: Or, the Whale*, 1851, ed. Andrew Delbanco, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin Books, 2003); this edition is referred to in the text as (*MD* p).

43 The only instance of gender awareness relating to the reworking of *Moby-Dick* can be found in *The Promised Land*: »They called her Moby Dick, believing that only a male could wreak such havoc, whereas I dubbed her *The Empire*« (*PL* 172).

44 See for a comprehensive account of Melville as Gothic writer Newton ARVIN, »Melville and the Gothic Novel«, *New England Quarterly* 22.1 (1949): 33–48.

45 Marsha C. VICK, »»Defamiliarization« and the Ideology of Race in *Moby-Dick*«, *CLA Journal* 35.1 (1991): 325–6.

46 Mary BLISH, »The Whiteness of the Whale Revisited«, *CLA Journal* 41.1 (1997): 57.

47 Cf. Fred V. BERNARD, »The Question of Race in *Moby-Dick*«, *The Massachusetts Review* Autumn (2002): 388.

48 Cf. Arvin 38.

of fugitive blacks«. ⁴⁹ Yet not only issues of black and white are dealt with, but also the plurality of ethnicities on board the ship. The *Pequod's* ethnically diverse crew is seen as a sign for the importance of diversity for the American society by Elizabeth Schultz, who states that Ishmael's deconstruction of whiteness forces the reader to question racial identities. ⁵⁰ To Marsha Vick, the non-whites on board are usually superior to their white supervisors. ⁵¹ Although most critics agree that Melville attacks most Americans' racial ideologies, ⁵² they fail to mention the fact that the non-white members of the crew are nevertheless portrayed from a white point of view. ⁵³ Chapters 26 and 27, both entitled »Knights and Squires«, introduce the mates of the *Pequod* and their harpooners. Whereas the white mates are called headsmen and are compared to »Gothic Knight[s] of old« (*MD* 130), their non-white helmsmen are referred to, in the style of feudal subordinates, as »squires« (*MD* 130); whereas the three mates are granted a total of five pages of introduction (*MD* 124–30), the three harpooners get a mere single page (*MD* 130–1). Furthermore, the non-whites are described in terms of imperial prejudices: Queequeg is »some abominable savage« (*MD* 24), Tashtego »a proud warrior hunter« (*MD* 130), and Daggoo »a gigantic, coal-black negro-savage [who] retained all his barbaric virtues« (*MD* 131). These images bring to mind Rousseau's »noble savage«, who, on the one hand, remains a savage in contrast to the civilized colonizer, but on the other hand retains a natural noblesse. Though the three harpooners take part in the ship's everyday conversation, they are, with few exceptions, limited to observations concerning the art of whaling. In the last chapter, which contains the third and last day of the fatal chase, they are even denied a voice of their own: whereas the three mates and Ahab engage in remarks about death and fate, neither Queequeg, nor Tashtego, nor Daggoo, are allowed some final words. They literally simply disappear from the text: both Queequeg and Daggoo vanish without any reference whatsoever (*MD* 619), and Tashtego is shown drowning while performing a last act of obedience (*MD* 623–4).

Mudrooroo introduces his rewriting of *Moby-Dick* on the last pages of *Underground* (*UG* 171), already establishing the imperial theme of the story which in its entirety is narrated in *The Promised Land*: the chase of the white leviathan which

49 Bernard 394.

50 Cf. Elizabeth SCHULTZ, »Visualizing Race: Images of Moby Dick,« *Leviathan: A Journal of Melville Studies* 3.1 (2001): 31–2.

51 Cf. Vick 333.

52 Cf. for example Vick 328 and Gesa MACKENTHUN, »Postcolonial Masquerade: Antebellum Sea Fiction and the Transatlantic Slave Trade,« *Early America Re-Explored: New Readings in Colonial, Early National, and Antebellum Culture*, ed. Klaus H. Schmidt and Fritz Fleischmann, *Early American Literature and Culture through the American Renaissance* 5 (New York: Peter Lang, 2000) 537–9.

53 Although Bernard sees the possibility of Ishmael being a mulatto or an Afro-American, most critics do not doubt his »whiteness«, cf. Bernard 384.

represents a blank space waiting to be filled with various readings (cf. *UG* 177–8). Hinting at the voiceless harpooners of *Moby-Dick*, in *Underground* it is Daggoo who rises to speak and emphasizes his and Wadawaka's identity: »He is an African, sir [*sic*], not a savage. His features are similar to mine [...]« (*UG* 178). This stress on ethnic identity is the main deviation from the original, and although Melville's novel is concerned with questions of race and ethnicity, it is still narrated from a non-minority point of view. Mudrooroo, on the other hand, has the African Wadawaka narrate the story of the chase and that of the three harpooners. Unlike Melville's ›savages‹, Mudrooroo's non-white characters have reasons of their own to hunt and kill the white whale: Queequeg battles the empire (cf. *PL* 173, 178), Tashtego wants to redeem himself and set his people free (cf. *PL* 174), and Daggoo wants to »find his homeland again« (*PL* 174). All of them join Ahab in his vengeance, whereas the rest of the crew is only driven by economic reasons (cf. *PL* 175), and want to free themselves from »the empire which rules [their] lives as surely as Moby Dick ruled Ahab« (*PL* 173).

By concentrating on Ahab's ›monomania« (*MD* 200), Mudrooroo Gothicizes the ›Yankee« (*PL* 172) and presents him as ›a savage skipper« (*PL* 172), thus using the colonizers' linguistic repertoire and semiotic field commonly used to describe non-Europeans. Ahab is even linked to the evils of vampirism: »I'll drink his blood as I quaff fine wine« (*UG* 177). The *Pequod*, though named after an extinct First Nations' tribe, is portrayed in a similar translation of the Gothic castle into the vampiric threat indigenous Australia has to face:

›This will be your home if the captain agrees,‹ Starbuck spoke. ›And note what sort of home it is. Look around and examine the curious fittings. You may have your savage craft covered all over with devilish designs, but not as this. [...] See those open bulwarks garnished with those long sharp teeth so that it bears a canny resemblance to that of our prey. (*UG* 176)

Hence Mudrooroo exposes binary oppositions which are maintained in *Moby-Dick's* colonial discourse between civilized and savage, predator and prey, and incorporates them into his very own Aboriginal discourse in order to indigenalize its Gothic dichotomies.

Additionally, other deficiencies of the colonial discourse in *Moby-Dick* are revealed when Ahab's death is taken up in *The Promised Land*:

›Ahab darted in again his harpoon. The stricken whale flew forward; with an igniting velocity the line ran through the groove . . . ran foul! Ahab stooped to clear it, and did so; but the flying caught him around the neck, dumbed him first, then shot him away. Ere the crew knew it, he was gone. Next instant, the heavy eye-splice in the

rope's final end flew out of the stark empty tub, knocked down an oarsman and, smiting the sea, disappeared into its depths. (PL 177)

Compared to the passage in *Moby-Dick*:

The harpoon was darted; the stricken whale flew forward; with igniting velocity the line ran through the groove; – ran foul. Ahab stooped to clear it; he did clear it; but the flying turn caught him round the neck, and voicelessly as Turkish mutes bowstring their victim, he was shot out of the boat, ere the crew knew he was gone. Next instant, the heavy eye-splice in the rope's final end flew out of the stark empty tub, knocked down an oarsman, and smiting the sea, disappeared in its depths. (MD 623)

Almost a verbatim quote, Mudrooroo's rewriting differs in one important aspect from the original and thereby illustrates the underlying Orientalisms of Melville's novel: to visualize Ahab's disappearance, the image of insidious and ambushing Turkish assassins is used, whereas Mudrooroo does without such pictures and describes Ahab's vanishing and death as a simple matter of fact.

Yet another instance of Orientalism is the Gothic and demonic representation of Fedallah and his boatmen – which can be linked to Melville's reading of Schiller's *Der Geisterseher* (*The Ghost-Seer*) (1789) and his conviction that its most fearsome scene is that in which the main character is followed by an Armenian:⁵⁴

With a start all glared at dark Ahab, who was surrounded by five dusky phantoms that seemed fresh formed out of air [. . .]. The figure that now stood by [the boat's] bows was tall and swart, with one white tooth evilly protruding from its steel-like lips. [. . .] Less swart in aspect, the companions of this figure were of that vivid, tiger-yellow complexion peculiar to some of the aboriginal natives of the Manilla's; – a race notorious for a certain diabolism of subtlety, and by some honest white mariners supposed to be the paid spies and secret confidential agents on the water of the devil, their lord [. . .]. (MD 235–6)

By presenting Fedallah and his fellows as both Asian and the devil's spies, an allegation supported by the honesty of white sources, Melville assigns to them racial stereotypes typical of nineteenth-century dominant culture.⁵⁵ Compared with his otherwise almost thoughtful and genial remarks on the other non-white crewmembers, these comments expose his double standards regarding the superiority

54 See for an account of Melville's own experience of being followed and the parallels he draws to Schiller's Gothic fragment *Der Geisterseher* Arvin 34.

55 Cf. Schultz 32.

of the races. Once again, Mudrooroo turns to these shortcomings and thereby comments on the imperial aspects of *Moby-Dick*: although he mentions Fedallah in *Underground* (cf. *UG* 177), Wadawaka replaces the Asian in *The Promised Land* as Ahab's harpooner, thus distorting Melville's subtle ethnic distinctions. By doing this, Mudrooroo once more unmasks the inadequacies of racial prejudices and hierarchies, de-Gothicizing that which they scorn and at the same time Gothicizing their ideological foundation.

iv. Ancient Mythology

Apart from canonical literary classics in the English language, Mudrooroo also turns to tales of Greek mythology in his vampire trilogy, focusing on three cycles: that of Heracles, that of Medea, and that of Persephone.⁵⁶ Rooted in the culture of one of the world's first colonial and patriarchal empires, these myths provide a rich source for imperial and generic critique. Pericles Georges's study on the Greek experience in barbarian Asia approves of Edward Said's observation on the intrinsic Orientalism of the Greeks' view on Persians: »Edward Said (1978) was altogether correct to place the *Persae* at the beginning of his account of the West's vision of the Asiatic as sensual, irrational, effeminate, cruel, and weak – in short, servile by nature«. ⁵⁷ Georges establishes a connection between Hellenic myths and their colonial expansion: like the European settlers' habit of mapping new and unknown lands with European names, the Greeks identified new territory »with familiar mythological landscapes« in order to claim those places as their own and to lessen the terror associated with them.⁵⁸ For Georges, »[m]ythography was nothing less than the anthropogony of the Greeks«, ⁵⁹ nothing but a way of Hellenizing both the conquered people and their deities and heroes. As Julius Jüthner remarks, legends and myths reflect the responses Greek expansionism met with when encountering foreign tribes for the first time: a warm reception resulted in positive legends, whereas a hostile reception entailed negative tales.⁶⁰ Irad Malkin, on the other hand, claims that the ethnic dichotomies important for the

56 Due to their sources being scattered all through ancient literature and legend, I refer to the myths of ancient Greece as recorded in Robert GRAVES, *The Greek Myths*, 1955, combined ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1992); references will be made to chapter numbers rather than page numbers. The same applies with regard to proper names of heroes and gods which differ in the various versions of the tales.

57 Pericles GEORGES, *Barbarian Asia and the Greek Experience: From the Archaic Period to the Age of Xenophon* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1994) xv.

58 Georges 2.

59 Georges 7.

60 Cf. Julius JÜTHNER, *Hellenen und Barbaren: Aus der Geschichte des Nationalbewusstseins, Das Erbe der Alten VIII* (Leipzig: Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1923) 10.

development of colonial binary thinking only emerged after the first part of the fifth century BC, whereas before, during the height of Greek colonialism, the term ›barbarian‹ was used rather neutrally, showing awareness of cultures more powerful and ancient than that of the Greeks.⁶¹ According to him, ancient Greek colonization cannot be viewed »through the prism of modern imperialism«. ⁶² Still, an analysis of how Mudrooroo deconstructs ancient Greek mythology from an indigenous perspective and fills it with Aboriginal content both reveals the part it played in European colonial thinking and shows its universal validity beyond a Western *Weltanschauung*.

Among the heroes of ancient Greek myths, Heracles was the most powerful and the most idolized. The majority of tales and epics referring to him is concerned with his struggle against wild and dangerous beasts such as the Nemean lion, the Lernaean Hydra, the Erymanthian boar, or the hellhound Cerberus. If no wild beast was to be slain, then Heracles battled savage and beast-like humans: the barbaric giant Antaeus, the Amazonian viragoes, or the three-bodied Geryon. The description of Antaeus even evokes classic Gothic themes, as he is said to have saved the skulls of his victims to roof a temple for his father Poseidon.⁶³ According to the entry on Heracles in *Der neue Pauly*, Heracles's fights with these ferocious creatures from an early stage on indicate his civilizing mission, a reading already supported by the story in which Heracles killed the Egyptian king Busiris and put an end to his human sacrifices.⁶⁴ Thus practising an early form of Orientalism, Heracles is the archetypal figure of the colonizer who slays the barbarian other and eventually paves the way for the ruling nation's culture. By appropriating this bravest of Greek heroes and replacing him with a colonized Aboriginal character, Mudrooroo once again reverses the roles imperial discourse had assigned to Aboriginal Australians and their white colonizers: »[...] Mungkati became known as Hercules for ever more« (UG 9). His Aboriginal name meaning »thickhead« (UG 8), this indigenous Heracles is portrayed as quick with his club but slow of comprehension:

[...] he growled, puffing his chest up, scowling and lifting his club, then thudding it down upon the ground [...]

[...] Again his club thudded onto the ground in a gesture which was becoming tiresome [...]

[...] And naturally, his club thudded down again. (UG 108–10)

61 Cf. Irad MALKIN, »Postcolonial Concepts and Ancient Greek Colonisation,« *Modern Language Quarterly* 65.3 (2004): 344–5.

62 Malkin 363.

63 Cf. Graves 133 g.

64 Cf. Fritz Graf BASEL, »Herakles,« *Der neue Pauly: Enzyklopädie der Antike*, ed. Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider, vol. 5 (Weimar: Metzler, 1998) 389.

Like his Greek counterpart, Mungkati is a man of action rather than of words and does not hesitate to kill those who do not fit into his system of ideas. This becomes obvious when he »cleav[es Malone's] skull in twain« (UG 31) without accepting to take responsibility for his deed (cf. UG 43) – an incident which in all its gory detail has already been told before by George in a rupture of linear narration:

One time, he [Hercules] even did a fellow in with an axe and I'll tell you why later, but for now just imagine that axe flashing down upon your head. How it strikes with a sodden thud, digging in deep, clefting the skull in twain. Bits of bone and brain flying everywhere. The blood gushing out a regular torrent. Some drops splatter on your face and your tongue darts out to lick the ruby fluid. [. . .] He [Hercules] split his man and splattered us with the gore of blood guilt for ever more. (UG 10)

Yet Jangamuttuk draws a clear line between Hercules's behaviour and Aboriginal concepts of civilization:

Instead he [Jangamuttuk] concentrated on the foul murder and the resulting blood vengeance, for the debt resulting from spilt blood had to be settled. He said that Hercules had committed a crime, no matter the cause, and it would bring a curse on us. (UG 36)

The judicial language employed by Jangamuttuk shows that Aboriginal communities have a legal system of their own, involving penal actions for crimes committed by their members. Considering the murder of a white a crime which equals white people's atrocities towards indigenous victims (cf. UG 36), Jangamuttuk makes clear that any brutality against others is not acceptable in a cultured society. Therefore Greek Heracles's mission appears in a different light, and the colonizer, who fancies himself civilized and worships an idol (Heracles) which embodies his imperial ideologies, is turned into a »bloodthirsty savage« himself. Again, this invites ambiguous readings and is doubly incorporated into Mudrooroo's Aboriginal discourse: on the one hand, it assigns to the colonizer the role of savage, and on the other, it declares the colonized native capable of heroic status. This double reading is enforced once more in *The Promised Land*, when Hercules rescues both Jangamuttuk and Ludjee from the underworld. In an episode resembling Pelop's fate of being boiled by Tantalus and served the gods at a banquet,⁶⁵ Ludjee is seemingly boiled and fed to George in his dingo shape (cf. UG 127–8), but escapes the boiling water by changing into her dreaming animal, Manta Ray, and is later found by Hercules (cf. PL 180–1). Echoing the rescue of Theseus (cf. PL 181) and Ascalaphus

65 Cf. Graves 108 c.

(cf. *UG* 127, *PL* 181),⁶⁶ Jangamuttuk's rescue then presents the Aboriginal Hercules again as the respected hero.

As Peter Walcot points out, Greek women in antiquity were required to be totally faithful, whereas their husbands were allowed extra-marital affairs, an idea already reflected in the relationship between Hera and Zeus.⁶⁷ Women were considered unable to curb their sexual passions, and their sexuality was feared by men who then turned to mythology to express this fear: Pandora, for instance, »whom Zeus had made as foolish, mischievous, and idle as she was beautiful – the first of a long line of such women«,⁶⁸ was a woman with »the mind of a bitch and a deceitful nature«. ⁶⁹ She released evil into the world, thus making men's lives miserable. Other female characters connoted negatively in Greek mythology include the sorceress Circe, the Gorgon Medusa, and the warlike Amazons. The latter defied a woman's natural role as wife and mother, even to the extent of mutilating and killing their male children.⁷⁰ Similar to the myth surrounding the Amazons is that of Medea, who deceived her father, killed her half-brother, and is said by some to have killed two of her own children.⁷¹ It has to be kept in mind, however, that she was betrayed by her husband Jason, whom she had helped many times and who later abandoned her for the sake of another wife, claiming that his oath to Medea was invalid, wherefore she revenged herself on him.⁷² Mudrooroo transforms this tale of an evil sorceress into that of a powerful female: »Perhaps my mother also repeated this story to us [Amelia and her sister] because she was seeking to reveal to us what hidden powers of vengeance lie within the female« (*UG* 151). Whereas the Greek myth stresses the crimes committed by Medea, such as killing her brother and taking revenge on Jason, Mudrooroo's story emphasizes her good deeds, which include winning Jason the Golden Fleece and saving his father's life as well as the unfaithfulness of her husband before her misdeeds are recounted only in brief (cf. *UG* 151–2). Yet the fact that it is Amelia who tells this version of the story to the two children she abducted from an Aboriginal community – and whom only a moment later she kills by plunging them into hot water, thus repeating what Medea was accused of (cf. *UG* 152, 154–5) – renders what began as a tale of female power

66 While Theseus, who wanted to abduct Persephone from the underworld, was invited by Hades to sit on the Chair of Forgetfulness which then became part of his flesh and from which Heracles had to forcefully tear him (cf. Graves 103 d, e), Ascalaphus was punished by Demeter who »push[ed] him down a hole and cover[ed] it [the hole] with an enormous rock« (Graves 24 l).

67 Cf. Peter WALCOT, »Greek Attitudes towards Women: The Mythological Evidence,« *Women in Antiquity*, ed. Ian McAusland and Peter Walcot, Greek & Rome Studies 3 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996) 93.

68 Graves 39 j.

69 Walcot 94–5.

70 Cf. Graves 131 c.

71 Cf. Graves 152 e–i; 153 a; 156 e, f.

72 Cf. Graves 156 b, c.

an account of gruesome colonial slaughter. Thus Medea's atrocities are attributed to the European colonizer, who is equated with mythology's she-devil rather than with any of its heroes.

The last mythological figure to which Mudrooroo devotes a longer episode is Persephone, whose myth is told in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* and hence is always connected to that of her mother. According to the legend, Hades fell in love with Persephone and abducted her, ripping open the earth which swallowed her. Her mother Demeter searched for her and refused the seeds to grow until her daughter would be restored to her. Zeus finally granted Persephone's return to the upper world on condition that she had not tasted the food of the dead. Yet she had tasted a pomegranate, some say only its seeds, whether by Hades's deceit or voluntarily cannot be discerned, and thus a compromise was agreed on: Persephone remains in Tartarus for one third of the year, but for the other thirds, she is reunited with her mother, who in gratitude for her return makes the seeds grow in spring.⁷³

Wadawaka is equally abducted by Amelia when in his native watery element: »He neared the middle of the pool and it happened. [...] He gave a shout that was abruptly cut off as his head disappeared beneath the waves« (UG 33), the only witness being his friend George. In a ceremony to return Wadawaka to his mob, George is sent on a quest to find and rescue his friend (cf. UG 37, 43). Like Demeter, he has to search the land for traces of Wadawaka, though he is supported by his father and another tribe's shaman, Milyado: »Well, that will guide him and I'll put similar signs along the way,« he [Jangamuttuk] said in the general direction of the old man [Milyado]« (UG 71). Guarded by a giant dingo, a character taken from Dick Roughsey's *The Giant Devil Dingo*,⁷⁴ the Australian underground replaces the Greek Tartarus, likewise endowed with secret back entrances, a system of rivers, and a ferryman who must be paid, though he is content with a kangaroo carcass (cf. UG 85–8). On his way to Wadawaka, George even encounters the dead who had not survived their mob's journey (cf. UD 4, 18), thus enacting an episode from Odysseus's wanderings: »As if from afar, my ears caught the droning of Wawilak's didjeridoo. [...] There also came to me the familiar scent of Augustus my brother and I even felt the touch of his hand for a brief instant [...]« (UG 98–9). When he finally encounters his friend, Wadawaka is presented as Amelia's husband (cf. UG 118–9), planting hallucinatory mushrooms (cf. UG 105). Unable to free either himself or Wadawaka from Amelia's power, George is in need of his parents' help who rush to his aid through one of the back entrances (cf. UG 118–9) and confront the female vampire with her evil deeds: »A kidnapper, murderer and pervert, that's what you are« (UG 122). While Wadawaka eventually awakens from his trance-like state and returns to the upper world (cf. UG 147–59), George remains

73 Cf. Graves 24 c–k.

74 Dick ROUGHSEY, *The Giant Devil Dingo* ([Sydney?]: Collins, 1973).

indecisive whether or not to stay with his mob above the ground, having eaten a fish provided by Amelia: »I didn't eat a single thing, except that fish, all the time I was underground« (UG 107). This scene calls to mind Persephone's pomegranate, which prevented her complete restoration to her mother.

Again, Mudrooroo takes up various events and ideas of Hellenic myths and distributes them deliberately among his own protagonists. Thus he transforms Europe's classical heritage to suit his own indigenous purposes. As Graves in an addendum to his recording of the Demeter-myth notes, Persephone's abduction by Hades is only part of a much greater myth in which Hellenic gods take pre-Hellenic goddesses by force, referring to male usurpation of archaic mother goddesses.⁷⁵ By means of violence, they are subdued under male mastery and deprived of their original powers. This act of subdual is turned against the male in *Underground*, for it is Amelia who exercises her power over her male victims and rules in her subterranean kingdom: »This is my kingdom and I have the power to give and to take away« (UG 103). After her rape by Wadawaka (cf. UD 188–9), Amelia wants him to pay for his deed and expresses her female view on men's sexual behaviour: »They think females are weak and defenseless, to be discarded or taken at their male whim. [...] He will realise that I am not a toy to be discarded and flung away« (UG 150). Voicing the underlying and accepted male violence against women in Greek mythology, which is full of divine and heroic rape and abduction, Mudrooroo on the one hand challenges traditional gender roles, but in the same instant distorts his own transformation, as he has a woman acting out the part of male cruelty in a critique of white colonizers' brutality towards indigenous people.

As far as colonial issues are concerned, the parts assigned to the Homeric characters are of importance as well: it is the white invader who abducts his black victim and the Aboriginal children in an uncanny vision of Australia's Stolen Generations. While white Amelia embodies Gothic Hades, the Aboriginal characters involved in Mudrooroo's performance of the Persephone myth play the parts of those who fall prey to the force the underground king/queen exercises. Still, there is one important difference: no compromise is agreed on. In the course of the trilogy, George entirely changes from human to pet dog because he is not able to free himself from Amelia's spell.

Mudrooroo's technique of endowing the members of his own cast with characteristics known from several figures from Greek mythology demonstrates a sophisticated approach to both imperial and generic questions, as they show a highly complicated and intriguing mingling of aspects in one person. Once more playing with traditional attributions and expectations, he appropriates the values inherent in heroic legends and turns them upside down, but not without exposing the context of imperial subjugation later generations bestowed upon these

75 Cf. Graves 24.3.

legends, as is the case with Heracles: idolized by the colonizer, the supposed hero is presented as the violent personification of colonial oppression.

b. Australia's ›Legendary‹ History Reassessed

i. *Eliza Fraser*

Mudrooroo does not content himself with the rewriting of literary classics and classical lore in order to comment on the impact of the British invasion on Aboriginal Australia, but extends his critique of colonialism to the area of history. In *The Undying*, he rewrites the story of Eliza Fraser from an Aboriginal point of view. In 1836, the *Stirling Castle* was shipwrecked off the coast of Thoorgine, what is today known as Fraser Island. The ship was under the command of Captain James Fraser, who was accompanied by his wife, Eliza. Along with a number of crew, the captain and his wife managed to man a boat. They beached themselves, stepped ashore, and soon encountered the Aboriginal inhabitants of the island, who played host to the castaways. In the course of the following six weeks, however, Captain Fraser was speared and several members of the crew went missing. Mrs Fraser was helped to flee by John Graham, an escaped convict who lived with the Aboriginal people. She promised him to speak in his favour, but betrayed him when the first settlement came in sight. After her rescue, an inquiry was held in London, which was covered by a court reporter named John Curtis. He published an account of the story in 1838, entitled *Shipwreck of the Stirling Castle*, in which he presented his own version of the castaways' sufferings in order to resurrect the reputation of Mrs Fraser.⁷⁶ During the nineteenth century, the saga of Eliza Fraser was highly popular not only in Australia but also in America, Britain, and her colonies. It served as a justification for the maltreatment of the native population everywhere in the Empire. While the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw a decline in interest in her figure, Eliza Fraser gained an »almost legendary status« in the 1970s, when she became a key icon within an Australian nationalist mythology.⁷⁷ Among the numerous twentieth-century adaptations of her story are paintings by Sidney Nolan and Badtjala artist Fiona Foley, the novel *A Fringe of Leaves* by Patrick White, other literary rewritings, and films, all of which discuss different aspects of the figure called Eliza Fraser. Within her own discourse, according to Gerry Turcotte, she underwent a dramatic change from »mother of empire to symbol of female

76 This is the story as told in Ian J. McNIVEN, Lynette RUSSELL, and Kay SCHAFFER, Introduction, *Constructions of Colonialism: Perspectives on Eliza Fraser's Shipwreck*, ed. Ian J. McNiven, Lynette Russell, and Kay Schaffer (London: Leicester UP–Cassell, 1998) 1–2.

77 McNiven, Russell, and Schaffer 4.

moral degradation.«⁷⁸ Yet she still serves as an icon for Australian identity, one Australia cannot do without, as Kay Schaffer notes: »One is tempted to say if she didn't exist we would have had to invent her.«⁷⁹

As the entire title of Curtis's report – *Shipwreck of the Stirling Castle: containing a faithful narrative of the dreadful sufferings of the crew, and the cruel murder of Captain Fraser by the savages: also the horrible barbarity of the cannibals inflicted upon the captain's widow [...]* (emphasis mine) – suggests, he portrays the indigenous community as brutal savages and cannibals, a narrative device which was common practice in first-contact narratives. Lynette Russell argues that through such descriptions of the indigene as an oppositional element the Europeans constructed their own nation identity⁸⁰ – a strategy well-known not only in the Gothic. The Aboriginal people remain anonymous props against the backdrop of the castaways' fate, lacking a voice of their own and representing only Europe's pre-historic past. Moreover, needless fears of cannibalism evoked in nineteenth-century texts construct indigenous life as the exact opposite of civilization, as the Gothic ›other. Unsurprisingly, Eliza Fraser embodies the innocent heroine of Gothic novels who is in mortal peril and at the mercy of her captors. In Rod Macneil's view, she even symbolizes the Empire itself: threats made by the Badtjala people upon her life and, most of all, upon her virtue, stand for the resistance of the colonized subject against British rule.⁸¹ Her survival fits into imperialist ideology and shows the Western colonizers' triumph over any defiance.

Modern adaptations of the saga still cling to Eliza Fraser as the personification of the British Empire, but for different reasons. Contemporary white Australian artists are no longer interested in the binary opposition of colonizer and indigene; instead, they yearn to establish a national identity independent from their British heritage: according to Kay Schaffer, the escaped convict Bracefell⁸² represents the Aussie underdog, and Mrs Fraser his »haughty British nemesis«, who finally betrays her

78 Gerry TURCOTTE, »Mission Impossible: Mudrooroo's Gothic Inter/Mission Statement,« *Missions of Interdependence: A Literary Directory*, ed. Gerhard Stilz, Cross/Cultures 58 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002) 339.

79 Kay SCHAFFER, »We are like Eliza: Twentieth-Century Australian Responses to the Eliza Fraser Saga,« *Constructions of Colonialism: Perspectives on Eliza Fraser's Shipwreck*, ed. Ian J. McNiven, Lynette Russell, and Kay Schaffer (London: Leicester UP–Cassell, 1998) 79.

80 Cf. Lynette RUSSELL, »Mere Trifles and Faint Representations: The Representations of Savage Life offered by Eliza Fraser,« *Constructions of Colonialism: Perspectives on Eliza Fraser's Shipwreck*, ed. Ian J. McNiven, Lynette Russell, and Kay Schaffer (London: Leicester UP–Cassell, 1998) 52–3.

81 Cf. Rod MACNEIL, »Our Fair Narrator down-under: Mrs Fraser's Body and the Preservation of the Empire,« *Constructions of Colonialism: Perspectives on Eliza Fraser's Shipwreck*, ed. Ian J. McNiven, Lynette Russell, and Kay Schaffer (London: Leicester UP–Cassell, 1998) 63–4.

82 The official report states that Mrs Fraser was rescued by one John Graham, but the introduction to the Thames & Hudson monograph *Sidney Nolan: Landscapes and Legends* speaks of David Bracefell, as is explained in McNiven, Russell, and Schaffer 6. In my paper, however, I will stick to the names of the rescuer as given in the articles I refer to when referring to him.

rescuer.⁸³ She even turns from virgin to seductress, thus adding a sexual note to her myth. Modern reworkings often explore the inglorious British past of Australia with its convict system rather than its imperialism, as in Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves* or the movie *The Faithful Narrative of the Capture, Sufferings and Miraculous Escape of Eliza Fraser* of 1976.⁸⁴ Especially male Australian artists »adapted the story to various nationalist ends in Australia, where the local version of David Bracefell's rescue became a part of a mythologised, anti-British nationalist history«. ⁸⁵ Yet another topic, that of setting Australian identity apart from Asian domination, is raised by Gillian Coote's documentary film *Island of Lies*. She positions Australia in an Asian-Pacific context and shows black and white Australians as reconciled with each other, fighting side by side against foreign economic dominance. Australian identity is thus once again defined in terms of difference to other cultures, the role of the ›other‹ now being ascribed to Japanese tourists and investors.⁸⁶

In *The Undying*, Amelia Fraser is first presented as Eliza Fraser's sister (cf. *UD* 66), but later introduces herself as Eliza Fraser, the sea-captain's wife, when entering Captain Torrens's settlement (cf. *UD* 139). She is the one responsible for the slaughter of the crew on board the *Kore* (cf. *UD* 91–2), and later on for that of the soldiers left as a guard by Captain Torrens (cf. *UD* 96–7), their deaths awkwardly echoing Charles Harpur's »Creek of the Four Graves«. Torrens nonetheless blames Aboriginal people for having massacred the whites and orders punitive actions: »The perpetrators of this atrocity must be punished and I swear by God that before this day is through, they will be« (*UD* 89). During the course of the novel, his attitude towards the indigenes is expressed whenever the narration shifts to a third-person point of view and focuses on him (cf. *UD* 84–9, 123–34). The choice of words attributed to him is designed to correspond with the images one has in mind of those colonialists who intended to extinguish indigenous peoples rather than save them: »such savages [...] who had looted«, »such fun and games [to hunt Aboriginal people down]« (*UD* 84), »the thieving blacks«, »black wretches« (*UD* 85), or »the bloodthirsty savages« (*UD* 127). In this context, Amelia/Eliza stands for Mrs Fraser of the nineteenth-century narratives, an innocent woman rescued from cannibals. With her resolution to remain a virgin firmly in mind (cf. *UD* 66), she embodies the moral superiority of the British Empire, just like the historical Eliza Fraser did.

Closely connected to these nineteenth-century accounts of her fate is another very popular captivity narrative: that of the White Woman of Gippsland. According to the story, in 1843 five men, while exploring the shores of a lake, made out the

83 Schaffer, »We are like Eliza« 80.

84 Cf. Schaffer, »We are like Eliza« 84, 88.

85 Kay SCHAFFER, *In the Wake of First Contact: The Eliza Fraser Stories* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995) 259.

86 Cf. Schaffer, »We are like Eliza« 94.

figure of a white woman held captive by Aboriginal natives. They refrained from rescuing her as they were outnumbered by their opponents. Although several expeditions set off in subsequent years on rescuing missions, none ever found this white woman, until in the late 1840s the interest in rescuing the woman lessened. It is still not clear whether or not she actually existed, but she may have been nothing but a ship's figurehead, which was eventually found and recovered from the Kurnai people, who used it as a centre-piece in their corroborees.⁸⁷ Similar to this story, Galbol Wednga, who later is renamed Renfiel, discovers the figurehead of the *Kore*, a blond and red-lipped statue (cf. *UD* 80–1). He hides the image from his tribe and stores it in a secret cave where he »keeps the tools of his trade« (*UD* 167). The white guards posted by Captain Torrens are, like the men who first encountered the white woman of Gippsland, deceived by Amelia, the undying yet fleshy counterpart of the figurehead, and never find out if it was a real person who begged for their help (cf. *UD* 95–7).

Yet the national myth of Eliza Fraser gradually declined and changed until she no longer represented Australian nationality but its enemy who hinders Australian independence. Mudrooroo's Amelia/Eliza also changes significantly: postcolonial accusations of misrepresentation of the Badtjala people in nineteenth-century versions of the saga are taken up as well as notions of female sexuality. The unjust punitive actions ordered by Captain Torrens for Amelia's deeds (cf. *UD* 124) recall British brutality against indigenous communities rather than vice versa, whereas her rape by Wadawaka refigures white anxieties of miscegenation:

It is then that he gives a grunt and I feel him enter me, tearing past whatever defences still remain and piercing me to my very vitals. I give a shriek. I have never known a man in this way and am afraid. Then I feel my body responding and try to rake his face with my nails, try to get at him with my fangs, but I am mortified when he laughs as he continues to violate me. [...] ›Sir, sir,‹ I pant along with him, which changes to ›master, master,‹ as I feel myself being overcome by an emotion I have not felt since my other dark lord took me for his then dismissed me out into my world of darkness and loneliness. (*UD* 188)

Simultaneously feared and desired by white women, the black male stood as a symbol of both sexual virility and racial degeneration. For Maureen Clark, this scene, which she reads as a possibly Fanon-inspired counter-invasion, shows how Mud-

87 This is the story as told in Kate DARIAN-SMITH, »Capturing the White Woman of Gippsland: A Frontier Myth,« *Captured Lives: Australian Captivity Narratives*, ed. Kate Darian-Smith, Roslyn Poignant, and Kay Schaffer, *Working Papers in Australian Studies* 85, 86, & 87 (London: Sir Robert Menzies Centre for Australian Studies, 1993) 14–17, 31.

rooroo challenges colonial systems of violence and refutes racist stereotypes »by consciously recalling a ridiculous cliché of much dramatized nineteenth-century writing«. ⁸⁸ Yet Wadawaka ultimately refuses to play Amelia's game of master and slave: »No,« he replies, »I am no master nor will I have a master over me« (UD 189). Although in control, he is nevertheless defined by his blackness in a blurred separation of civilized and savage which is inherent in the concept of miscegenation. Still, this episode also refers to modern versions of Eliza Fraser and her sexuality. By granting Amelia a voice to speak for her own and a sexuality to experience on her own, Mudrooroo opposes those male constructions of her: »[...] nor does the *subhaga* [bloodsucker] acknowledge a master. It is beyond her nature [...]« (UD 191, emphasis in the original).

Constructed as the British adversary to Australian identity by white male Australians, the figure of Eliza Fraser becomes a two-sided symbol of resistance in Mudrooroo's work. On the one hand, she appears as the violent British colonizer responsible for massacres of Aboriginal people in a reversed shipwreck-story, while on the other hand she defies modern masculine conceptions of her myth and thus Australianness: in *The Undying*, it is not the Aussie underdog who rescues her – who by now has become a symbol of modern Australia for white Australian writers – and is rewarded with betrayal, but the Aboriginal man Galbol Wednga (cf. UD 138–40). Much like Fiona Foley's artistic engagement with Sidney Nolan and his version of painting back to the centre, Mudrooroo consciously writes back both to the centre of Empire, embodied by nineteenth-century figurations of Mrs Fraser, and to the different Australian versions of her which themselves enter into a dialogue with the master discourse of an imperial Eliza Fraser. This strand shows how Mudrooroo rejects her character as a Gothic emblem of oppression both in the past and the present of Australia.

ii. *Russian Jack*

Another historical figure who became a legend already in his lifetime was Russian Jack. Presumably born Ivan Fredericks, of Archangel, in 1852, he styled himself a Russian Finn. »The strongest man on the goldfield«, ⁸⁹ he was one of the best-known individuals of the great Kimberley gold-rush of 1886. Always on the track with his self-made wheelbarrow, his fame derives from an act of charity: on the road from Derby to Halls Creek he found a sick and worn-out prospector, loaded him and his swag on top of his own wheelbarrow, and carried him approximately 30 miles to the nearest station. This made him immortal and »endeared him[...] to a generation

⁸⁸ Clark, »Terror as White Female« 130–1.

⁸⁹ Peter J. BRIDGE, *Russian Jack* (Carlisle: Hesperian P, 2002) viii.

of *men*«. ⁹⁰ There are numerous versions, especially in tourism literature, as to how far he carried his fellow, ranging from 20 to 200 miles. Because of the lack of actual evidence – already during his lifetime several tales of various distances started circulating – the vagueness of facts detailing his act played an important role in the process of myth-making. Russian Jack's act thenceforth became the epitome of the concept of mateship in Australian thought. Former Prime Minister John Howard's proposed amendment of the constitutional preamble in 1999 shows how cherished this concept still is in Australia: »We value excellence as well as fairness, independence as dearly as mateship«. ⁹¹ Even the recent debate on Australian values is not spared its very own mateship-icon: the ANZAC legend of »Simpson and his Donkey«, which is quite similar to Russian Jack's story. Between 25 April and 19 May 1915, John Simpson was a stretch-bearer at Gallipoli and together with his donkey carried wounded soldiers, day and night, from the frontline to the beach, thus saving many lives until he was killed in action by machine-gun fire. ⁹² For former Australian Education Minister Brendan Nelson, »[Simpson] represents everything at the heart of what it means to be Australian«. ⁹³

Strongly opposed by both female and indigenous Australians, the figure of Russian Jack is literally torn to pieces in *The Promised Land*. Ivan Fredericks was a remarkably tall and strong man, as sources incorporated in Peter Bridge's biography tell, ⁹⁴ features which make his literary counterpart Amelia's favourite prey: »A giant man with a huge bushy beard plodded in great heavy boots along the track« (*PL* 48). Together with his partner, George Augustus Robinson's son Sonny, who was abandoned by his parents at the end of *Master of the Ghost Dreaming*, he owns a claim at Kalipa in which the enormous nugget, called the »Golden Fleece«, is found. A true »typical Australian« of Ward's definition, ⁹⁵ Jack despises authority and society, as he only answers grudgingly when spoken to by George Augustus Robinson, who orders him out of the way due to being »on government business« (*PL* 49): »The man gave one red-eyed glare over his shoulder, neither breaking his gait nor swerving aside [...] »Longer than you, Toffee Nose«« (*PL* 29). He likewise shuns the camp of Amelia's party, except when gathering together provisions (cf. *PL* 57–9). Furthermore, he is not the man who avoids a little scuffle: »[...] Well, he'll be in for a bit of this.« And he clenched his right fist a few inches

90 Bridge viii; emphasis mine.

91 PARLIAMENTARY LIBRARY WEB MANAGER, »Constitution Alteration (Preamble) 1999,« *Bills Digest No. 32 1999-2000*, Parliament of Australia - Parliamentary Library, 13 Aug. 2001, 6 Sep. 2004 (<http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/bd/1999-2000/2000bd032.htm>).

92 Cf. »John Simpson Kirkpatrick: Simpson and His Donkey,« *Australian War Memorial*, Australian War Memorial, 2007, 13 June 2007 (<http://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/simpson.htm>).

93 Michelle GRATTAN, »Accept the Nation's Values or get out, Nelson declares,« *The Age* 25 Aug. 2005: 1.

94 Cf. Bridge 3–7.

95 For a discussion of Ward's typical Australian, see p. 2.

above the shaft before grabbing it again. ›Silly bugger, but give him one and settle the score as mates do [...]‹« (PL 49).

Complicated as any of the trilogy's attributions, the character of Russian Jack serves as a means to both destabilize the concept of mateship itself and to expose its deficiencies when it comes to the formation of Australian identity. In *The Promised Land*, there exists no mateship between the living:

There's water ahead and then there's my mate [Sonny] who could not take to the road shank's pony and picked up a cart for hisself. He's at Yillarn waiting for me. Stupid blighter, couldn't handle his liquor, got into a scrap and went off without me and these provisions. (PL 49)

Although called mate by Jack, Sonny's behaviour is far from picture-perfect mateship. At Kalipa, he once more betrays Jack when moved by his father's reproaches and agrees to show him the place where he and Jack hide their gold nugget (cf. PL 83–4). Only after Russian Jack's death does Sonny grieve for his mate: »My mate, my mate,‹ Sonny quavered. ›He done them no wrong, and they-they – you know what they did [...]‹« (PL 132). This shows how the idea of mateship is glorified as a mere concept only, becoming idolized through the lack of actual presence: charity begins at home as long as the mates are alive and possible competitors for the gold, yet death wipes out this rivalry. Additionally, the contempt George Augustus Robinson expresses for Russian Jack, this icon of a true mate, indicates the actual contempt with which those embodying the concept of mateship are regarded: »[...] that Russian, he is a brute and a ruffian« (PL 87) and »Russians were, after all, close to savages themselves« (PL 116). In consequence, mateship in modern theories of Australian identity is nothing but a figurative notion, the idealization of a distorted image of reality.

Having unmasked the falsity of what constitutes male Australianness, Mudrooroo goes one step further and utterly destroys this notion: it is a woman who kills the all-Australian myth of mateship. Attracted by his stature, Amelia eventually sucks him dry and, what makes the image even more disturbing, unmans her victim (cf. PL 125–6). Here, the emasculation of the literary mate symbolizes the destruction of a male-dominated concept of national identity. Even the issue of a national identity itself is turned upside down by Mudrooroo's choice of characters, as both Russian Jack and John Simpson were actually far from being Australian at all: in what would today be considered illegal immigration, they both jumped ship in Newcastle and by doing this gained entry into Australia.⁹⁶ It is thus the

96 Cf. Bridge 1 and Michael DUFFY, »Who's Who - John Simpson Kirkpatrick,« *First World War.com*, 24 Mar. 2002, 13 June 2007 (<http://www.firstworldwar.com/bio/kirkpatrick.htm>), respectively.

hypocrisy of praising mateship as the ultimate epitome of Australianness which is torn to pieces in this episode of *The Promised Land*.

iii. *The Myall Creek Massacre*

The last instance of Australian history to be discussed with regard to Mudrooroo's vampire trilogy is the Myall Creek massacre of 1838, which stands for numerous recorded and unrecorded atrocities committed against Aboriginal people in Australia. According to Brian Harrison, the death of a white youth further west at Terri-Hie-Hie is generally assumed to have sparked a general uprising against indigenous communities two weeks prior to the massacre in question. On 9 June 1838, almost a dozen stockmen approached about 28 members of an Aboriginal group who was peacefully encamped on Henry Dangar's Myall Creek run. With no apparent reason, they drove them like cattle to a nearby hollow, where the entire group, regardless of sex or age, was either shot to death or cut to pieces. Two days later, the men piled the dead bodies on a pyre and burned them. A police investigation was held, and eleven white men were subsequently tried for the murder of ›Daddy‹, an elder of the group. In this trial, all men were acquitted due to their lawyers' argument that none of the burnt bodies could accurately be identified as that of ›Daddy‹, yet they were detained on further charges. Seven of them were put to trial a second time, and they were indicted on twenty charges of murder. Although they pleaded not guilty on all twenty counts, the jury nevertheless found them guilty of five of the charges and the court eventually sentenced them to death. On 18 December 1838, they were hanged in Sydney. None of the men ever denied what had happened, it was rather that »they thought it extremely hard that white men should be put to death for killing blacks«. ⁹⁷ Their execution on grounds of mere ›trifles‹ rather than their killing spree was what caused much uproar throughout nineteenth-century Australia. ⁹⁸

This course of events strongly resembles that which is narrated in *The Promised Land*, where one more atrocity, also of 1838, is hinted at, namely that of the infamous ›Major Nunn's Campaign‹, in which between 40 and 50 Aboriginal men, women, and children were chased and finally shot dead as retaliation for one corporal having been speared in the leg. ⁹⁹ This incident is re-enacted in *The Promised Land* when the teamster of Sergeant Barron's troupes, which accompany the expedition of George Augustus Robinson, is slightly injured by a spear (cf. PL 55).

97 Brian HARRISON, ›The Myall Creek Massacre,‹ *Records of Times Past: Ethnohistorical Essays on the Culture and Ecology of the New England Tribes*, ed. Isabel McBryde (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1978) 20–1.

98 This is the story as told in Harrison 17–21.

99 Cf. Harrison 40.

It is, however, not the injury of the teamster or the death of a white youth which sets the events in motion but the rape of an indigenous girl by George Augustus Robinson: at Kalipa, an indigenous tribe arrives at the same waterhole at which the whites camp. Always eager for ›black velvet‹ (cf. *UG* 10), he follows one of the women, who was with Russian Jack during the evening and whose nakedness he considers an open invitation for men like him: »Her eyes gleamed over the rim [of the pannikin] and he thought he saw an inviting look there« (*PL* 115); and »They go about completely naked, open to any man's lust and welcoming it too« (*PL* 121). Later on, Robinson encounters her again and rapes her, leaving her injured and barely alive afterwards (cf. *PL* 118–9). Yet it is Amelia who finally kills the girl, fully aware of the fact that »her people will try to exact a bloody vengeance« (*PL* 120). Not knowing that it was not him who murdered the woman, George Augustus Robinson soon settles on a scapegoat: »It was the savages. They saw her with him [Russian Jack] and such is their jealousy that they have murdered her« (*PL* 120). Amelia then opens the second act when sucking Russian Jack dry and leaving him with his penis »stuff[ed] into his mouth« (*PL* 126), a deed which entails punitive actions straight away (cf. *PL* 127–31). Sergeant Barron's men kill both men and women, young and old; not even children are spared: »Babies and infants were picked up and their heads slammed together« (*PL* 131). Mirroring the Myall Creek massacre, »not a living human being of the tribe remained« (*PL* 131). Afterwards, they are heaped up and burned like the victims of the Myall Creek massacre (cf. *PL* 133). Illustrating a gruesome example of »frontier justice« (*PL* 132), Mudrooroo revels in details of this slaughter, but not without turning to its immediate aftermath and the reactions of the perpetrators. Sergeant Barron worries about his men's carbines and Sir George about his reputation as »conciliator of savages« (*PL* 131–2). The latter is, however, quickly persuaded by Barron to steer for another direction: the peaceful Aboriginal camp is turned into a brutal raid upon that of the whites, the slaughtered women into insidious spies, and the murdered men into attacking warriors (*PL* 132–3); a procedure that brings to mind the real George Augustus Robinson's diaries, »one of the most disabling [i.e., less than truthful] ›texts‹ of empire«, as Gerry Turcotte calls them.¹⁰⁰ Similar to the historical events of 1838, there is one person who insists on reporting to the authorities what truly happened; ironically, this person is Amelia (cf. *PL* 136). There is yet another provoking fact: it is the ›civilized‹ Aboriginal soldiers of the native police troops who kill the desert tribe by order of Sergeant Barron, a means by which the achievements of European civilization concerning ›savages‹ are challenged, as is the whole Western meaning of ›civilization‹ when it comes to the military. Through the figure of Sergeant

100 Gerry TURCOTTE, »Remastering the Ghosts: Mudrooroo and Gothic Refigurations,« *Mongrel Signatures: Reflections on the Work of Mudrooroo*, ed. Annalisa Oboe, *Cross/Cultures* 64 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003) 132.

Barron, »an old soldier from the ranks who had fought at Waterloo in the infantry, and had come to his position only after a lifetime of active service« (*PL* 31), the military system and achievements which so-called European civilization prides itself on are ridiculed as dubious ambitions.

A similar episode in *The Undying* shows how Mudrooroo tries to put history straight and commemorates what Henry Reynolds refers to as »[t]hree celebrated Aboriginal attacks«,¹⁰¹ the *Maria* massacre of 1840 and the Aboriginal attacks on *Hornet Bank* (1857) and *Cullinlaringoe* (1861): Torrens's white settlement, inhabited by about 40 people, is completely eradicated by the combined forces of Waai's and Jangamuttuk's tribes, who do not care for the settlers' sex or age either and likewise burn the settlement to ashes. With no mercy, the settlers are taken by surprise, killed with clubs and nulla-nullas, and dismembered before the traces of their existence, and some of the settlers still alive, are burned (cf. *UD* 195–9). Thus Mudrooroo challenges the continuing oppression of Aboriginal people by way of Anglo-Australian historiography. A view commonly held by (white) historians is that there was no violent resistance, a belief supported by the official doctrine that no war was ever declared on the indigenous peoples of Australia, which made negotiations over any truce or peace treaty, like the famous Treaty of Waitangi in New Zealand, obsolete. In the words of Charles D. Rowley: »The Maori was respected as a warrior; the Aboriginal was despised as a rural pest.«¹⁰² Yet as Reynolds argues, Australia's indigenous inhabitants were neither particularly peaceful – he goes so far as to state they indeed fought a war – nor passive and instead reacted quite creatively to the European invasion:¹⁰³ they incorporated the European existence and traditions into Aboriginal cosmology. Not only did Aboriginal people all over Australia consider the whites as »beings returned from the dead«¹⁰⁴ which they welcomed into their kinship systems, they also introduced European tunes and words into corroborees.¹⁰⁵ This strategy plays an important role in both the vampire trilogy and *Master of the Ghost Dreaming*, in which Jangamuttuk first performs the Ghost Ceremony after which he is named. The performers are painted in what seems a mimicry of European fashion and Jangamuttuk sings in English, performing a powerful ceremony which symbolizes the appropriation of European concepts and literally enacts its theories (cf. *MG* 2–5):¹⁰⁶ »He [Jangamuttuk] was not after a realist copy, after all he had no intention of aping the European, but sought for an adaptation of these alien cultural forms appropriate to his own cultu-

101 Cf. Henry REYNOLDS, *The other Side of the Frontier: Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia* (Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1982) 78.

102 Charles D. ROWLEY, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society* (Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1974) 15.

103 Cf. Reynolds 1–2; 86.

104 Reynolds 30–1.

105 Cf. Reynolds 43.

106 For a discussion concerning the theories of appropriation, see p. 21–25 and p. 28.

ral matrix« (MG 3). Yet what had been created in order to enable Jangamuttuk to enter »into the realm of the ghosts [...] to attempt the act of possession [...] and] to bring all of his people into contact with the ghost realm so that they could capture the essence of health and well-being« (MG 3) is described as a mere shadow of itself in *The Undying*, »withouth didgeridoo players and with our [George's mob] lessened numbers it [being] but a pallid thing« (UD 32), and finally is regarded as nothing more than »a lively show« (PL 232).

Another important element of the violent Aboriginal resistance to white invasion was, according to Reynolds, sorcery, which was used to enhance the chances of physical attacks.¹⁰⁷ An example of this can be found in the way Waai's and Jangamuttuk's tribes prepare for the attack on the white settlement and then actually wipe it out: first, the arrival of the British is explained in terms of Aboriginal cosmology by one of the elders of Waai's tribe as the re-enactment of a Dreamtime-battle between the ancestors inhabiting the land and the sea creatures:

[t]he birds and animals living on it [the land] became annoyed that the sea animals still came ashore as if they owned the place. [...] We decided then to attack the sea creatures when they came ashore. [...] [N]ow, as in those days, it is time for us to drive these sea creatures away. (UD 195)

Then, in order to keep away any malign spirit the whites may enlist and to support their physical attack,

Jangamuttuk began singing a verse from the *Moma* ceremony which would dissipate any baleful psychic forces. He sang, »*Oraki manilla molla manilli. Oraki manilla molla manilla,*« then stopped and said, »And this is how you send those ghosts on their way«, he sang, »*Kootoola parenja renjalkuntien polooloo wollum poomaralkara pata pata lapa ringkara/winna narra prinjol poronjo.* Arrh, I have sent them on their way. Now all we have to do is to clean up the place.« (UD 196–7)

Finally, the »mere physical« (UD 197) battle, which ends with the settlement set on fire, is elaborated on in all its grim details (cf. UD 197–9).

Here, Mudrooroo gives an example of yet another aspect of a powerful Aboriginal resistance: instead of translating Jangamuttuk's words into English, he merely transcribes them from their phonetic notation into Latin characters, thus seemingly offering them for easy consumption by his readers.¹⁰⁸ Yet through his refusal

107 Cf. Reynolds 86–7.

108 A good example of the rather complicated phonetic notation of Aboriginal languages can be found in T.G.H. STREHLOW, *Songs of Central Australia* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1971).

to translate Jangamuttuk's words into the colonizer's language, Mudrooroo counters the power of language as a tool of suppression and defies the supposed superiority of the Queen's English – which itself is mimicked by Jangamuttuk in his Ghost Ceremony (cf. *PL* 216). By thus excluding the majority of his readership from understanding the full meaning of Jangamuttuk's magic, Mudrooroo challenges the supremacy of English culture and the English language through yet another well-known act of transformative defiance.

The extent to which Mudrooroo questions European historiography, however, is not restricted to the apparent events analysed above. He also turns to little-known and well-silenced entries in Australian history, examples of which are related in the stories of the rescue of Ludjee's sisters (cf. *UG* 22) and of Wadawaka's return as highwayman (cf. *PL* 158–60).

The story of Ludjee's sisters Nadjee and Lorimee as told in *Underground* is exemplary of the fate many Aboriginal women suffered, the abduction and subsequent slavery by white men. It recalls, however, in particular the fate of the sisters of Trucanini, after whom Ludjee is modelled and who was considered the last Tasmanian and dubbed their queen by whites.¹⁰⁹ According to Vivienne Rae Ellis, John Baker kidnapped three of Trucanini's tribal sisters in 1828 and took them to Kangaroo Island. While one of the girls was later shot by a sealer, the other two remained on the island together with a sealer named Hephthetnet. John Baker, however, was later indicted for abduction, but acquitted.¹¹⁰ Similarly, Nadjee and Lorimee were lured onto some whalers' boat and then kidnapped and constantly gang-raped. Some time later, Malone, who eventually is killed by Hercules, won them in a game of cards and kept them as his slaves, now and then trading their bodies for rum (cf. *UG* 23–7). No ghastly feature of Nadjee's and Lorimee's ›life‹ in the hands of the white men is left out, but every single aspect of their abuse is voiced, thus epitomizing the many Aboriginal fates silenced by white European historiography.

Wadawaka's life, on the other hand, represents the lives of the many African slaves who came to Australia as convicts: embodying both the infamous ›Black Caesar‹ in his guise of highwayman (cf. *PL* 158–60) and else Gilbert Robertson, whose life stories are traced by Cassandra Pybus, Wadawaka raises questions of ethnicity within Australia. Black Caesar, as Pybus has discovered, was bound for Sierra Leone, where several former African slaves who had fled the US to Britain were enlisted to establish a black community, but was sentenced to transportation

109 Cf. Vivienne Rae ELLIS, *Trucanini: Queen or Traitor?* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1981) 145.

110 Cf. Ellis 9–10.

to Australia prior to leaving for Africa¹¹¹ – a history Wadawaka shares and through which he first met Amelia in London (cf. *UD* 190). Robertson, on the other hand, was born in Trinidad as the son of a planter and his slave mistress and went to Australia as a free settler. Once there, he directly competed with George Augustus Robinson for the care of the Aboriginal people of Van Diemen's land.¹¹² In addition to revealing a concealed chapter in white Australian history through the figure of the African Wadawaka, Mudrooroo also introduces questions of alternative possibilities for black Australian identity in a predominantly white society, thus defying a history selected and written by whites.

c. Identity Reclaimed

As I have argued before, colonial Gothic texts present the colonized subject as the terrible and fearsome ›other‹ who symbolizes the literally dark self of the colonizer and assures him of his own moral integrity and identity. Mudrooroo's vampire trilogy does not differ from those stock conventions of Gothic fiction, but he reverses the roles of hero and villain: the British invaders are referred to as *nam*, ghosts, by Jangamuttuk and his mob (cf. *UD* 18), and *moma*, which means devils, by others (cf. *UD* 42 109; *UG* 25), whereas the indigenes are humans who fight these evil spirits (cf. *UD* 2, 42). According to Henry Reynolds, Europeans were indeed believed to be returned from the dead and accordingly addressed with traditional terms meaning ghost or spirit eternal, but those Aboriginal people in contact with Europeans soon changed their attitude and ghost words formerly used with awe took on a negative connotation, eventually meaning devil.¹¹³ This rather naïve approach towards the first British colonizers, however, is countered in Mudrooroo's vampire trilogy: as Jangamuttuk's mob believes, the ghosts came, and keep coming, through a hole in the sky to conquer the human world, and only Jangamuttuk in his position as Master of the Ghost Dreaming can repel this force (cf. *UG* 27–8). The story thus unfolds as a typical Gothic plot of usurpation, rightful claims to land, and the attempted restoration of order.

Already the trilogy's prequel, *Master of the Ghost Dreaming*, determines the course for the Gothic setting of the whole series:

111 Cf. Cassandra PYBUS, *A Touch of the Tar: African Settlers in Colonial Australia and the implications for Issues of Aboriginality*, London Papers in Australian Studies 3 (London: Menzies Centre for Australian Studies, 2001) 6.

112 Cf. Pybus 18.

113 Cf. Reynolds 30–1, 36.

[Morning Star] became not the harbinger of the morning, of the light, but a marker of the density of the night which has overtaken us. It illuminates our misery and tugs our souls far from day. Our spirits roam the realm of the ghosts – an unfriendly land where trees and plants, insects and serpents, animals and humans wither and suffer. Now, we, the pitiful fragments of once strong families suffer on in exile. Pulled by Evening Star into the realm of the ghost, only some of us live on, kept alive by our hope that we shall escape this plane of fear and pain. All around us is the darkness of the night; all around us is an underlying silence of a land of death. (MD 1)

When recollecting the events which took place in *Master of the Ghost Dreaming*, George tells his listeners that the hopes rested on Jangamuttuk, who was Master of the Ghost Dreaming, to release his people from this Gothic place and to send the ghosts back to where they came from (cf. UD 2). Here, the traditional antithesis of hero and Gothic villain, the ›other‹, is dissolved and constructed afresh: it is the British colonizer who is responsible for any Gothic occurrence within the text. Amelia has slaughtered the crew of the *Kore* and, later, the soldiers guarding its wreck, a deed for which Captain Torrens orders brutal retaliation against Waai's tribe. Like a film director, he has the corpses placed in a row »as a decoration« (UD 124) and arranges the Gothic setting: »[...] what else could we do to realise this Gothic scene?« (UD 124). A similar Gothic scenery, also a result of Torrens's brutality, is the first thing Jangamuttuk's mob encounters when landing on the foreign shore:

I felt my eyes fill with tears and I could not at first bear to look at the hanging dead bodies. [...] The shattered tops of the masts of the brigantine had been buried in the sand and then a spar had been lashed between them, tied securely so that it would remain firm under the weight and thrashings of ten human beings. Then, in order for the murderers to do their work without overly stretching, a long narrow trench had been dug underneath. Nooses had been tied at intervals along the spar and through these the heads of the unfortunate victims had been thrust. Then, from the marks along the edge of the trench, their feet had been kicked away from under them and they had swung out into space, choking at the end of the ropes. Some of them, I saw, had tried to swing back to the side of the trench and thus lessen the terrible agony, but their feet had been kicked away by heavy ghost boots. I stared at the twisted faces with the swollen tongues alive with flies. They protruded like diseased slugs from mouths wide open, gasping for air, wide open to force through a final breath which was blocked by the constricting rope. I stared. I could smell the blood congealed in dead veins. I inhaled a stronger stench and glanced down from the faces to a further horror: each corpse had been slashed across the stomach, had been hacked open by a blunt instrument, for the wounds were not clean cuts

and seemingly had been prolonged to add to the agony of the suffocating victims. I saw how the blood had flown out along with the intestines which bulged and oozed harsh fluids and odours. (UD 104–5)

In order to emphasize the fatal impact of colonization on Aboriginal Australia, a Gothic scenery is evoked throughout the first volume of the trilogy: the sails shudder »like the shrouds of corpses« (UD 5) and sound like rattling bones (cf. UD 4), and there comes »the shook-shook of giant bat wings« from the rigging (UD 3), images which constantly return in the latter two volumes. When the didgeridoo player »vanished in the night«, a fog hovers about the sea, and frozen water appears to be a »ghost fortress« (UD 18–19). Furthermore, Fada, the historical George Augustus Robinson, is described as feeding on the people in his care – and thus likened to Amelia and her vampiric acts: »Fada ate at our souls and, when he had finished eating, he abandoned us« (UD 2). This representation matches the description Waai gives of the *moma*: »He has a hunger for fresh meat and blood, human meat and blood, when he is overcome by this urge, he roams about hunting his prey« (UD 42–3). Having started in *The Undying*, the Gothic is continued in *Underground*: »Now another song to set the mood of our gloomy tale« (UG 6). Throughout the trilogy, the whites' world is Gothicized and the white man is constructed as the Gothic ›other‹.

The question of pastoralism here becomes an important issue, as the whites are reproached with having Gothicized the once natural landscape Aboriginal communities lived with harmonically,¹¹⁴ and utter darkness is associated with white people, represented by Amelia: »We [the Aboriginal people] are creatures of the day and of the overworld while she [Amelia] belongs down here where neither the sun nor moon rises to relieve the gloom and despair« (UG 119). This key distinction within Gothic literature between pastoral and gloomy places is played with when it comes to Whitby. Fashioned to provide a pastoral contrast to Dracula's Transylvanian castle in *Dracula*, this seaside resort is rendered Gothic in *The Promised Land*, a strategy which calls attention to the colonial and prejudicially false attributions in Stoker's novel:

[Whitby was] a picturesque fishing town in North Riding dominated by the ruins of an ancient abbey, below which was a cemetery with graves that were on the verge of slipping into the ocean. The combination of hilltop ruins, the ancient cemetery and the cliff edge held them [the Westenras] with their Gothic splendour. (PL 1–2)

114 A similar view can be found in Nan Bowman ALBINSKI, »A Survey of Australian Utopian and Dystopian Fiction,« *Australian Literary Studies* 13.1 (1987): 25–6, who states that, from an Aboriginal perspective, »white civilization is a dystopia that destroys the utopian, symbiotic relationship to the land of aboriginal culture«.

By contrast, the Whitby as described in Mina Murray's journal seems a pastoral idyll:

This is a lovely place. The little river, the Esk, runs through a deep valley, which broadens out as it comes near the harbour. [...] The valley is beautifully green [...]. [T]here is another church, the parish one, round which is a big graveyard, all full of tombstones. This is to my mind the nicest spot in Whitby [...]. There are walks, with seats beside them, through the churchyard; and people go and sit there all day long looking at the beautiful view and enjoying the breeze. (D 71–2)

Even the ruins of Whitby Abbey with their violent history are »full of beautiful and romantic bits« (D 71) rather than steeped in blood.

Other places in *The Promised Land* which became Gothicized through the hands of white people include those areas where there is still gold to pick from the surface: Skull's Flat (cf. PL 68) and Kalipa, the Killing Fields (cf. PL 71). The name Skull's Flat derives from both racist categories of phrenology and a story the fossickers tell at Yillarn. There once were three mates »who came to the Devil's playground [...] and found [...] the mother lode« (PL 69). Though there was enough gold for all three of them, one of them fell victim to hallucinations, and »there came the Devil to put the axe in his hand« (PL 69). Still delirious, he hacked off his mates' heads, stuck the skulls on the branches of a dead tree, and placed nuggets in the sockets of their eyes. When his food was all gone, he started living on the bodies of his mates, »a regular Bedlamite« (PL 69) by then, and finally died beside the other two skeletons.¹¹⁵ Kalipa, on the other hand, is the diggers' »El Dorado« (PL 70), though they do not dare to approach it, for they fear the »bloodthirsty savages« after whose alleged deeds it was named »Killing Fields« (PL 71). According to Monaitch, however, it is simply the home of a tribe of desert indigenes who believe in the Great Serpent (cf. PL 39). Yet in the course of the story, that place truly becomes a »Killing Field«, though only through the hands of the whites again: it is the site of the massacre committed by Sergeant Barron's troops (cf. PL 127–31).¹¹⁶ The actual Gothic impact the British invasion of Australia had on its Aboriginal people is referred to in other episodes as well:

Savages? And what savages we are to be the victims of such barbarians who believed such words, but still raped and blundered who and what they wanted. Not even young boys were safe from them, so it is best not to mention what happened to our young girls and women. (UG 136)

115 The question to be asked is: with all three of them dead, who told the story?

116 For an account of Sergeant Barron's massacre and its implication in terms of re-writing white historiography, see p. 65.

Again, the British, both settlers and military invaders, are addressed in bitter terms which reverse the meaning of the terms ›savages‹ and ›barbarians‹. The role of the Gothic ›other‹ is once more removed from the colonized and imposed on the colonizer, thus worn-out stereotypes are indigenized and Aboriginal people cast in the role of the Gothic victim.

Yet since the most disturbing figure in Gothic fiction is that of the vampire, Mudrooroo concentrates on the figure of Amelia, whose monstrous female body for Annalisa Oboe is »the ultimate locus of perversion«,¹¹⁷ throughout his trilogy to destabilize the white colonial Gothic discourse. In *The Undying*, Amelia stands for the British invader who, in her function as female vampire, »suck[s the Australian landscape] dry and contaminates its spaces«,¹¹⁸ a metaphor intensified by references to Australia's Stolen Generations: Amelia abducts two indigenous toddlers and »nourishes« them with her blood (cf. *UG* 104), though not without »snacking« on them (cf. *UG* 96), before finally killing them in a fit of rage (cf. *UG* 154–5). This episode eerily reveals how the Stolen Generations have been robbed of their cultural heritage and instilled with white beliefs:

Those children, there is not the hint of whiteness about them. You stole them from above and couldn't even keep them whole. You perverted them as soon as you felt the need arise. Now you have deprived them of their growing. They are lost to the world above. (*UG* 137)

When pleading with his son, Jangamuttuk points out that white interference in Aboriginal rearing and education leads to the extinction of vital indigenous values: »Raised by ghosts, you caught their habits and now you must forget them and survive, remember them and you die« (*UG* 38).

As Maureen Clark notes, even Amelia's »dark kingdom« (*UG* 133) evokes pictures of colonial missions and penal institutions and it does so in Gothic terms:¹¹⁹

The darkness was a felt thickness [. . .]. I [George as Dingo] sensed the ghosts of my mob shuffling along beside me. My nose smelled only death and decay. [. . .] I was alone in what seemed a vast emptiness. [. . .] I knew then that I was in a huge cavern and filled by the smell of ancient bones. They were even under my feet [. . .]. I moved across the cavern towards [a glimmer of light] and entered a narrow side passage with walls glittering from embedded specks of mitre. As I walked down the

117 Oboe, »Metamorphic Bodies« 231.

118 Turcotte, »Remastering the Ghosts« 131.

119 Cf. Clark, »Terror as White Female« 132.

passage too, the stone began to glow with some sort of whitish light which enabled me to break into a trot; but was this any better than the all encompassing darkness? (UG 98–9)

In a deliberate reversal of the conventional European symbolism of colours, where white represents innocence and black evil, the image of these subterranean passages by means of the Gothicized yet heavenly white already familiar from *Moby-Dick* (cf. also UG 129),¹²⁰ emphasizes the devastating effects of Australia's policy of assimilation. Taken up again in *The Promised Land*, the opposition of fair and foul and the role this played in constructing colonial binaries is contemplated once more: »In your [Wadawaka's] darkness, I find myself and, and – ‹ In your [Amelia's] whiteness, I tremble, knowing you for what you are,‹ he replies« (PL 227) – a motif which is then repeated in the metamorphosis of beauty to beast and black to beauty:

Her pale loveliness lost its shapeliness and transformed into an ugly bat which took to the air gracefully. The man's dark bulk resumed a shape which was powerful and a thing of beauty. Leopard allowed Bat to settle on his back and he slowly carried her towards the dwelling. (PL 228)

This image of white as more terrifying as anything else is also taken up by George in *Underground*, recalling Poe's Gothic *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* of 1850, and Wadawaka's account of his slave days:

Well, you've had enough of dust and head, I dare say, and need a tale about the far cold southern ocean with its icebergs and strange werebears lurching above the snow, with its squalls and tempests and phantom ships petrified in strange frozen waves that take away the living temperature and render the whole crew, captain down to cabin scruff, stiff and dead. It's cold, mates, cold as the death you dream as the sweat trickles down you backs and stirs the hairs as if you feel a phantom touch of a frozen hand belonging to someone who once loved you. . . (UG 5)

and

›There was this place in which I found myself. It had a swirling whiteness too, but the whiteness of that place was salt and it stung to my body, not my mind as this mistiness does. I have a half barrel in the slush beside me and a shovel in my hand and I scoop up the whiteness into the barrel, empty it onto the growing pile of bitter glowing whiteness, then do the same again. We slave on, the sun blazing down on

¹²⁰ For a discussion of Melville's use of the colour white, see p. 47.

our heads like a bonfire. My body blisters from the heat and the crystals cake on my skin. My feet from constantly being in the slush are full of dreadful abscesses, cankers that eat down to the very bone. If you look, you will see the scars, where the whiteness etched into my black skin. [...] I need [...] even that smell of salt which once I dreaded as it ate into my flesh and marked my skin with whiteness. . . . (UG 131–2)¹²¹

To further demonize the horror of whiteness, Jangamuttuk even refers to Amelia as having a »white heart« (UG 139), thus echoing the common metaphor of the black heart as a sign of utmost evil.

By playing with different points of view, Mudrooroo creates an intriguing set of interdependent attributions. For Sir George, both women and non-British people are necessary to define himself against, a position which becomes obvious when analysing his views on Russians: »Why, they still had serfs and, what was it called? *Droit du seigneur*« (PL 116); a right he and other British men were always anxious to exercise themselves with regard to Aboriginal women. This custom is said to have existed in feudal Europe of medieval times and »is paralleled in various primitive societies«,¹²² thus a thing of a dark and pre-enlightened past. By using this term in reference to Russians, George Augustus Robinson likens their culture to that of the »savages«. Ironically, this right, if it existed at all, was most probably never actually enforced in other ways than money payments,¹²³ an idea which, together with the fact that he considers Amelia »an apparition from some dense Gothic novel« (PL 135), exposes Sir George's own superstitious and thus pre-enlightened mind – a mindset many Gothic novels attribute their villains with. Russians, however, share the British history of colonization, having occupied Finland from 1809 to 1917, and also need an »other« against which to determine their identity. The traditional vampire tale told by Russian Jack, whose historical counterpart, having been a Russian Finn by birth who »emigrated« to Australia, was a two-time colonizer himself, is an example of this need. The story, interestingly told after Jack rejects George's tale as improbable, is about one of Jack's mates who belongs to the Czar's army and is on leave to attend a relative's wedding, finding himself in the company of an »Eretik« (PL 65). This Russian type of vampire later drains the newly-wed couple's blood, but Jack's mate brings it all to a happy ending by driving a wooden

121 As Diana Brydon remarks, salt is a very prominent and Gothic metaphor in much Caribbean literature, cf. Diana BRYDON, »Postcolonial Gothic: Ghosts, Iron and Salt in Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon*,« *Ebony, Ivory and Tea*, ed. Zbigniew Białas and Krzysztof Kwalczyk-Twarowski (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2004) 217–18.

122 »Seigneur, Droit du,« *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica Online, 2007, 10 Feb. 2007 (<http://www.search.eb.com.wwwproxy0.nun.unsw.edu.au/eb/article-9066620>).

123 Cf. »Seigneur, Droit du«.

stake through the Eretek's heart, burning the body, and burying him at a crossing (cf. *PL* 66) – thus marking another triumph over an attempt of counter-invasion.

Mudrooroo's concern for identity and its determination is also expressed in his obsession with names and illustrates a close correspondence between proper name and self-definition, as Annalisa Oboe notices.¹²⁴ A means of colonial disempowerment, Sir George chooses royal names to christen the baptized converts, for example George and Augustus, but sticks to pagan names such as Hercules for those whom he still considers to be heathens (cf. *UG* 9) without acknowledging their indigenous names. In an act of transformation, the Aboriginal characters use this very strategy in order to assert their power over the colonizer when naming George Augustus Robinson »Fada« and John Summer »Wadawaka« (cf. *UD* 189).¹²⁵ This act of gaining and re-gaining power over the ›other‹ is pursued throughout the trilogy: Jangamuttuk's little group persists in calling Sir George »Fada« (cf. *PL* 170), while they themselves »never used what they considered their ›ghost‹ names« (*UG* 9), and Wadawaka sees his true identity best expressed by the name »Wadawaka, ›Ocean Born‹« (*UD* 192). By resisting palimpsestic colonial attempts of domination, they reclaim their identity as blacks and the Gothic ›not-other‹.

Apart from this usurpation and reversal of the European Gothic tradition, there is another, and for readers with a Western, European background less obvious, Gothic discourse. In both *Underground* and *The Promised Land* several animals are mentioned in passing, as if chosen randomly, which play an important part in Aboriginal mythology.¹²⁶ First, there is the curlew, its screams being mentioned by Milyado (cf. *UG* 60), who links it to Amelia, and by George Augustus Robinson (cf. *PL* 12). In the belief of some Aboriginal communities, curlews are the guardians of the departed, their cry announcing death. They give a warning to the still living on three successive nights in order to assure them that their death will be from natural causes. After their death, the curlew carries the soul of the dead person to the sky world.¹²⁷ Then there is the owl, the dreaming shape in which the desert tribe's shaman attacks Amelia in *The Promised Land* (cf. *PL* 91). The owl is believed to smell death and to be the watch for baneful spirits. Once it smells that death approaches a person, the owl leads these harmful spirits to that person, and hence

124 Cf. Annalisa OBOE, Introduction, *Mongrel Signatures: Reflections on the Work of Mudrooroo*, ed. Annalisa Oboe, *Cross/Cultures* 64 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003) viii.

125 In another example of nominal uncertainty, his name is changed in the course of the trilogy, and he is referred to as »John Summers« in *The Promised Land* whereas in *The Undying*, his name is only »John Summer«, once again challenging European superiority of names.

126 For the analysis of Mudrooroo's texts alone, I will refer to aspects of Aboriginal mythology as outlined in MUDROOROO, *Aboriginal Mythology: An A–Z Spanning the History of Aboriginal Mythology from the Earliest Legends to the Present Day* (London: Thorsons–HarperCollins, 1994), a book which sparked a lot of criticism among Aboriginal elders on its publication and cannot be regarded as a universal and uncontested work on Aboriginal mythology.

127 Cf. Mudrooroo, *Aboriginal Mythology* 37.

its coming was regarded as an ill omen.¹²⁸ Both birds are signs of near death in Aboriginal belief and are associated with Amelia in the vampire trilogy, the representative of death through contamination. They are part of an indigenous cultural subtext foreign to the Western reader, thus completing the transformation into an Aboriginal Gothic which began with the appropriation of the European Gothic tradition and the reversal of its binaries of identity.

Another example of how both European and indigenous cultural patterns are interwoven and thereby create a uniquely Aboriginal Gothic can be found in the figure of Captain Torrens, the polar werebear. Posing another threat to indigenous identity, Torrens's furry alter ego is both positioned against and in line with the vampire in the guise of Amelia. According to Brian Frost, the werewolf of folklore has always been an »emblem of treachery, savagery, and bloodthirstiness«,¹²⁹ showing »traits [...] such as cunning craftiness, swiftness of movement, bestial ferocity, and unbridled cruelty.«¹³⁰ Its origins, like the vampire's, can be traced back to the ancient world, and its myth probably derives from exaggerated accounts of fur-clad warriors and their nightly raids.¹³¹ Known around the world, wereanimals usually come in the form of that animal which is most feared in the area it appears in; there are, for instance, weretigers in India, wereleopards, -lions, or -crocodiles in Africa, werefoxes in China and Japan, and werejaguars in South America.¹³² The brutal nature commonly associated with wereanimals is a key feature of the polar werebear in *The Undying* as well: »When his change next came upon him, he would savage them with a savagery which would go beyond their own« (UD 88). By transgressing the strict boundaries of pre-Darwinian times between human and animal, he, like Amelia, is characterized as abhuman and the Gothic ›other‹ who threatens to destroy indigenous identity. Yet unlike Amelia, who kills his physical form (UD 148–9),¹³³ Torrens does not try to infect and thus assimilate indigenous identity, his aim is the total annihilation of any Aboriginal presence in Australia. Thus the fact that Torrens, a man who »became a demon« (UD 125) when still in his human shape anyway, is killed by Amelia while changing into his werebear-shape takes on a double meaning. First and in strict chronological order, it stands for the change in Australian government policy from annihilation to assimilation – although Torrens's continued psychic presence suggests that the spirit of extinction

128 Cf. Mudrooroo, *Aboriginal Mythology* 126.

129 Brian J. FROST, *The Essential Guide to Werewolf Literature* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 2003) 3.

130 Frost 6.

131 Cf. Frost 4.

132 Cf. Frost 6 and Alison JONES, *Larousse Dictionary of World Folklore* (Edinburgh: Larousse, 1995) 454.

133 According to Gordon Melton, in many mythologies vampires and werewolves exist peacefully side by side, and it is only due to three films produced by Universal in the 1940s and the television series *Dark Shadows* that both became deadly enemies, cf. J. Gordon MELTON, *The Vampire Book: The Encyclopedia of the Undead* (Farmington Hills: Visible Ink P, 1999) 769, 772.

still lingers on after it was officially overridden. On another level, this constellation implies that Amelia and the infection she brings is a more dreadful power than mere ferocity.

In addition to the renewed reference to an unappeasable thirst for blood and its colonial implications, the figure of Captain Torrens also carries a historical meaning. It was a Sir Robert Richard Torrens who in 1858 introduced the Torrens System of simplified land transfer, which in effect was a legal expression of the doctrine of *terra nullius* and facilitated the whites' access to land, thereby contributing to the dispossession of Aboriginal people. In 1993, however, the Native Title Act came into force, which put the ruling of *Mabo v. Queensland* of 1992 into practice. The court there acknowledged an indigenous system of law and ownership prior to European settlement:

The common law of [Australia] would perpetuate injustice if it were to continue to embrace the enlarged notion of *terra nullius* and to persist in characterizing the indigenous inhabitants of the Australian colonies as people too low in the scale of social organization to be acknowledged as possessing rights and interests in land. [...] The lands of this continent were not *terra nullius* or ›practically unoccupied‹ in 1788. [...] The idea that land which is in regular occupation may be *terra nullius* is unacceptable, in law as well as in fact.¹³⁴

If the traditional connection of Aboriginal communities to the land and the water has been maintained, this connection is recognized by the law as native title – the uncanny and unsettling return of the repressed in the eyes of the whites.¹³⁵

Again, these events find their Gothic expression in Mudrooroo's vampire trilogy through an act of transformation. Immune against traditional indigenous magic, which is embodied in the crystals Jangamuttuk and his fellow shamans carry,¹³⁶ the polar werebear and his arctic shield, with which he psychically protects the settlement, require different, new weapons. Here, the familiar Gothic trope of killing a wereanimal by shooting it with a silver bullet is incorporated into the Aboriginal boning ritual performed by Jangamuttuk and Waai: substituting the ineffective crystals, which are usually used to catch a victim's soul in a bone-pointing ceremony,¹³⁷ some silver pellets help to confine the werebear in its bony gaol (cf. *UD* 177–9). Else, the ceremony described in *The Undying* does, except for one

134 *MABO v The State of Queensland*, HCA 23, High Court of Australia, 3 June 1992, Judges 1:63, 3:56, 5:20.

135 For the issue of the repressed returning, see p. 17.

136 See for the magic inherent in Aboriginal shamans' crystals Mudrooroo, *Aboriginal Mythology* 138.

137 Cf. Mudrooroo, *Aboriginal Mythology* 19.

central part, not differ from other such ceremonies used to kill a person from afar. A shaman, assisted by one of his fellows, points a bone into the direction of the victim and thus draws the victim's soul into the bone. To stop the soul from escaping, the bone is closed by a lump of wax. Then it is buried in a heap of leaves and emu feathers and left there for several months before it is burned. Along with the burning, the victim becomes weaker, and when the bone is entirely consumed, the victim is dead.¹³⁸ Yet instead of killing Torrens's psychic alter ego, Jangamuttuk and Waai decide to only send him »[d]own into the ocean where he can do no harm« (UD 179) – but where he still lives on together with his annihilating spirit. Thus cleverly merging both European Gothic conventions and Aboriginal traditions of a maban reality, Mudrooroo creates another instance of Aboriginal Gothic, in which he transforms its European element into a critique of imperial realities.

For Mudrooroo, however, refiguring the master's discourse of Gothic fiction does not suffice as far as questions of identity are concerned. Rather, in order to convey his idea of Australianness, he also turns to a varied array of narrative techniques based on the different concepts of storytelling within European, i.e., written, and Aboriginal, i.e., oral, traditions. In his vampire trilogy, Mudrooroo tries to preserve this Aboriginal orality when his first-person narrator George starts his story in the beginning of *The Undying* and *Underground*. The very first lines of *The Undying*, and the various interjections throughout the trilogy, are in George's native language and thus inaccessible to readers with a Western, European background. With their help, George paves the way for the songline he is about to relate and refers back to the cultural assumption that every songline is

the sound equivalent to the spatial journeys of the ancestors. [...] They detail the travels of the ancestors and each verse may be read in terms of geographical features of the landscape. Encoded within them are great ceremonies which reactivate the *Dreamtime* in the present.¹³⁹

Yet, as Eva Rask Knudsen remarks, the very act of communicating a plot in the form of the novel, which is a linear form of story-telling, implies the submission to European conventions and the neglect of Aboriginal traditions.¹⁴⁰ Through George's interactions with his listeners, and his readers, however, this formal submission is evaded. George's ›yarn‹ is told orally to an audience of prospectors and only later recorded in writing: »Perhaps, if I have the time, I should put my adventures down upon paper so that a wider audience may marvel at them« (UG 181). Here,

138 Cf. Mudrooroo, *Aboriginal Mythology* 19–20.

139 Mudrooroo, *Aboriginal Mythology* 150; emphasis in the original.

140 Cf. Knudsen, »Mission Completed« 323–4.

Mudrooroo again transforms what seems at first glance a surrender to the master's discourse to suit his Aboriginal purposes.

To further his endeavour of revaluing Aboriginal songlines and their oral tradition, Mudrooroo also draws on Europe's earliest literary heritage, in particular on Homer. The Homeric epics are commonly regarded as the foundations of classical European poetry, but, influenced by Milman Parry's work on formulaic patterns in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, modern scholarship argues in favour of an *oral* origin of those epics.¹⁴¹ Thus the great Aboriginal songlines, epics themselves and, as Mudrooroo hopes, eventually an accepted part of a common heritage of all Australians,¹⁴² are closely related to those works which have profoundly shaped European imperial thinking. Their closeness is demonstrated in Mudrooroo's vampire trilogy when George likens the seafarings of his mob to the *Odyssey*: »We were like those Greeks too, them that sailed off to fight a war and then got lost on the way home. Yeah, ours was like the voyage of that Ulysses. It went on and on, though at the end there was nary a glimpse of home, let alone a promised land« (*UG* 4). Later, in *The Promised Land*, the *Odyssey* is taken up again when Amelia tells Lucy to »[b]e like Penelope and embroider while [she] waits« (*PL* 46) – a thread twice mixed up with that of the fate *Clotho* by Lucy, the representative of upper-class British women, before (cf. *PL* 29, 45) in a mockery of how uneducated the British invader truly was.

Within his reworking of the Greek underworld, Mudrooroo also introduces the character of Milyado, Bandicoot (cf. *UG* 49). The titular character in *The Bandicoot Song of Ilbálintja*, a song cycle collected and analysed by T.G.H Strehlow,¹⁴³ also is a Bandicoot, and as Clare Archer-Lean works out in great detail, is very reminiscent of Mudrooroo's shaman Milyado.¹⁴⁴

Rich yellow soil!
 Impenetrable hollow!
 Red and orange soil!
 Impenetrable hollow!
 [...]
 Crooking their little claws they are raking grass together;
 With balled paws they are raking grass together.

141 See for a synopsis of the ›Homeric Question‹ Robert FOWLER, »The Homeric Question,« *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, ed. Robert Fowler, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 220–34.

142 Cf. Mudrooroo, *Milli Milli Wangka* 2.

143 Cf. Strehlow 129–46.

144 Cf. Archer-Lean 262–3.

They are snoring now –
Half-asleep they are snoring now.¹⁴⁵

In a direct comparison, Milyado's daydream sounds very similar:

There's nothing like burrowing down into the *soft warm earth* or slashing your way through a *hard hot one*. Just imagine *my front claws loosening the dirt* and the hind legs pushing it behind me. I go down and down until I get tired and then *curl up into a tight ball* far from the light *to dream on* about what is far below where the stones glow. (UG 61; emphasis mine)

Through Milyado, Jangamuttuk and George learn of the secret entrances to the underworld, dug by his bandicoot ancestors (cf. UG 63, 69–71). By thus awarding Milyado with one of the key parts in his reworking of ancient Greek mythology, Mudrooroo positions *The Bandicoot Song of Ilbá!intja* side by side with the great epics of classical Greece.

Similarly, replacing Cerberus with a giant devil-dingo adapted from Dick Roughsey's children's book of the same name, allows Mudrooroo to place this story in its rightful place and at the same time to criticize the way whites regarded Aboriginal stories as only suited for children's picture books. The dreamtime story of the giant devil-dingo as told by Roughsey is about how the dingo became domesticated: Gaiya, the giant devil-dingo, was the companion of an evil grasshopper woman called Eelgin, and on her orders hunted and killed humans for food. One day, Gaiya pursued two brothers of the butcher-bird tribe, who entrapped and speared him, later also killing Eelgin. The shaman of the butcher-bird tribe then took »the bones, the kidneys and the head [of the giant devil dingo] and made two small dingoes, one male and one female. He covered them with skin and blew down the mouths of the dogs until they came to life«,¹⁴⁶ ordering them to be a friend to man and to help him hunt. Again, what seems a likely transposition in an Australian context, namely hellhound to dingo, is also an important example for both the transformation of European traditions and the re-claiming of an indigenous identity: not only is it another Aboriginal myth which is on a par with the founding epics of European civilization, but it is also the creation story of George's dreaming animal.

Apart from raising issues of orality, and how it also shaped Europe's cultural heritage, through the narrative techniques he employs, Mudrooroo also works with Aboriginal notions of time and history as opposed to European historiography. While the latter relies on linear concepts, where the past is past and the future still to come, Aboriginal Australians have a different temporal framework: as Bill

145 This is part of a translated and edited version which is reprinted in Strehlow 132–3.

146 Roughsey 27–8.

Edwards explains, the events of what Europeans call ›The Dreaming‹ in one sense of the word occurred in the past, but they are at the same time still present and can be envisioned directly through rituals. Therefore the indigenous concept of time is cyclic rather than linear in »the sense that each generation is able to experience the present reality of The Dreaming«. ¹⁴⁷ Although the story of Jangamuttuk's mob is presented as a historical novel, a subgenre which according to Annalisa Oboe is, as a realist narrative, used to mark the end of cyclical time, ¹⁴⁸ Mudrooroo nevertheless manages to incorporate elements rooted in the idea of cyclical time. A case in point is Wadawaka's *Song Cycle of the Nomad*: at the end of »that western voyage« (UD 1), only George and Wadawaka are left, »the only two survivors« (UG 170); a moment which, at the very same time, marks the ending as well as the beginning of quite the same tale, that of the last survivor of a sea voyage. This narrative twist of re-telling the same story in neverending circles is then continued in *The Promised Land*, when Wadawaka, again the last survivor, after his return from the whaling cruise is about to embark on the HMS *Great Britain* in order to return to England – from whence he came to Australia in the first place.

Another example is the timeline within the trilogy itself. Already *The Undying* begins with announcing the end (›That's how we begin this songline. [...] until I reached here alone and unwanted«, UD 1), and *The Promised Land* eventually resolves the trilogy's intricate temporal fabric by explaining the other novels' chronology: the events of the first two volumes are narrated while George briefly resumes his human shape in Yillarn: »Ah, that's good, and now that dark coot has put an end to his yarn about white things that go bump in the night and suck the blood from unsuspecting blackfellows [...]« (PL 65). Accordingly, the present of both *The Undying* and *Underground* is, from a linear point of view, the past of *The Promised Land*, but from a cyclical point of view still intrudes the present of the last volume and is accessible by means of story-telling.

To reflect the actual impact of British invasion on indigenous Australia, however, Mudrooroo parts with an altogether oral and cyclical narration. He rather mirrors the Aboriginal peoples' eventual powerlessness against anything European in his narrative techniques. For that purpose, the means of his choice is his first-person narrator George. George begins and ends the narration in both *The Undying* and *Underground*, but within the entire trilogy, George's control of the story steadily declines. Already the first volume indicates such a loss of narrative control: as soon as the character of Amelia Fraser is introduced, the narration slips out of George's

147 Bill EDWARDS, »Living the Dreaming«, *Aboriginal Australia: An Introductory Reader in Aboriginal Studies*, ed. Colin Bourke, Eleanor Bourke, and Bill Edwards, 2nd ed. (St. Lucia: U of Queensland P, 2003) 79.

148 Cf. Annalisa OBOE, »Dr. Wooreddy's War against Time«, *Mongrel Signatures: Reflections on the Work of Mudrooroo*, ed. Annalisa Oboe, *Cross/Cultures* 64 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003) 88.

hands, and the Aboriginal tradition of story-telling is usurped by the invader. The first encounter between George and Amelia then results in the infection of the Aboriginal boy with the blood of the white vampire, the transfusion re-enacting well-known vampiric transformations:

[...] suddenly a dark shape fell from the trees and fastened on my neck. I gave a howl of terror and whirled, then rolled over and over trying to dislodge the thing from my throat. I snapped at it and my teeth fastened on a part of its body. [...] My neck stung and I could not reach the spot with my tongue. It itched as if a poison had been injected into me. (UD 60–1)

A constant craving for blood, referred to throughout both *The Undying* and *Underground*, results from this, indicating George's worsening contamination – a contamination which had already begun when he was fathered by George Augustus Robinson (cf. *UG* 174 and *PL* 117) and which is already expressed in the fever which befell him before he met Amelia, yet after he tasted the blood of a hunted animal for the first time: »Well, he tasted the blood of his first life today and it caused a fever. The spirit of an animal awakened in him, one that likes the taste of blood.« (UD 34).

It is, however, the first encounter with Amelia after which George starts to change and his identity is steadily blurred, even to the extent of sharing Amelia's dreams and thoughts: »She gave me dreams that were not my dreams [...]« (UD 2) and »This seemed to have infected me with another change. [...] There came also another effect. My mind at times seemed to be thinking another's thoughts« (UD 65). He then loses control of the narrative, which is resumed by Amelia, the second first-person narrator (cf. UD 66–76). Through this narrative technique, the image of the colonizer as preying upon the indigenes' blood, and thereby both on their lives and their identity, is evoked anew. While George resumes the role of narrator only thrice after his first meeting with Amelia (cf. UD 98–117, 150–81, 195–202), she is in control of the narrative five times (cf. UD 66–76, 90–4, 117–22, 135–49, 182–94), a strict separation which is maintained in *Underground*. Amelia's literary predecessor Dracula, on the other hand, is not granted a single line of his own in a novel which has him as titular hero – his character can only be accessed through the diaries and notes of deeply traumatized and drug-addicted strangers.¹⁴⁹ By allowing Amelia to speak on her own behalf, thus defying a traditional vampire's status as »the complete antithesis of subjectivity, agency and authority«,¹⁵⁰ as Fred

149 The reliability of traumatized, drugg-addicted, and zealous sources has already been questioned by Fred SABERHAGEN, *The Dracula Tape*, 1975 (Riverdale: Baen Books, 1999), a work which also gave the vampire a voice of its own.

150 Botting 151.

Botting puts it, Mudrooroo again rejects patterns of silencing established through the European Gothic discourse.

The merging of narrative perspectives in *Underground* shows how George's identity is permanently on the verge of collapsing. Though Amelia is in power as first-person narrator only once (cf. *UG* 90–6), her thoughts govern George all his time underground, thereby making it difficult to distinguish between his thoughts and those of Amelia: »[...] her mind became my mind« (*UG* 82). *The Promised Land* finally abstains from any traces of first-person narrators at all and is told entirely from a third-person perspective, a perspective alien to oral and thus Aboriginal story-telling. This development in narrative perspective and the characters' loss of narrative control is reflected internally as well: it is not only the narrative which becomes ruled by the white invader, but also George's mind.

He is not only affected by Amelia's dreams and thoughts, but also follows her calling when having assumed his dingo-shape (*UD* 115–17). Her calls become more and more pressing and demanding in *Underground*, even reaching him when still in his human form (cf. *UG* 45). While in *The Undying*, safe for two instances, it was only Amelia who referred to herself as George's »mistress« (*UD* 93), in *Underground* it is George who constantly addresses her as »mistress« (*UG* 71, 80, 83, 89, 97 etc.). Being a dingo most of the time, he is easily led astray by the vampire, even to the extent of not recognizing his parents: »I should have known her [Ludjee] and did, but my mind was not my own [...]« (*UG* 132). While being in the shape of his Dreaming animal, George finds himself in an in-between state of confusion. He neither belongs to Amelia's underground kingdom, nor to his overground mob:

Where was I and what was I doing here? I had some vague recollection that I had gone underground on some sort of quest or rescue mission which seemed silly. [...] I was a doggy and well looked after by a loving mistress. (*UG* 129)

Still, George has a human side:

I knew that I was not really a dog, but a human who wanted to have the scent of his own kind about him. (*UG* 154)

This finally leads to his being insecure of his status:

Once I had been a confused dog, now I was a puzzled human filled with conflicting emotions that should not have been there, hence my belief that she [Amelia] had stolen my soul. I wanted my parents back as well as wanting my mistress, though I was no longer a dog, but George, a human. (*UG* 163)

The loss of identity is also illustrated by the image of George turning into a dog: »I was well and truly tamed – her pet!« (UG 89), a process completed in *The Promised Land*, when he features almost entirely as Dingo, and only twice resumes his human shape (cf. PL 65–7, 213). Moreover, it is the very figure of his Dreaming animal which denotes his uncertain identity, as the other initiated members of the different tribes have as Dreaming animals Aboriginal ancestors, whereas George turns into a dingo, which, according to indigenous beliefs, arrived from outside Australia, though still in the Dreamtime, and is not one of the original ancestors.¹⁵¹

Besides the violent incorporations of colonization, i.e., Amelia and Captain Torrens, Mudrooroo also addresses another aspect of British colonial zeal, that of Christianization brought by missionaries. Under the cloak of charity, those missionaries converted their Aboriginal subjects and in passing decimated their numbers enormously, thus effectively helping the white pioneers who needed land. The Christian faith is rejected by Mudrooroo's indigenous characters when imposed on them by Sir George on his Flinders Island mission, where they only mocked his efforts.¹⁵² Whenever there is the opportunity to incorporate stories into their own mythology, however, they accept it as a powerful means of magic: »»Ah, silver,« Wadawaka said. »There is a story about a shaman who was betrayed for thirty pieces of silver. [...]« [...] »Are there any other stories about this metal?« queried Jangamuttuk, the Collector of Stories, of Wadawaka« (UD 176). The most fundamental metaphor of Christianity is taken up as well in order to expose the Gothicism inherent in Christian belief: like every other vampire, Amelia cannot abide hymns and shuns crosses; though other devices used to drive out demons make her smile, the cross »shone a lurid painful light that blistered her skin« (PL 39). Yet the reason why it hurts her is not because the cross is a sign of redemption, but because it is the »symbol of another's pain« (PL 40), calling to attention how ghastly the worship of an instrument of torture and death as well as the quasi-vampiric custom of drinking the saviour's blood must seem to others. By emphasizing the notion of salvation through human sacrifice, Mudrooroo recalls ancient Heracles's civilizing mission and presents the Christian faith as equally uncivilized as ancient Egypt's Busiris was from a Greek point of view.¹⁵³

An entirely different approach to the benefits of Christianization, directed at Christians rather than Christianity, is taken in *The Promised Land*: as soon as George Augustus Robinson hears the story that gold was found in the desert, his missionary fervour increases (cf. PL 20). He quite eagerly mounts an expedition to save the »savages« from damnation, though it is really the gold he is interested

151 Cf. Mudrooroo, *Aboriginal Mythology* 48.

152 The mocking treatment of Christianity is especially evident in *The Master of the Ghost Dreaming* and analysed in Smidt 217–20.

153 For the colonization of Busiris in Greek myths, see p. 52.

in: »Yes, Sir George,« observes Amelia tartly. »Enough of hypocrisy, both gold and savages can be gleaned from this land« (PL 86). Exemplified in George Augustus Robinson, this theme is at the end reinforced when Queen Victoria visits the Great Exhibition (1851) and afterwards writes in her diary. Though she »was quite taken with the performance« (PL 233) of Jangamuttuk and his mob, the Golden Fleece, as an enormous nugget brought from Australia is called, was the object that really caught her eye: »[...] but what was really striking [...] was a gigantic nugget or slug of gold of some pounds in weight [...]« (PL 233). By exaggerating the actual impression Australia's gold made in 1851, when, according to Geoffrey Blainey, only minute grains, hardly of interest to the English public, were exhibited,¹⁵⁴ Mudrooroo calls attention to the impact mining had on indigenous communities and how it furthered the loss of their lands.

Among the various facets of Aboriginal appropriation and resistance in his vampire trilogy, Mudrooroo also employs means of creating rather than challenging concepts of Australian identity: he tries to integrate indigenous designs into white Australian ideas, thus placing an indigenous maban reality next to the scientific reality of the whites. First, he does away with common stereotypes of Aboriginal society which led to a belittling of indigenous cultural values, as for example with the common misconception of a changeless Aboriginal society supposed to belong to a pre-historic past and incapable to adjust to any changes. The development of Jangamuttuk's mob, for example, paints a different picture: the shaman's rituals to send the whites back become ever more sophisticated. The most obvious adaptation to their situation, however, is expressed in their handling of the white vampire. As already noted,¹⁵⁵ they are not able to deal with Amelia in *The Undying*, but in *Underground*, they are much wiser: »If I [Jangamuttuk] had my spear I would drive the wooden point deep within that white heart of yours and watch in glee the stolen blood gush forth« (UG 139). When introducing Aboriginal religious beliefs, Mudrooroo also replaces common white beliefs. According to Bill Edwards, the whites came with preconceived ideas of what should constitute a religion, ideas confirmed by their experiences in Africa and Asia, and thus did not acknowledge Aboriginal forms of religious expression as a true »religion«.¹⁵⁶ Yet many subtle aspects of religion run through Aboriginal cosmology, a feature illustrated in Mudrooroo's entire trilogy. The very fact that his protagonists have a Dreaming animal, first a companion and later on an alter ego symbolizing their ancestors, shows how spiritual beliefs form part of an Aboriginal maban reality. More complex

154 Cf. Geoffrey BLAINNEY, *The Rush that never Ended: A History of Australian Mining*, 2nd ed. (Carlton: Melbourne UP, 1974) 37.

155 See p. 36–37.

156 Cf. Edwards 78.

structures are revealed by Jangamuttuk when indicating a belief in life after death, a core part of Christian doctrine as well:

›His [Jesus’s] sign? No, it isn’t,‹ Jangamuttuk exclaimed. ›That is only the beginning of the road leading to the milky ocean. I followed it when I took those of my people from the wrecked ship and led them up there where they might rest, free from ghosts. I left them there, and when I have completed my journey to the west, I will follow after and we shall rejoin them. So it is and it has nothing to do with Jesus [. . .].‹ (PL 182–3)

The next step Mudrooroo takes in reconciling the different Australian identities is providing possible explanations for popular stereotypes which for him have arisen out of a continuous misunderstanding based on white assumptions of their superiority. One episode of *The Promised Land* exemplifies the whites’ numerous misconceptions: while the indigenous tribe is mourning the death of a child Amelia has killed, they are observed by Sir George. To him, their customary rites seem as if they were about to cook and eat that child: »They are cannibals!« (PL 94). The wailing mother approaches him and invites him to share her grief, an act which is again misinterpreted by Sir George: »›My God, [...] she is about to offer me that dead child for my meal‹« (PL 95). Before any attempt of truly understanding the situation is made, he »turn[s] and [flees] from the camp« (PL 95). Based on a presumed degeneracy of everything which is not European, the British, maybe deliberately, fail to recognize equally complex structures of life in indigenous societies.

Constantly concerned with multiple readings of identity, Mudrooroo finally reclaims a powerful indigenous identity within a modern-day Australia by creating a space for a multi-layered Australian identity. His entire cast is reunited at the governor’s place, a substitute for the diversity of Australians inhabiting that vast continent. The change from a devastating view on Aboriginal identity to that of a more positive judgement in the wake of the outlook for an Australian republic is mirrored in the course of the trilogy. In *The Undying*, the reversal of narrative structures typical of the Gothic is not completed but initiated a transformation of the Gothic, as the predator’s victim is not safe from eventual ruin. Amelia finishes what Dracula is denied: she infects her victim with vampirism, thus taking away his human identity. George even loses everything which constitutes his Aboriginal identity: his mob, his parents, and his language (cf. UD 3). His situation is desperate, and he has to accommodate to the colonists’ way of life: »Now I must use the language of the ghosts and let it shape my lips« (UD 3). A turn towards reconciliation and a hopeful future is taken in *The Promised Land*: George’s parents and Hercules

mysteriously return from their certain deaths, and Amelia and Wadawaka spend the last evening in Australia in perfect harmony, all of them jointly mocking Becky and Sir George (cf. *PL* 225, 231). Having portrayed his characters from both the others' and their own point of view, Mudrooroo complies with his own call for a multi-layered representation: »All singular, totalistic representations of the Aboriginal (and the European, for that matter) are suspect, if not downright fictional.«¹⁵⁷

Despite his efforts to create a reconciled society, however, Mudrooroo cannot but comment on the past and does so by breaking off his songlines right before the usurpation and transformation of the master's discourse is completed: the Gothic invader finally triumphs over the invaded nation and peoples the land with its like. By differing from usual Gothic endings in so vital a point, Mudrooroo's vampire trilogy once more calls attention to the actual impact colonization had on Aboriginal Australians. Like George, who could not escape his fate which is foreshadowed throughout the first two volumes,¹⁵⁸ the Aboriginal peoples of Australia could not escape the white settlers and the devaluation of their culture and customs. Yet by usurping the Gothic inherent in many classics of the European literary tradition, digesting their colonial implications, and then transforming them into an indigenized Gothic discourse with the help of an Aboriginal culture entirely foreign to European ideas, Mudrooroo finally transforms the disabling discourse of European Gothic into an enabling Aboriginal Gothic with which he both expresses his critique of colonialism and begins a hybridized dialogue.

157 Mudrooroo, *Milli Milli Wangka* 51.

158 During the hunt, his taste for blood awakens (cf. *UD* 20–1, 34) and in his dreams he »was pursued by shadows whose only substance was claws and fangs« (*UD* 84). After Malone's murder, he is fascinated as he watches the blood run down from the split skull: »How red and intoxicating it looked« (*UG* 31).

2. De-Composing the Epic: Sam Watson's *The Kadaitcha Sung*

Another work playing with notions of both Western and Aboriginal epic dimensions is Sam Watson's *The Kadaitcha Sung* of 1990.¹ Set in urban Brisbane and nearby Fingal Mission as well as in places important to Aboriginal Dreamings, *The Kadaitcha Sung* is the first novel of a planned trilogy which features three families of Aboriginal tribal magic as titular heroes.² The novel centres around the character of Tommy Gubba, a young man of mixed heritage and last descendant of the ancient and once-powerful clan of sorcerers called the Kadaitcha. Tommy's task is to kill his enemy Booka, also a Kadaitcha man and Tommy's uncle, and to restore the heart of the Rainbow Serpent in its proper place at Uluru so that Biamee, a god and »greater being« (KS 1), may return to his garden Australia and protect his chosen people against the whites. Around this quest evolves a plot combining elements of Aboriginal myths and beliefs with a popular-fiction version of Aboriginal life in contemporary Brisbane in an epic of warfare; a blend of narrative modes many critics have noticed and classified in terms of magic realism and maban reality.³ Recently, however, the focus has shifted towards an examination of the sacred and the profane within *The Kadaitcha Sung*, thus avoiding to reproduce the precarious tension between premodern Aboriginal magic and Western reality inherent in former approaches.⁴ Instead, the discussion has started to concentrate on the mixture of Aboriginal Law (the sacred) with popular-culture forms and issues (the profane), as several studies show.⁵ For Gareth Griffiths, this mingling of different narrative sources in *The Kadaitcha Sung* »reflect[s] the hybridized nature of contemporary indigenous culture«,⁶ an argument Kate Hall develops further by stating that »[i]n foregrounding the (often uneasy) dialogue between differing cultural identities and histories, these hybrid texts [i.a. *The Kadaitcha*

1 All quotations from and comments on *The Kadaitcha Sung* refer to Sam WATSON, *The Kadaitcha Sung* (Ringwood: Penguin Books Australia, 1990); this edition is referred to in the text as (KS p).

2 Sam Watson plans to focus on the Kadaitcha, a figure of revenge and payback, then the moogie spirit, a death spirit who takes the spirit from a dying person, and finally the light figure of the poorie. Cf. Sam WATSON, »I say this to you: Sam Watson talks to *Meanjin*,« *Meanjin* 53.4 (1994): 594–5.

3 Cf. for example Mudrooroo, »Maban Reality and Shape-Shifting the Past« 8–15, Mudrooroo, *Milli Milli Wangka* 96–104, and Suzanne BAKER, »Magic Realism as a Postcolonial Strategy: *The Kadaitcha Sung*,« *SPAN* 32 (1991): 14, 17.

4 See for a critique of Baker's magic-realist approach Ken GELDER, »The Politics of the Sacred,« *World Literature Today* 67.3 (1993): 501.

5 Cf. Gelder, »Politics of the Sacred« 501 and Ken GELDER and Jane M. JACOBS, *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation* (Carlton: Melbourne UP, 1998) 111–12, 116 as well as Knudsen, *The Circle and the Spiral* 269–312.

6 Gareth GRIFFITHS, »Representing Difference in Sam Watson's *The Kadaitcha Sung*,« *A Talent(ed) Digger: Creations, Cameos, and Essays in Honour of Anna Rutherford*, ed. Hena Maes-Jelinek, Gordon Collier, and Geoffrey V. Davis (Rodopi, 1996) 472.

Sung] unsettle the monologic discourse of white Australian historiography and narratives of nation«. ⁷ As the following analysis will show, however, the hybridity identified in the amalgamation of the profane and the sacred takes a turn for the darker and joins different aspects of white and black Australia in a Gothic critique of colonialism and its consequences.

While Mudrooroo went back to the earliest epics of European civilization, those of Homer, Sam Watson turns to the first sacred epics which form the basis of Western civilizing, i.e., missionary, efforts: reminiscent of the founding epics of Christianity, the Old and New Testament, in both language and storyline, the novel's prologue sets the mood for an epic to come. It outlines the creation of Australia, the origins of the Kadaitcha as representative of the gods on earth, the war waged between the two brothers Koobara and Booka because of one being preferred over the other, the banishment of Biamee from his garden, the destruction brought by whites, and finally a glimpse of hope and salvation. The well-educated Christian reader will no doubt have noticed the parallels between these elements and the stories handed down in the Bible, such as the creation of heaven, earth, and man, the story of Cain and his brother Abel as well as that of man being expelled from paradise, and finally the hope which lies in the promise of man's salvation through Christ. And like the redemption of mankind from sin is regarded as the major theme of the Bible, a regained Aboriginal identity through the figure of Tommy Gubba is at the centre of *The Kadaitcha Sung*. In the tradition of the grand epics of the world, the novel enacts the story of the inevitably ensuing final confrontation between the forces of good and evil, embodied in Tommy Gubba on the one hand and Booka Roth on the other. Their roles as saviour and fiend, respectively, are again revealed in epic vocabulary: »But Koobara's son had been born of a white woman, and Biamee promised his people that the Kadaitcha child would deliver them« (KS 4), whereas »[t]he Chief of the Native Mounted Police [Booka Roth] was the Prince of Darkness. Old Satan himself!« (KS 12). Tommy is first introduced together with Purnung, »the great dingo spirit of the dreaming time« (KS 5), on his way to an important ceremony at Uluru, where he is to meet his old spirit teachers and mentors as well as his ancestors and the great god Biamee for his final initiation into the myths of the Kadaitcha clan. Freed from temporal and local restraints – the only reference to time being the mention of a whites' camp nearby – this scene takes up the epic mode of the prologue and thereby follows the oral traditions of timelessness, universality, and simultaneity of dreaming time and present. Here, an Aboriginal perspective, and with it culture and society, constitutes the primary position of the narrative and as such features as centre of interest and importance, thus countering white marginalization. At the same time, the description of Uluru

7 Kate HALL, »Harmony and Discord: Evocations of Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Australian Magical Realism,« *Antithesis* 14 (2004): III.

as the sacred heart of indigenous Australia defies stereotypical pictures painted by whites of the »Red Centre« as an arid and hostile place for any human being. This focus on what seems to be a textbook-inspired version of maban reality, however, soon gives way to a Gothic rendering of colonial brutality which in different shapes returns again and again in the novel: in a clever twist of narrative mode, Watson uses the Gothic with which he describes seemingly contemporary actions of the whites to link past and present atrocities against Aboriginal people in an amalgamation of times. Through this device he comments not only on the genocidal history of white settlement in Australia, but also on its dire reverberations in present conditions for Aboriginal Australians. The most striking of these cases is the resurrection of the NMP from its grave: officially dissolved in 1900, the Native Mounted Police still controls the streets of contemporary Brisbane and the Queensland hinterland in *The Kadaitcha Sung*; not as an echo of times past some rednecks might endow with a nostalgic air but as an only too present-day threat and violent force (KS 40–1). With their fictitious black uniforms (KS 64, 94, 116, 122, 205) – the historic NMP was dressed in blue jackets with either blue or white trousers – Watson’s NMP even recalls Nazi Germany’s SS, and is thus placed alongside and, in its contemporary version, as worthy heir to the most notorious killing unit of World War II. It makes its first appearance in the guise of three white men camping at Uluru and passing their time with either indulging in sweet memories of »hunt[ing] friggin’ coons all over the country« (KS 11) or with abusing Aboriginal woman Worimi as, for example, »Floppy Tits« (KS 16). This combination of past massacres and everyday racism still only too real in today’s Australia blurs the boundaries of past and present, physical and psychological violence in gruesome Gothic fashion, thus creating »a world of shades« (KS 18). To vividly illustrate the horror of those past massacres, Watson uses standard props of Gothic frenzy in a cruel reversion of Gothic villain and victim:

Me and Ed and some of the other boys, we worked in Tassie and Victoria, right up through the friggin’ Territory. I seen days when we come back to camp soaked in blood, mate, drippin’ blood and brains and shit from our arseholes to our friggin’ eyebrows. (KS 11)

In order to demonstrate the amount of killings, these images are repeated again and again in gleeful manner:

I’d poisoned all their water holes and we kept them on the move so they couldn’t get any tucker. Then one morning we struck it lucky and we sprung their gins and piccaninnies. [...]

›So we were right amongst them and we was going like friggin' thrashing machines. Old Roth was too shitted off to try and save any of them. He just told us to knock the fuckin' lot of them!‹ He chuckled drily with the memory of the bloodletting. ›The gins were screaming and the friggin' piccaninnies were bellowing. There was blood and shit flying everywhere. I stuck to the kids like, because I was pretty buggered by then. I had a ball mate. Just grab one and head for a good size boulder. I'd swing 'em by the ankles and then swoosh 'em into the friggin' rock. Mate, you should have seen it. Those little bastards busted open like melons and I never even used a bullet.‹ (KS 15)

These videogame-influenced body-counts are then intensified by the stark contrast Worimi's recollection of her little daughter's death provides: »Her daughter had only just begun to walk on her chubby little legs when the migloo had smashed her head with a club. Her daughter's brains had splattered onto her breasts as she lay almost senseless beneath the heaving loins of the white rider« (KS 17). By denying those massacres any temporal structure, except for the fact that either perpetrators or victims are still alive and thus contemporaries, Watson once more draws attention to the ongoing discrimination against Aboriginal people, but on the other hand also affirms the counter-discursive power an Aboriginal view of history holds. Within this repulsively detailed reversion of Gothic standards, however, Watson disguises his criticism of yet another aspect of white colonization. Challenging worn-out perceptions of leading a people ostensibly trapped in pre-history to the comforts of European civilization, he characterizes the whites as reverting back to barbariously killing with their bare hands and to poisoning, a method usually used by weaker opponents facing an otherwise overpowering adversary instead of exhibiting advanced and superior, hence ›cultured‹, war-techniques.

Another issue high on the agenda of Sam Watson's political activity is that of Aboriginal deaths in custody, which in *The Kadaitcha Sung* is also broached in Gothic terms and once more delivered in a conflation of times: today's Bulley Macow is tried for murder in a Brisbane court before a jury, and shortly before the verdict is returned, Tommy, who acts as Aboriginal interpreter, visits Bulley in his cell for a last talk, as »[i]n Queensland a verdict of murder carried an automatic death penalty« (KS 62). Queensland, however, was the first state to abolish capital punishment as early as in 1922, nine years after the last execution had taken place.⁸

8 The federal government abolished the death penalty, which in Australia was always carried out by hanging, in its Death Penalty Abolition Act of 1973, and the last state to follow was New South Wales in 1985. The last execution, however, took place in 1967, other death penalties have since been commuted to life imprisonment. An overview of the dates of last executions and the abolition of capital punishment in the various states can be found at *Death Penalty in Australia*, New South Wales Council for Civil Liberties, 31 July 2007, 21 Nov. 2007 (http://www.nswccl.org.au/issues/death_penalty/australia.php).

Through this device, Watson makes the reader aware of how Australia's judicial system still is responsible for untenable ratios of Aboriginal deaths in custody today, just as the official death penalty was in times past. Thus he calls attention to the suffering of Aboriginal people in gaol and equates it with actual death. Insight into the devastating effects of imprisonment and constant abuse by the white guards and of how this kills not only Bulley's body but also his mind is given in his talk with Tommy, which gives evidence of a slow zombification of Bulley's Aboriginal identity: »[t]his place is no good, boy. I've been in a cave one time before, but I never felt like this. My body feels like it's being crushed« (KS 55), and Tommy notices that »[h]e had aged terribly since his arrest. His healthy skin had turned grey and he had been battered into shambling, slack-mouthed submission« (KS 57). The open land – even though that is also becoming »gradually imprison[ed ...] with [...] bands of steel and bitumen« (KS 18) – and its vitalizing powers, on the other hand, offer Bulley an almost pastoral retreat in contrast to the Gothic reality the whites subjected him to: »Every time them migloo punch me and kick me, when they try do drowned me and all that. I bin call to the land then, I bin call to my own special land and my own spirit push« (KS 58). As symbol of this mental flight and signifier of the maban reality of Aboriginal life acts the red kangaroo, Bulley's totem, which also serves as a means to criticize the way in which white custody wrecks Aboriginal people:⁹ »I feel him [the red kangaroo] inside me, he need that open country. He no good in a cage like this place, he need wide, open place« (KS 58–9). Here, the red kangaroo's comforting maban reality is set against a Gothicized rendering of white justice, a system alien to the land and not based on centuries-old tradition but on nothing more than »a piece of white paper« (KS 72).

Further references to the white legal system and the colonial brutality it brought to Aboriginal Australians can be found in references to the wood used within the Supreme Court and the judge's chamber. First, the interior of the court is covered with panel-work made of »rare pine milled on the northern tablelands [... which] had been the homes of wood spirits« (KS 61) – spirits now dispossessed through white greed. Justice Jones's chamber, then, contains a »huge desk that had been carved out of a heavy, dark timber« (KS 74), which sends out the feel of a »nameless tragedy« (KS 74) to Tommy and has its own Gothic tragedy to tell: having once belonged to a pioneer somewhere west of Cairns, it was made of a single tree which had been used as a burial tree by the local tribe whose spirits Tommy feels to be still entrapped within the desk (KS 75). In a gloomy repetition

9 A similar episode can be found in the short film »Black Man Down«, a story which is written by Sam Watson and introduced on the DVD's blurb as »[a] journey into the core of the Aboriginal psyche as a troubled young warrior, alone in a cell, is watched by a Dreamtime spirit when death comes calling«, cf. Sam WATSON, »Black Man Down,« *From Sand to Celluloid*, ed. Australian Film Commission, DVD (Film Australia, 1996).

of institutionally sanctified killing, this desk now serves a judge who had just sentenced another Aboriginal man to death and who shows no respect for the maban elements surrounding him but, in true colonialist stance, dismisses them as superstition (KS 75).

Alongside these obvious references to the brutality of white colonization and how that still resonates in contemporary Australia, a more subliminal use of Gothic traditions plays an equally disturbing role in *The Kadaitcha Sung*. As I will argue, this rather subtle variation of Gothic structures serves a twofold purpose in the novel, in which easily discernible elements of classic European Gothic tales meet with a colonially minded kind of Gothic familiar from movies concerned with the well-known trope of the Indian burial ground such as *Kadaicha* [sic] or *The Min-Min*.¹⁰ Whereas the first category amounts to a reversion of questionable Gothic dichotomies of self and other, the appropriation of the latter revels in commodified images of exotic sorcery only to distort their underlying assumptions and shortcomings to the extent of offering empowering devices for recovering Aboriginal identity and potential.

The figure of Booka Roth looms large in the first category of traditional European Gothic, which is aptly introduced with a Gothic thunderstorm (KS 40), as he is the key character in the enactment of typical Gothic scenarios of pursued maidens in distress and ruthless villains. Booka first appears in the novel's prologue as Koobara's rogue twin, »squat and ugly, possessed of a violence that was fearful to behold« (KS 2), and his »rage exploded into a terrible cataclysm of bloodletting« (KS 2). »[T]he evil one« (KS 3), as he is called, is described in truly Gothic terms during Tommy's initiation rites: »He is the best killer on the land, boy. [...] When Biamee created him he was like a perfect weapon. [...] We gave him too much of the killing blood, too much« (KS 37). This characterization as Gothic monster and transgressor of the boundaries between man and beast is pushed even further, as Booka shows traits of a vampire when he tastes blood (KS 203–4) and fears crossing running water (KS 45). To complete his ab-humanness, he is presented as a body-snatcher, having stolen the body of a white man actually called Roth (KS 52), a name which can be traced back to Walter Edmund Roth, a controversial anthropologist who held the infamous title of Protector of Aborigines in Queensland between 1898 and 1906. Through this devious ploy, the disputable work of early anthropologists as well as the institution of Protector of Aborigines are not only questioned, but transferred to the sphere of Gothic villainy.

10 The movies mentioned here deal with vengeful Aboriginal Australian forces unleashed by white intruders desecrating ancient burial grounds. This trope is a commonplace in many parodies and reworkings of *Poltergeist*, which itself explicitly distances the horrible events of the story from any Native American sources. The Gothic of these movies, however, stems from a purely Western understanding of a magic exoticism as an evil and vengeful commodity uncannily returning.

To further intensify Booka's Gothic portrayal and to criticize British imperial power, Watson creates a whole Gothic venue in the suburbs of Brisbane, using and Gothicizing colonial landmarks on the way. First, on Cribb Island there are the Native compound and the barracks of the NMP which »the blacks of Coontown called [...] the Pen. It was short for Pig-Pen, and could have referred to the officers as much as to conditions within its walls« (KS 70). The immediate surroundings of these colonial institutions, one run by the NMP, the other by Jesuit priests, then offer an altogether Gothic scenery:

›This place stinks!‹ Tommy wound up his window as the smell of mud and rotting vegetation filled the car.

Cribb Island was not a true island. It was more a hummock of stable ground within a sprawling network of mosquito-infested mud flats. Crabs and flathead abounded in the murky and constantly shifting waterways, while the twisted and mishappen trees were host to a multitude of birdlife. Deadly snakes and spiders patrolled the perimeters, while the mud flats were depthless beneath thin crusts of sun-hardened sillage. (KS 85–6)

Amidst this gruesome scenery, the history of the Native compound tells the story of how colonial rule was handed over from military to religious institutions, as the compound »was built over an old colonial fort« (KS 82) – a history also echoing Australia's official policies concerning the treatment of indigenous people from annihilation to assimilation. This old fort is endowed with all the traits which constitute a true Gothic mansion, complete with »two high gates that hung listlessly on rusted hinges« (KS 86) and a »network of underground passageways and abandoned storm water channels« (KS 82–3). Here, the colonial Gothic prop of an old fort defying its hostile and alien environment is taken up, yet not as signifier of the Gothic hero, but, in its unholy communion with Gothic Catholicism, as hallmark for colonial suppression.

An even more horrid Gothic quality is established in the description of Booka's very own headquarter, which is referred to as both »fortress« (KS 38, 164, 198, 253, 307) and »mansion« (KS 205, 307). Situated upon Mount Cootha and overlooking the city of Brisbane, this house is the janus-faced showpiece of Booka's depravity. While the part above the earth offers a recreational drink and discussion for Queensland's political leaders (KS 230–6), the basement is designed to make their abhorrent fantasies come true:

The Roth mansion was again hosting an evening of enjoyment for some of Queensland's most powerful men, and at that moment they were enjoying themselves in the

locked basement. Booka, who well knew of the twisted tastes of his betters, had provided them with three fine young gins. (KS 205)

In far less euphemistic terms, Booka's basement resembles a Gothic torture chamber:

The gin gave an agonised gasp and died [...].

There were two men with her, one white and the other black, and she was lying belly down across a narrow bed. Sambo's fingers were still buried in her throat. He had strangled her while holding her head between his thighs. [...] Mr Justice Jones was naked, lying on her back, his penis buried in her anus and his arms wrapped around her.

[...] With a series of short, angry thrusts, the white man climaxed. He closed his eyes as the waves of ecstasy washed over him.

›Whoo!‹ He rolled off the empty envelope of flesh [...]. ›She was a good one! The best I've had for a while...‹ [...]

Each of the basement rooms was set up in a similar fashion [...]. (KS 221–2)

When Tommy enters these »bowels of Roth's evil kingdom« (KS 236), he encounters a setting of »hostile magic« (KS 237) which is full of Gothic menace (KS 236–7). By joining both layers of respectful integrity on the one hand and moral corruption on the other in one building, Watson terrifyingly exposes the hypocrisy of Queensland's elite in power and puts their actions to trial.¹¹ In a similar vein, white notions of indigenous women as whores are turned upside down, as an Aboriginal woman is cast in the role of the Gothic maiden in distress. Her fate, however, differs widely from that of a Gothic heroine, and through this fundamental difference, Sam Watson comments on the very real and inescapable Gothic nature of Aboriginal life in Brisbane.

Other Gothic details of Booka's fortress include its direct access to the passageways found underneath the Jesuit mission and a magically concealed secret cave, whose entrance is hidden beneath a wall of blood, »one of the gateways to the underworld« (KS 38), as Tommy is told. The path leading to the underworld and thus to the heart of the Rainbow Serpent hidden there is guarded by a Bunyatt, a monster originally damned to the eternal pits by Biamee, but »sung [...] up from the bowels of the earth« (KS 38–9) by Booka. The lair of the Bunyatt »was a place of pure evil and [...] [t]he sandy floor was littered with rotting remains and the

11 As Sam Watson said in an interview, he wrote »the book [*The Kadaitcha Sung*] to hit back at Joh [Bjelke-Petersen]«, a Queensland premier who finally had to resign due to a corruption scandal involving the Queensland police; see Watson, »I say this to you« 593.

stench was overpowering« (KS 308). The description of the beast itself is equally appalling:

Nearly twice the height of a man and shaped not unlike a man, the Bunyatt was covered with a dull, greyish scaly skin and its huge body was topped by a flattened, misshapen head from which gleamed red eyes and a mouthful of terrible, yellowed teeth. (KS 308)

Here, the European-derived Gothic seemingly climaxes in a beast of »mindless malevolence« (KS 307), but in his critique of colonialism, Watson uses the Bunyatt as degenerate link to the strength of Aboriginal heritage and thereby introduces the second strand of Gothic, that which assigns Aboriginal power and magic to the realms of malicious exoticism in order to ostensibly satisfy the tastes of a white audience for »something very weird« (KS 20).

The mood for a tale of evil sorcery is already set in the first scenes of the novel, after Tommy and Purnung have reached Uluru, at whose base the three white members of the NMP have their camp: »The howl of the giant dingo shattered the air and rolled on beyond the camp. It came from the Rock and was a noise that neither white man had ever heard before. It was as though the very gates of hell had been torn apart« (KS 21). What, from a European point of view, starts as an uncanny story of magic revenge is then in the course of the novel transformed into a tale of Aboriginal power through the very same devices which, due to their creepy mysticism, should have stirred up cozy shivers. Throughout the novel, Tommy and his allies offer bits and pieces of their Gothic powers – yet not without pointing to the Aboriginal culture this equips with a newfound strength: in passing, Tommy causes a taxi to overturn, apparently killing the passenger who before has spitted at him and his Aboriginal companion (KS 82), and in another scene, Jonjurrie's »deadly spear, which had been moulded from the blood tree of the Dreaming Place« (KS 192), is mentioned, an overt Gothic reference in itself, but also a signifier of the resurgence of Aboriginal culture and heritage.

One of the most obvious elements of this kind of Gothic, however, is the titular ceremony, the singing of Booka Roth and his minion Sambo by Tommy. After Tommy has been raped by them, he extracts their bodily fluids and other specimen from his violated body and uses them in his ritual:

The young Kadaitcha had summoned a legion of elements to hear his demands for vengeance. [. . .]

Tommy began a low sing-song, his voice paying tribute to the old gods and the old ways. As his voice became harder, the names of Booka Roth and Sambo Bottle were uttered more and more. Before him, in the bark bowl, there were two separate piles

of pubic hair and other scrapings.
The time for payback was upon them. (KS 54)

In the course of *The Kadaitcha Sung*, the devastating effects this magic has on Sambo are built up to a fatal climax. At first, Sambo finds »a single red feather« (KS 67) as indicator that he had been sung and soon figures out »that his would not be a quick death« (KS 177) and that »he was doomed« (KS 178). The pains sweeping through his body increase gradually to the point when »[he] piss blood and [he] shitting blood too« (KS 238), until the spell finally kills Sambo (KS 286). A similar curse is placed on Sugar, a barmaid at the Palace Hotel, by her ex-boyfriend, causing her pains twice daily at high tide (KS 106, 108). She turns to Tommy for help, and his magic conquers that of »the Island witchdoctor« (KS 108). These two episodes seem to fulfil every prejudice against black magic ever summoned in Gothic fiction, yet they present the reader with important elements of Aboriginal culture: according to A.P. Elkin, any person may be able to perform some kind of magic, but the ability to heal is reserved for true medicine men, whose »life is one of self-discipline, preceded by training, of social responsibility, and of contact with powerful forces or spiritual beings«¹² – qualities matching Tommy Gubba. Through his character, the clear line dividing good and bad magic central to white dichotomies is blurred and his magic is given the important status it holds within Aboriginal society. Another, although seemingly minor, reference to what at first European sight seems to be a picture-perfect type of a commodified tribal magic can be found in the device of the moogi stone: called »death stone« (KS 36) and attributed with a malevolence of its own (KS 97), it is nevertheless the major weapon of every Kadaitcha (KS 220, 250) and as such a powerful source of Aboriginal identity. As Elkin points out, these »magical substances, such as quartz, shells, stones, bones, and snakes [...] are to him [the true medicine man] sources of power not of death«,¹³ a conclusion which also resonates in *The Kadaitcha Sung*, as »the sacred strengths of the moogi stone« (KS 151) renew Tommy's powers. Here, instead of figuring as a tool to other Aboriginal tradition and heritage, as magic does in movies such as *Kadaicha*,¹⁴ its use distorts anticipated casts of hero and villain and thus both reveals their dichotomous flaws and emphasizes the potency Aboriginal identity carries.

The full extent of this transformation of thwarted expectations can be found in the ritual punishment of Tea-Pot, in which the atmosphere is set by Tommy's appearance as Gothic villain par excellence: »Tommy waved his fingers underneath

12 A.P. ELKIN, *Aboriginal Men of High Degree: Initiation and Sorcery in the World's Oldest Tradition*, 1945, 2nd ed. (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 1994) 15.

13 Elkin 31.

14 This Australian movie has tellingly been renamed *Stones of Death* for the US-American market, as a group of teenagers who live in an apartment block built on a sacred site one by one falls victim to the powers of magic crystals and their deadly curse.

his jaw and a red glow lit his face. [...] Tommy's voice was dead, lacking all human quality. His eyes were black scars, empty of life« (KS 117). Yet through his appearance as fully-initiated Kadaitcha, he also re-installs a tribal identity in Tea-Pot: »Clean yourself, Bunda of the Gullilee!« [...] No one had used his tribal name in years. [...] They were talking now in the old tongue« (KS 118–9). In another, this time spatial, intermingling, where an inner-city Brisbane warehouse transforms into »the green and brown of a small [Bora] ring« (KS 120), Aboriginal justice is about to be done, and the setting is thoroughly Gothic:

Black night was all around him and he was alone. [...] Beyond the boundary of the circle there was nothing. The stones that made up the sacred circle stood out like teeth. A dreadful keening reached up from deep below and smacked at his eardrums. There was chanting all around him and he was hammered to the ground by a swirling mass of spirits. The phantom horde swooped upon him, flailing at him with skeletal hands that tore at his hair and his eyes. (KS 119–20)

This Gothicized fantastic setting within the Bora ring, however, sharply contrasts with the equally Gothic reality of the Gullilee people, who »had lived in a bountiful land of grass plains [and] had never known hunger or want« (KS 121) – a true pastoral idyll which had then been ravaged by Bunda's urge for revenge:

Bunda joined with the black-garbed riders [the NMP], and he learned to kill. [...] Then there came the day when Bunda returned to his own land, leading the crack troops of the NMP.

The Gullilee were obliterated in a single day. Not one man, woman or child was allowed to live and after the orgy of blood lust and rape their bodies and the camp were put to the torch. (KS 122)

In this scene, two of the purposes the novel uses the Gothic for interact: to illustrate white atrocities against Aboriginal people on the one hand and to empower Aboriginal identity through turning European preconceptions upside down on the other. Thus the false apprehensions colonial Gothic literature subjected Aboriginal people to are challenged and exposed, whereas at the same time the possibilities a transformation of this discourse offers them is highlighted, a lesson also visualized in *The Kadaitcha Sung*: »He [Bunda] would scream for a long time yet and beg for oblivion. But the people of the now-extinct Gullilee blood had learned much from their migloo tormentors and would see to it that Bunda remained conscious until the end of eternity...« (KS 127).

Another clash of classical European and an Aboriginalized Gothic is enacted on a cemetery which is pictured with well-known Gothic vocabulary:

There was still no moon and in the cemetery the stars gave only a dull, almost anaemic light to the terraced rows of tombstones.

Mary led Tommy in through a side gate that was hidden in the dark folds of a hedge. The rusted hinges groaned tiredly and the dead noted their trespass but allowed them passage. [...]

His [Tommy's] eyes pierced the brooding gloom. (KS 161)

What in traditional Gothic literature is used to invoke terror and fear through its sublimity, however, in *The Kadaitcha Sung* acts as a means of rest and regeneration for Tommy: »For some reason beyond his understanding, Tommy always felt quite comfortable in the cemetery« (KS 161). Still, the connection of Tommy and the Gothic cemetery of European origin has its ruptures, as the underworld of Mary's dead mother, who only appears as »shade« and »raging spirit« (KS 164) whose »unfriendly fingers reach out and play with [Tommy's] mind« (KS 163), is set off against his living Dreaming companions who can transgress the boundaries of both worlds. Here, those fragile concepts of the Gothic ›Other‹ are once more twisted to mere shadows of their former ›Selves‹. Apart from such general Gothic references, this confrontation also takes up the issue of white anthropological work in Gothicized complexity: while still alive, Mary's mother

stank of black blood and black suffering ... not of the land of Uluru, but of the shadowed land that lay across the water. [...] The man [Mary's father] and his wife were amateur anthropologists who excavated and researched a series of ancient sites on the lands of the Kikuyu people. (KS 162)

Not only does this encounter exhibit the same traits familiar from those stories which commodify Aboriginal culture for the sake of Gothic shivers when the anthropologist calls Tommy »sorcerer« (KS 165), but it also establishes a link to other peoples which have suffered from white colonialism. It is not simply a story lamenting the fall of black cultures, though, but takes the inevitable as a channel to express their reclaimed identity: the sacred stone Mary's parents stole in their violation of the African tomb together with the spell it holds is the weapon Tommy needs to defeat the Bunyatt (KS 165). The fact that the »earth gods« (KS 165) deliberately chose to »transfer [...] the mystery to them [Mary's parents] in a desperate attempt to maintain its [the spell's] integrity« (KS 165) then shows the agency black society still holds despite white suppression. Through this tool, Sam Watson once more opposes white marginalization of black culture in a claim for self-determination.

References to the significance of enacting Aboriginal culture as a means of power and, vice versa, the loss of their cultural heritage as a sign of failure on the part

of Australian indigenous peoples can be found in several episodes of the novel. Especially the urban reality of black people in Brisbane is set against their tribal identity, as for example in the episode of the two young men thoughtlessly dancing secret initiation dances in a pub (KS 103), and later when Tommy walks through Coontown and

[w]ords of many ancient dialects were thrown drunkenly at him. Blurred faces dulled by cheap wine and starvation passed by in a stream and Tommy's soul became heavy with despair. He was reaching a point from which he would finally confront the white man's total conquest. (KS 109)

Yet as the story tells, this conquest must be blamed on the lethargy of the Aboriginal people themselves and on their gods, as the warriors' »skills in the arts of war had been dulled by years of peace« (KS 32) and the gods »are locked out of this world through their own failure« (KS 109).¹⁵ In the course of events which take place between the coming of the whites and Tommy's birth in yet another fusion of times, however, Biamee was able to »re-establish a fragile link with them [his faithful]« (KS 3), an achievement symbolizing the hope which lies in a return to old traditions and culture as a way to overcome suppression and marginalization. Additionally, »[m]ost of the sacred sites had been saved« (KS 34) and never lost their sacred powers (KS 154), waiting to be rediscovered as a source of life. A comparison between the characters of Tommy Gubba and Booka Roth then shows the importance a resurgence of Aboriginal heritage carries in the confrontation of good and bad: whereas Tommy's totem, Tapu the snake (KS 28), accompanies him through the whole novel in visual form – a snake drawn on the pages of the book indicates a change of scenes – as a sign of his energy, Booka is described as weak, for »[t]he further he drifts from the mysteries of the land, the faster he loses his strength« (KS 37) – and with it his chances to win the final battle: despite his capacity as Gothic villain of European colouring, who as a rule is overcome by his light-bearing heroic »self, Booka is defeated by an Aboriginal Gothic character who draws his power from indigenous rituals and legacies exemplified in temporal aspects such as the ever-returning creation myth in writing, visual form, and experience (KS 1–4, 23, and 31–5) as well as in spatial elements such as bora rings, tunnels, or holes. Particularly the latter have been discerned as strong factors of a reinvigorated Aboriginal identity,¹⁶ and at the same time, they are all-too familiar

15 As Sam Watson says in an interview, »our sacred duty was to defend our land and we failed«, Watson, »I say this to you« 596.

16 Cf. Knudsen, *The Circle and the Spiral* 269–312 and Lydia WEVERS, »Globalising Indigenes: Postcolonial Fiction from Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific,« *JASAL* 5 (2006): 125–6.

tropes of traditional Gothic fiction – once again transformed into instruments of indigenous defiance and agency:

A dull glow seemed to dance off the reddish walls and the air was heavy. [...] From deep within the earth there came a low humming. To Tommy's ears and to his spirit within, the sound seemed to be the call of a million lost souls and he stepped forward carefully. The descent was steep and the floor was treacherous [...]. This was the passage of life that lay between the world of men and the Dreaming Time. It would lead him down to the very belly of the Rainbow Serpent [...]. [...] Behind him the sacred passage closed up as he passed. There was no turning back. (KS 24)

Yet rather than facing unspeakable horrors, Tommy is initiated into the most ancient and sacred ceremonies of his people and »will walk with the gods« (KS 26). Once initiated and gone across, »he was not a living being anymore« (KS 31), adding another Gothic quality to this snake-eyed character of revenge and payback (KS 28).

What begins and ends as an Aboriginal epic of biblical dimensions – the Aboriginal people of Fingal leaving the mission »towards their tribal lands« (KS 312) and a pregnant Jelda travelling on horseback is very reminiscent of biblical exoduses – then is transformed into a thoroughly Gothic tale of revenge and colonial brutality. The Gothic within the novel, however, is not only used to vividly illustrate colonial cruelty and violence through the ages from first contacts to contemporary Queensland, but also to restore a forgotten Aboriginal identity. Through the use of familiar Gothic features in key positions of the text, Sam Watson creates a Gothic ambiguity which on the one hand continues traditional notions of self and other in reversed form, yet on the other establishes an Aboriginal Gothic defiant of stereotyped expectations of exotic sorcery. In its confident rendering of Gothic elements and traits as empowering and essentially sacred, *The Kadaitcha Sung* ultimately transforms what was supposed to be a silencing and oppressing discourse into an indigenous discourse of identity and regained self-determination, thus unearthing the ideological atrociousness of colonialism and the dire consequences it brought to Aboriginal people in truly Gothic fashion.

3. Un-Singing Historiography: Kim Scott's *Benang*

A similar ambiguity of Gothic understandings of life, death, and beyond, which was central to the character of Tommy Gubba in *The Kadaitcha Sung*, also lies at the titular heart of Kim Scott's *Benang: From the Heart* of 1999.¹ While recovering from a near-fatal car accident, the young part-Aboriginal narrator Harley discovers the written traces of his family lineage in the house of his Scottish grandfather, Ern(est) Solomon Scat. To his horror, Harley finds out he is »the first white man born« (B 10), the dubiously successful result of his grandfather's cruel eugenic projects. In an attempt to »sabotage [his] grandfather's social experiment« (B 449), Harley then sets out to re-store the forgotten stories of his black family – of Fanny, Sandy One and Two Mason, of Harriette, Dinah, Kathleen, Topsy, and Tommy – with the help of his uncles Will and Jack: in a journey following »traditional runs« (B 165) across the Gothic territories of twentieth-century white Australia, Harley pieces the shattered fragments left of his Nyoongar heritage together in order to join the two halves of his self. Exemplified in the image of Harley hovering in the air, having »a propensity for elevation« (B 12; emphasis in the original), *Benang* draws the picture of an uprooted personality caught between the records of white historiography and the oral memory of his black past. Instead of presenting the story of Harley's family in the linear way of »sharply ruled diagrams« (B 27), the story itself refuses to play by the rules of the novel in a »systematic disrespect for chronology«² and showcases itself in circular and postmodern fashions. The use of official documents, files, letters, extracts of scientific essays, or newspaper articles as integral parts of the novel is therefore not at all a means to establish a historical framework, but rather a means to include the very concept of white historiography and its instruments into the narration in a critique of its exclusive view on history. This practice of entwining semi-fictional characters and story with documentary data, termed »metahistoriographic fictional work« by Pablo Armellino,³ has entered the academic field as ficto-criticism. According to Helen Flavell, ficto-criticism describes »generically transgressive writing, which blurs the defining lines between fiction/creative writing and critical/theoretical texts«,⁴ thus defying standard generic conventions. Through its position in-between, she argues, *Benang* destabilizes

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- 1 All quotations from and comments on *Benang: From the Heart* refer to Kim SCOTT, *Benang: From the Heart* (North Freemantle: Freemantle Arts Centre P, 1999); this edition is referred to in the text as (B p).
 - 2 Pablo ARMELLINO, »Australia Re-Mapped and Con-Texted in Kim Scott's *Benang*,« *The Pain of Unbelonging: Alienation and Identity in Australasian Literature*, ed. Sheila Collingwood-Whittick, CrossCultures 91 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007) 26.
 - 3 Armellino 15.
 - 4 Helen FLAVELL, »Writing-Between: Australian and Canadian Ficto-Criticism,« diss., Murdoch U, 2004, 3.

notions of genre and discourse by »creatively imagin[ing] another space« instead of simply opposing the racism it criticizes.⁵ The novel's occupation with colonial records and writing and their transformation into an indigenous discourse is also central to a range of other analyses, all of which identify a certain use of these records against themselves,⁶ defining this strategy alternatively as interruption,⁷ disturbance,⁸ or deconstruction and deviation.⁹ Other issues looming large in discussions of *Benang* include magic realist/maban elements,¹⁰ uncertain identity,¹¹ monstrous, disease-ridden bodies¹² as well as violence, brutalities, and dark secrets.¹³ Despite this repertoire of Gothic subjects and several explicit references to a bloody Gothic scenery, as for example a tree steeped in blood (cf. B 187) or »a salty pool the colour of blood [filled with things which] look like thin limbs« (B 477–8), no critic has so far examined the novel's relation to and its use of the Gothic tradition. This is all the more amazing as already the picture on the book's front cover invites a Gothic reading:

5 Flavell 181.

6 Cf. John FIELDER, »Country and Connections: An Overview of the Writing of Kim Scott,« *Altitude* 6 (2005) (<http://www.api-network.com/cgi-bin/altitude21c/fly?page=Issue6&n=1>) 15.

7 Cf. Madeleine BYRNE, »How Australian is it? (Reading *Benang*)«, *Antipodes* 15.2 (2001): 113.

8 Cf. Lisa SLATER, »Kim Scott's *Benang*: An Ethics of Uncertainty,« *JASAL* 4 (2005): 148.

9 Cf. Lisa SLATER, »Making Strange Men: Resistance and Reconciliation in Kim Scott's *Benang*,« *Resistance and Reconciliation: Writing in the Commonwealth*, ed. Bruce Bennett et al. (Canberra: ACLALS, 2003) 358, 369.

10 Cf. Fielder 17 and Lisa SLATER, »*Benang*, this »Most Local of Histories: Annexing Colonial Records into a World without End,« *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 41.1 (2006): 65.

11 Cf. Julie GOODSPEED-CHADWICK, »Postcolonial responses to White Australia: Traumatic Representations of Persons of Native and Mixed Blood in Australian Contemporary Literature (especially Women's Writing),« *Atlantic Literary Review* 4.4 (2003): 210, Slater, »Making Strange Men« 358, and Slater, »Ethics of Uncertainty« 147–58.

12 Cf. Lisa SLATER, »Kim Scott's *Benang*: Monstrous (Textual) Bodies,« *Southerly* 65.1 (2005): 63–73.

13 Cf. Byrne III, Slater, »Ethics of Uncertainty« 148, Flavell 179, 181, and Tony BIRCH, »»The First White Man Born«: Contesting the »Stolen Generations« Narrative in Australia,« *Imagining Australia: Literature and Culture in the New New World*, ed. Judith Ryan and Chris Wallace-Crabbe (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2004) 152.

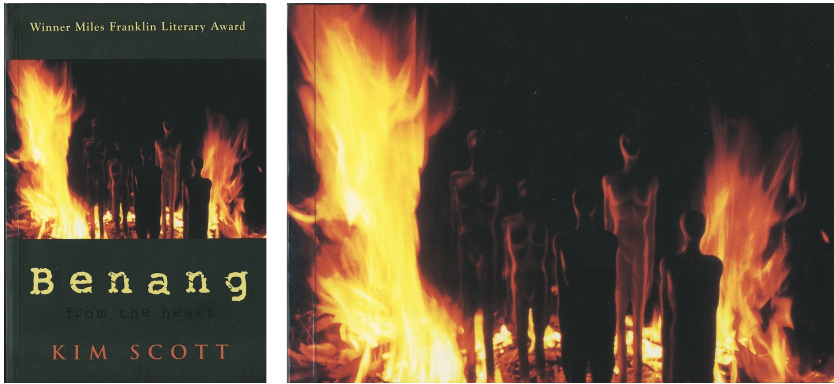


Figure 1: Zombified shadowy figures standing surrounded by blazing flames, as if to be burned at the stake, are set against a pitch-black background.

This picture, taken from an installation by Terrence Shiosaki tellingly entitled »European Subjugation«, relates colonization to the Gothic – a demonic covenant which, as my thesis will show, Kim Scott in his novel destroys by subverting its discursive binaries and ideological flaws and transforming them into powerful strategies of reclaiming indigenous identity.

The very first lines of the novel, a quotation from the Seaman Aboriginal Land Inquiry of 1984, further emphasize the need for a Gothic understanding of *Benang*:

Many Nyungars today speak with deep feeling about this wild, windswept country. They tell stories about the old folk they lost in the massacre and recall how their mothers warned them to stay out of that area. [...] The whole region has bad associations and an *unwelcoming aura for them*. *It is a place for ghosts, not for living people.* (B 5; emphasis mine)

Adding the novel's frantic occupation with racist discourses of breeding, starting with a newspaper article of the *West Australian* of 22 July 1933 headed »The Half-caste: Means of Disappearance« (B 5), and taking into account H.L. Malchow's considerations on the menacing Gothic nature of the half-breed,¹⁴ it is hardly possible to ignore the Gothic as an important category for analysing *Benang: From the Heart*, as this thesis will demonstrate.

14 Cf. Howard L. MALCHOW, »The Half-Breed as Gothic Unnatural,« *The Victorians and Race*, ed. Shearer West, Nineteenth Century Series (Aldershot: Scolar P, 1996) 101–11, an article which in an extended version has also been published in Howard L. MALCHOW, *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996) 167–237.

In old-fashioned Gothic style, the story of *Benang* is set in motion with the discovery of documents, paralleling the found manuscript of early Gothic novels. Yet already at this stage, the rules of Gothic fiction are transgressed in an act of resistance: whereas in traditional Gothic literature manuscripts embody the reliability of the written word and give credibility to the Gothic hero,¹⁵ in contrast to the orality reserved for the villainous other, this trait is played off against itself in *Benang*, where the whiteness of paper is spurned and Aboriginal identity is regained. Accordingly, one of the major themes of the novel is the problematic role historic records played in silencing Aboriginal voices in a Gothic incarceration of the mind, introduced when Harley first comes across his grandfather's papers and finds himself

hovering over sets of documents, things filed in plastic envelopes in rumbling drawers and snapping files. Certificates of birth, death, marriage; newspaper clippings, police reports; letters (personal; from this or that historical society); parish records; cemetery listings; books; photographs. . . . (B 25)

Here, both the accurate scheme behind Ern's eugenic endeavours and the reliance of Western historiography on what is »paper proof« (B 46) reveal their cold-blooded character. Yet except for those interspersed documents left to speak for themselves, the written word is hardly ever referred to explicitly in the text and is instead opposed as a means of disabling black agency: »We got caught that way, on paper« (B 426). This rejection, and literal dis-ordering, of the concept of literacy and its claims to superiority is most obviously demonstrated by Harley raging among the neatly kept files of his grandfather, »pluck[ing] papers from drawers, thr[owing] them, let[ting] them fall [...] ma[king] books fly, index cards panic and flee« (B 27) – a liberation which marks the beginning of his own enterprise of »[s]peaking from the heart« (B 495). The denial of the found-manuscript type of storyline, however, is not a denial of the Gothic itself, but rather of its rigid ideological dichotomies, hence the return to orality must be seen as a means to overcome both white historiography and the legacies of colonial Gothic fiction in a transformative defiance.

Although the Gothic in its traditional guise is discarded, it nevertheless returns in an indigenized shape to indict colonial discourses by skilfully appropriating and vivisectioning its binaries, ripping the shining surface of white Australia's patronizing benevolence apart and assembling its broken parts anew in Aboriginal fashion.

15 See for example Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, which consists entirely of written documents, a fact which stresses their importance as a means of defeating the count: »What a good thing Mrs Harker put my cylinders into type! We never could have found the dates [of Dracula appearing at Carfax] otherwise...« (D 240).

The gaps created by a white interpretation of history are filled with indigenous content – Harley’s black family and their lives: »I thought of all those the papers named, and of how little the ink could tell« (B 347). This Nyoongar family which is inadequately portrayed in the files meticulously documenting Ern’s eugenic efforts then takes shape through the stories shared between Harley and his uncles Will and Jack at the campfires, a technique which once more contrasts written and oral ways of preserving culture. The Gothic grip literacy has on orality, concealing and silencing the spoken word, is made apparent in the almost light-hearted tone of historic reports, whose Gothic character is unmasked in an act of re-telling by Harley:

They crept to the natives [sic] camp deep in the night, gently raised their weapons and fired an earth-shattering volley over the heads of the sleeping natives. [...] Thus all attempts at uprising were frustrated in such a way as to leave no bitterness but just a quiet sense of mastery on the part of the white man, and a good lesson to the primitive mind. (B 183–4; emphasis in the original)

In Harley’s words, however, this ›expedition‹ sounds less genial – and rather unsuccessful, as Aboriginal voices managed to survive:

Flame and explosion leapt from beyond the outstretched arms of a man beside him [Sandy I]. A Winchester, almost the very latest thing. The man bent over bodies, lunging and hacking, faceless in the grim darkness.

›They understand this.« [...]]

The shadow of that tree [where the bodies were hung] reaches toward us [those Nyoongars living today] still. Its stain grows larger, darker; is deep in the earth.

Even in darkness, and after, and even when it no longer stains the crusty skin, blood continues to seep down and down to water below. The paths we took have disappeared and been sealed, and yet at the very least we still skim, humming, along the scar tissue. (B 186–7)

By offering a bloody counter-narrative to officially approved historiography, Kim Scott skins the latter of its euphemism and thus intensifies the Gothic of both the horrid realities still echoing in contemporary Australia as well as of the very act of concealing them.

In this passage, the topos of white brutality already familiar from Mudrooroo’s and Sam Watson’s works is raised, one of the transformative devices used in *Benang* to Gothicize the white invaders who »brought death with them« (B 493). It is mainly with reference to massacres that the narrative’s vocabulary parallels the actions’ bloodiness, thereby emphasizing their cruelty unspeakable with Aboriginal

words. Here, the language loses its usual bitter detachedness and calmly details the atrocities of white invasion, copying the everyday casualty of white accounts:

Let us disregard those shot, brain-bashed, stolen. Forget those poisoned, those chained and force-fed with salt until they led the way to water.

Forget whalers, sealers, explorers, assorted adventurers.

Fanny Benang Mason saw her people fall; saw them trembling, nervous, darting glances all about them. Some became swollen, felt themselves burning up. Their skin – too hot to touch – erupted in various forms of sores. People itched, and scratched the skin away, and writhed on the ground with their arses raw from so much shitting, until eventually even that ceased and there was only an ooze of mucus and blood. (B 493–4)

Apart from the actual horrors of those massacres, it is the official bureaucratic approval which renders those killings even ghastlier, as »[t]hey [the whites] got a permit,« I [Harley] said. »From the police. To kill.« I had seen a reference to police permission for a revenge killing among my grandfather's papers. »Eighteen, they were allowed to kill eighteen.« (B 175). Yet it is not only the fact that the life of one white man, for whose death retaliation was granted, is *ex officio* measured against the lives of eighteen Aboriginal people which appals, but again rather that which is blotted out in official historiography, the Aboriginal perspective: »Uncle Jack snorted. »More than that, they killed just about everyone around here. Most Nyoongars still won't come here, just wind up the windows and drive right through Gebalup.« (B 175). Gebalup itself, it seems, enacts the very patterns Maria Tumarkin identifies as double-layered traumascapes:¹⁶ on the surface, there are the remnants of a »town [...] about to dissolve, to sink back into the sand« (B 117), a failed pioneer experiment, whereas beneath its foundations black memories of massacres are concealed, thus raising a monument to colonial explorers and pioneers by silencing and covering up the ground.

On a less obviously brutal but still grimly petrifying level, the story focuses on concepts of assimilation and eugenics, on »uplift[ing] and elevat[ing] these people to our own plane« (B 11). Those passages telling of how the whites tried to put their plans into action highlight the Gothic nature of objectifying Aboriginal people, recalling the cruel experiments of Doctor Moreau as well as Australian cattle stations: »You were driven to the settlement like animals, really, but of course it was not for slaughtering. For training? Yes, perhaps. Certainly it was for breeding, according to the strict principles of animal husbandry« (B 91). As a comparison with the

16 Cf. Maria M. TUMARKIN, »Secret Life of Wounded Spaces: Traumascapes in the [sic] Contemporary Australia,« diss., U of Melbourne, 2002, 38–9.

following extract of A.O. Neville's papers shows, the style of official correspondence is caustically imitated to expose its cold-hearted ruthlessness:

Our policy is to send them out into the white community, and if the girl comes back pregnant our rule is to keep her for two years. The child is then taken away from the mother and sometimes never sees her again. Thus these children grow up as whites, knowing nothing of their environment. At the expiration of the period of two years the mother goes back into service. So that it really doesn't matter if she has half a dozen children. (B 157)

Embodied in Ernest Solomon Scat, fictional cousin of A.O. Neville and executor of his eugenic ideas, the individual exercise of such objectification seems even more gruesome. »Never one to lose an opportunity« (B 132), Ern creates a Gothic reality by supplanting his first wife Kathleen, who »had changed, and not to Ern's taste« (B 133), with the younger Topsy, at first by letting her pass as Kathleen (cf. B 133) and soon afterwards by simply calling her his wife (cf. B 134).

Kim Scott, however, does not content himself with actual death and physical violence, but pushes the boundaries of Gothic transgression even further when he portrays white assimilation policies as murder: »It's another sort of murdering. What the law was doing. And helping people do. Killing Nyoongars really, making 'em white, making 'em hate 'emselves and pretend they're something else, keeping 'em apart« (B 337–8). In order to accurately mimic the slow and creeping nature of this cultural death, the text is interspersed with subtle references to »this kind of death« (B 93) and to being »only partially alive« (B 395) or »not quite dead« (B 123). What in these passages is pictured on a rather generalized and symbolic level acquires a new disturbing quality when it again comes to Ern's ingeniousness on the personal level of Harley's black family. Taking the idea of »making 'em white« (B 338) literally in truly Gothic fashion, Ern constantly exposes Topsy to baths of bleach (cf. B 158, 372), a procedure which finally leads to her death (cf. B 373). Legally bleaching his family then seemingly culminates in the creation of Harley, the first white man born, but Harley's own assessment of his status shows how that really meant being dead from the moment of his birth: »At so many funerals I have felt lonely, that it was I who had already been dead longest, that I myself represented the final killing off; the genocide thing, you know« (B 446). The key provided by the narrative to overcome this cultural death then reverses the rules of Gothic identity as well as Malchow's classification of the hybrid as vampire-like Gothic type:¹⁷ »[...] I realized that I had come back from the dead, was one of those few. I may well be djanak, or djangha [...]« (B 163). Harley resurrects the Nyoongar part of himself

17 Cf. Malchow, »The Half-Breed« 103.

and rises from the dead – the Gothic *uber*-topos par excellence. Yet by letting Harley refer to himself with Nyoongar words, the text offers a transformative reading of the Gothic quality of this process, as an audience with a European background is not able to discern whether a djanak/djangha corresponds to the beastly monster – or the brave hu-man. Hence the binaries of life and death essential to the European Gothic tradition are exposed to a transformative act of disturbing and reversing their connotations in Harley's identity, a device further developed in the Nyoongar story of the curlew, which also played an important part in Mudrooroo's transformation of the Gothic.¹⁸

Right at the beginning of the narrative, the curlew's prominence within Nyoongar culture as »[d]eath bird« (B 8) is pointed out, and its cry is described varyingly as »haunting« (B 282, 382) or »chill« (B 452), as a cry »which has made so many shiver, and think of death« (B 454). Despite this traditional role, the death associated with the curlew's cry in *Benang* is not of a well-known physical kind, but rather the cultural genocide of assimilation. As Harriette tells, »[t]hey're crying for some silly people not walking properly; not walking proud. They feel sorry for them – they always walk so nice and proud themselves« (B 283). This attribution of cultural death to the curlew's cry in Aboriginal perspectives reaches a further and rather »terrifying« (B 454) level in Harley's performances, where it is no longer the bird but Harley who emanates its cry, making people feel »uncomfortable« (B 5, 87, 454, 494) about his status between white and black heritage and cultures. Here, Aboriginal content permeates and indigenizes the conventions of European Gothic and their inflexible boundaries and unsettles familiar perceptions of good and evil. Although the curlew remains a harbinger of death and as such seems an apt ingredient to the dark side of a white Gothic tale, it nevertheless also represents the cultural pride of the Nyoongar people. The figure of this bird hence serves a two-fold purpose, at once countering the deathly failings of European discourses and transforming Gothic fiction in its Western appearance into a powerful discourse of affirmed indigenous identity.

The importance of various birds to Aboriginal identity is further emphasized in Harley's encounters with them. First, there is the episode of his returning from the dead, when he »remember[s] the call of quails in the dune grasses, and [thinks] of curlews crying from moonlit chalky paths, and the footprints such a bird would leave.« (B 163). Bringing to mind Louis's awakening to the keen senses of a vampire in Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*,¹⁹ Harley's return from the dead follows stock Gothic patterns and at the same time marks his death to the white world as an initiation into the essence of his Nyoongar heritage. Instead of acquiring keen sensory perceptions, Harley's cultural senses are refined through his careful

18 See p. 76.

19 Cf. Anne RICE, *Interview with the Vampire*, 1976 (London: Warner Books, 1996) 24–5.

observation of the birds (cf. *B* 453–3), as Jack tells him: »Those birds. That was the spirit in the land talking to you. Birds, animals, anything can do it. That is what Aboriginal people see.« (*B* 455) – birds Harley has hitherto ignored even though each time he went to Gebalup they »landed in [his] path, and flapped away at the last moment« (*B* 43).

Apart from such a discursive dimension of Aboriginal culture in the narrative, there is also a spatial dimension to it, symbolized by Harley floating in the air and barely touching the ground. Being literally up-rooted from the land of his ancestors, a trait Harley shares with his uncle Will (cf. *B* 147), he needs to be introduced into indigenous culture to become grounded again. The task of bringing Harley down to earth is accomplished by his uncles Jack and Will, who take him across his traditional country to those places important to his black family's history. Along the way, they tell the stories of the Benang family obliterated in Ern's historiographic attempts in an enactment of what Stephen Muecke theorizes as nomadology.²⁰ It is the land which stores the forgotten stories written on the country itself, waiting for a person to interpret the stored texts and thereby to Aboriginally read that country. The land is once again sung by Jack and Will and emerges through the narratives told at the campfire and performed by Harley as the three of them move along its ancient tracks: »we talked all the way west, then all the way east« (*B* 187). Kim Scott here draws on essential elements of Aboriginal culture, the link between land, songs, and practices of history in order to distinguish the black way of singing the past from written white historiography, finally letting Harley confess that »it is far, far easier for me to sing than write« (*B* 8). On the other hand, this link also implies a white inability to orality, which is vividly demonstrated in the disease-ridden organs and articulations of the white men in *Benang*. Chronologically first, there are Daniel Coolmann, who would fall to foul pieces were it not for his clothes and who had lost his upper lip to cancer which had left him with a speech defect (cf. *B* 55–57, 338) as well as Sandy I Mason, who lived with a »cancerous tongue« (*B* 292), a signifier of his failure to stand and speak up for his black family. Then there is Ern, who, due to his suffering a stroke (cf. *B* 29), is not able to produce coherent speech (cf. *B* 142), which sets him in sharp contrast to uncle Jack Chatalong (cf. *B* 59–60). This pathologic rendering of white characters at once highlights the privilege orality holds in the story and further Gothicizes everything white within the story.

In a complex structure of Gothic orality, Kim Scott makes use of certain compositional methods peculiar to oral thinking. Composed as a thrice-told tale, one sung for Harley's audiences around the campfires, one told Harley by his uncles Jack and Will, and one penned down for the individual reader, the storycircle of *Benang* is established in the form of an interactive performance (cf. *B* 7–8) and ar-

20 Cf. Krim BENTERRAK, Stephen MUECKE, and Paddy ROE, *Reading the Country: Introduction to Nomadology*, 1984 (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1996) 20.

ranged episodically around recurring characters. Thus *Benang* conforms to certain mnemonic patterns such as repetitions, formulaic expressions, or stock settings Walter Ong has discerned as key criteria for oral thinking and remembering to work effectively.²¹ As Ong argues, the narratives of orality are publicly remembered themes and formulas, »the result of interaction between the singer, the present audience, and the singer's memories of songs sung.«²² Yet instead of serving mnemonic purposes, the themes and formulas reiterated in *Benang* rather emphasize the disturbing alliance whiteness enters into with the Gothic as if seen through a magnifying glass. Kim Scott's use of the colour white itself in particular serves to illustrate its own Gothic essence in oral fashion. Right from the beginning, the colour white is identified as a colour of death and disease (cf. *B* 150) in an analogy for white murder of Aboriginal people:

On either side of us trees, dying, turning white. Once there were many, many more of them, and they were alive, and they drank the rain and returned it to the sky. Now their roots shrivelled in salt water and – thus betrayed – they raised bare and brittle limbs to the sky. (*B* 34)

The tree as metaphor for Aboriginal people, identity, culture, and heritage is taken up again when Ern in writing orders Harley to destroy the old gum tree in front of their house, to »[c]ut down the tree. Burn it, dig out its roots. He might also have written: *Displace, disperse, dismiss...* My friends, you recognise the language« (*B* 107, emphasis in the original). Similarly, the very rootlessness Harley suffers from due to his white upbringing is explained in arboreal terms when Harley calls on his readers to »[l]ook at us, stuck out in the sky like branches from which the rest of the tree has been cut and carted away« (*B* 145). Constant references to the white bones of those massacred by white settlers then form a silent accusation of white murder, eerily visualizing voices prematurely subdued; but again they also stand for cultural death through assimilation. In truly oral manner, the words relating the white bones to future generations are almost verbatim used twice – except for the last part: »Bones white like the skin of the young ones will be, the children flowing from these, the survivors growing paler and paler and maybe dying« (*B* 176) as compared to »Bones, white like the skin of the young ones will be, the children flowing on, becoming paler and paler and just as dead« (*B* 289). Although, if viewed from the linear perspective of the reader, the sequence of the quotes suggests a development for the fatal, a circular understanding of the events reveals that it is the first quote which refers to a contemporary situation instead

21 Cf. Walter J. ONG, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982) 34.

22 Ong 146.

of to the past and thus connects to Harley's overcoming his uplifted status and recovering his indigenous heritage. Particularly the continued practice of singing among the hidden bones, begun by Fanny and resumed by Jack, and later also Will, signifies an ever-present Aboriginal tradition and strength. This strength is then, quite literally, acted out when Jack kills Daniel Coolman by pulling him over the edge of the very mine shaft where Jack had hidden the bones: »Who would have thought Jack had such strength?« (B 83).

Another example of how Kim Scott transforms the European Gothic tradition through oral mnemonic patterns is the link he establishes between familiar stock settings and white actions. When Sandy One remembers, as if recovering from a trauma, his assistance in a killing spree, its grisly horrors are vividly pictured in the text:

He must have seen it clear; such things as corpses shifting with the wind or ocean water, scattered bones, ears and other purses of flesh strung over a mantelpiece, and pools of water showing his own face against a blood-red sky. Yes, like an island in some bloody fluid. And he had memories even – although not strictly his own – of his own absence. And the island sinking in the rising aftermath of violence. (B 282)

On a different level, the connection between Gothic settings and white people also recalls the ambiguous status Gothic pastoralism holds within an indigenized Gothic counter discourse. An episode in which a member of the Mustle-family, »[t]he *landed gentry* of this story« (B 171, emphasis in the original), and his wife set out for Frederickstown appropriately starts with a Gothic mood of growing wind, rain, and darkness and then culminates in the death of Campbell Mustle (cf. B 473–6), indicating the settlers' inability to live properly with the land. This image of the whites not recognizing the beauty of the land but rather demonizing its harshness is painted throughout the novel in a contrast of apocalyptic desert and blissful Eden:

Dry winds, sun, no water [. . .] a land rapidly becoming desert. Cleared of trees, its skin blew away in a searing wind. The land's fluids rose to the raw surface, and they were thick and salty.

[. . .] He [Ern] was surrounded by cleared land, by sand; but there was always, somewhere, some tight and curling bush, and still-secret waterholes. (B 116–17)

The Aboriginal world hinted at with the last words rather implies an overflowing garden like the one experienced by Sandy One through the knowledge of his wife Fanny:

There were flowers spread across the undulating plains. Pinks, creams, yellow white and blue [...]. The sun did not mark them, nor the wind tear.

[...] There were kangaroos all about, keeping an eye out ears up. The animals looked at them and scratched their chests, thinking. Then bounded away with such exuberance.

[...] You could look across [this parkland], and yeah it was green and soft and undulating; it was what was called hill and dale, with running creeks and tall trees here and there.

[...] [T]he water was crowded. There were green floating creepers, insects, themselves, and the nodding dark heads – ringed with petals – of the tall rushes behind them. And then the occasional rippling of the air showing its breath.

[...] At the bottom of the crevice, there; water, rose from between the rocks, growing like the moon and its beaming. He tasted sweet water from her hands [...]. (B 179–80)

As long as nature and Aboriginal life are not interfered with by the whites, it is the pastoral idyll so excessively portrayed in Sandy One and Fanny's trip, but as soon as whites enter the scene, nature becomes connoted with the Gothic, as for instance in the case of the little corellas Jack notices as a child while the constable orders his family to leave the place they live at: »there were little corellas also [...]. Each one's plumage seemed grubby and blood-spattered« (B 303).²³

In his Gothicized version of white historiography and its papery weapon, »so sharp-edged and so pale« (B 27), Kim Scott deconstructs white scientific discourse and transforms this paragon of European Gothic ›Self‹ into its distorted ›Other‹. He establishes an oral counter discourse in its place, a »shifty, snaking narrative« (B 22), following ancestral forms and spatial paths, thereby acknowledging the plurality of indigenous voices still there. The boundaries wilfully imposed on Harley's family history by Ern are transgressed by Harley's orality, and the immersion in his Nyoongar past finally lets him transform the unstable surface of his self in a Gothic restoration of order. Within the classic Gothic framework of the found manuscript and restoration of order, however, Kim Scott's indigenized Gothic tale does not comply with European rules of temporal remoteness and superstition, but displaces the Gothic into an ever-present spatial and modal dimension of Western science. The generic pattern of the innocent heroine in distress and need of a knight in shining white armour is also transformed into a yarn of the black women of Harley's family and their never-ceasing power of resisting their white husbands

23 A song from a song series of the Anbarra people of North-Central Arnhem Land performed at mortuary rites has the corella as titular hero, cf. Margaret Clunies Ross, »Two Aboriginal Oral Texts from Arnhem Land, North Australia: A Ngalilak (White Cockatoo) Song-Verse from the Clan Song Series Djambidj,« *Oral Tradition* 1.2 (1986) (<http://journal.oraltradition.org/issues/1/ii/gurrmanamana>) 10.

and officials in order to let their family survive. Instead of embodying »a solitary full stop« (B 109) of immaculate whiteness, Harley is one of those survivors Fanny, Harriette, Dinah, Kathleen, Topsy, and the other women of his family fought for, symbolizing the titular tomorrow, Benang (cf. B 464): Harley's white heritage is literally tanned first by Sandy One Mason's black grandmother (cf. B 483) and then by several uncertainties as to his family lineage, beginning with his grandmother Topsy's own parents and ending with his unknown, though presumably partly black, mother. In a last mockery of his grandfather's high-flying eugenic plans, the story even reveals that Harley's only children (the accident at the beginning left him sterile) are born of white and black sisters of assimilation – assuring that they »are still here, Benang.« (B 495).

4. Con-Juring the Phantom: Spectral Memories

a. Trauma Interred: Alexis Wright's *Plains of Promise*

Instead of unearthing a silenced yet vividly remembered black family history, as did Kim Scott in his novel *Benang*, both Alexis Wright's novel *Plains of Promise* of 1997¹ and Vivienne Cleven's *Her Sister's Eye* as well as Beck Cole's short film *Plains Empty* focus on the haunting phantoms of repressed memories. They do so by having the ghostly remnants of a long-lost past return to the world of the living in an attempt to uncover the forgotten truths of colonialism. Thus jointly blurring and transgressing the most impassable boundary of all, that between life and death, the spectres conjured in all three works nevertheless differ considerably from each other in design and purpose.

In *Plains of Promise*, the lives of four generations of Aboriginal women unfold: on arrival at St. Dominic's Mission for Aborigines, seven-year old Ivy Koopundi Andrews is separated from her mother, who a short while later sets fire to herself and starts a menacing series of suicides (cf. *PP* 21–2). Left to a life of sexual abuse by the missionary Errol Jipp and later to domestic violence at the hands of her husband Elliot, Ivy at the age of 14 gives birth to the missionary's child, Mary, who is also taken from her mother to be raised by white foster parents. After they died in an accident, Mary learns she is of Aboriginal descent and sets out to retrace her black roots. She starts work at the Coalition of Aboriginal Governments and enters into a relationship with its director, Buddy Doolan, who fathers her girl Jessie. In search of her origins, Mary then returns to the former mission in order to quench the disturbing sense of loss and displacement handed down from mother to daughter.

Yet what at first reads like the kind of familiar life story Aboriginal women writers are renowned for soon shows its Gothic colours against the backdrop of a nature Gothicized by white missionaries. Epitomized in »God's celebratory poinciana tree« (*PP* 3), the vampiric nature of St. Dominic's Mission for Aborigines is introduced right at the beginning: having grown out of seeds the first missionary brought to the northern Gulf country, the tree survived

claypans, the droughts and the Wets to grow large and graceful [. . .]. Its roots clung tighter to the earth when [black] girls cried out for their mothers or wept into its branches when they were lonely or hurt, enduring the frustration and cruelty of their times. The tree grew in spite of all this. Healthy and unexploited, unaffected when

1 All quotations from and comments on *Plains of Promise* refer to Alexis WRIGHT, *Plains of Promise* (St. Lucia: U of Queensland P, 1997); this edition is referred to in the text as (*PP* p).

illness fell on all sides, witnessing the frequent occurrence of premature deaths, none of which affected the growth of God's tree.

[. . .] The Aboriginal inmates thought the tree should not have been allowed to grow there on their ancestral country. It was wrong. Their spiritual ancestors grew more and more disturbed by the thirsty, greedy foreign tree intruding into the bowels of their world. The uprising fluid carried away precious nutrients; in the middle of the night they woke up gasping for air, thought they were dying [. . .]. (PP 3–4)

Like Mudrooroo's conventional vampire figure which feeds on Aboriginal blood and thus drains its victims' black identity, the tree exhausts the natural resources vital for Aboriginal survival and flourishes because of their misery. Françoise Kral regards this »vegetal vampire« as a signifier of »colonization as a parasite encysting a healthy organism«² and argues that the use of Gothic props in the novel does not simply transfer a European tradition but through an »unconscious gothic [*sic*]«³ rather exposes the Gothic quality inherent in colonialism.

The recurrent image of crows throughout the novel as harbingers of death further exemplifies the latent Gothic nature of the colonial experience. They seem to be connected to Ivy as a parting gift of her mother and haunt the family through to Jessie: a crow first appears in the tree at the mission shortly after Ivy and her mother's removal to St. Dominic's, foreshadowing the series of suicides starting with Ivy's mother (cf. PP 4). Then they fly in abundance in what is supposed to be Ivy's home country (cf. PP 44, 48) and return to her in tormenting shape after her institutionalization (cf. PP 170, 173), where they are still denounced to bring death (cf. PP 173). Much later, Ivy's daughter Mary rescues a crow which then repeatedly comes to visit her and Jessie in their flat (cf. PP 221), watching over her (cf. PP 235), despite Mary's distaste for crows in general (cf. PP 221, 258). When Mary and Jessie return to the site of Ivy's suffering, the old mission, Jessie aims with her slingshot at the crows which have remained as constant reminders of Aboriginal suffering (cf. PP 257–8). At the end of the narration, they finally make their last appearance during the unhappy reunion of Ivy, Mary, and Jessie (cf. PP 290). Embodying the spectre which haunts the lives of the Koopundi-Andrews women, those generations of crows following them can be read in the light of Abraham and Torok's work on

2 Françoise KRAL, »Postcolonial Gothic as Gothic Sub-Version? A Study of Black Australian Fiction,« *Gothic Studies* 10.2 (2008): 117.

3 Françoise KRAL, »Postcolonial Gothic as Gothic Subversion? A Study of Black Australian Fiction,« Gothic Ex/Changes, IGA Conference, Liverpool Hope University College, Liverpool, 18 July 2003 par. 5.

transgenerational haunting: »what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others«.⁴

Traditionally, it is only a certain category of the dead who return to haunt – and torment – the living, yet for Abraham, as Nicholas Rand explains, »the dead do not return, but their lives' unfinished business is unconsciously handed down to their descendants«,⁵ thus passing on a silenced void. In *Plains of Promise*, this void is literally fleshed out in the guise of the crows which eerily echo the silence of the female protagonists. When Ivy is taken away, her mother is only able to scream but cannot voice any words (cf. *PP* 13) and Ivy later silently endures the constant abuse by Jipp and Elliot she successfully bans from her memory (cf. *PP* 170–1), »revolving faster and faster into a black vortex« (*PP* 169), as well as the barbarous treatments at the Sycamore Heights Mental Health and Research Institute. Mary, on the other hand, is met with a wall of silence and buried memories when she searches for her family roots. What starts as an individual's speechless response to a single traumatic event evolves into a mute endurance of life-long trauma and finally culminates in collective silence covering the communal trauma of lost identity epitomized in the fiery suicides, »the legacy of Ivy's mother. Her only legacy« (*PP* 22). Here, trauma is not only a legacy handed down from mother to daughter, but its scope also grows with every generation forcibly removed from its family, thus demonstrating the shared trauma of Australia's Stolen Generations.

This increased amount of trauma which affects the female protagonists is narratively represented in different levels of the Gothic within the novel. Tormented by »small and faceless creatures [who] slid down the ropes from the stormy skies« (*PP* 14), Ivy's mother finally commits suicide and thereby passes on her haunting to Ivy (cf. *PP* 22). As the novel's working title, *Requiem for Ivy*,⁶ suggests, there is an individual Gothic experienced by Ivy alone by being the victim of sexual abuse and domestic violence. Starting with Reverend Jipp's constant abuse from her early childhood (cf. *PP* 25), Ivy's powerlessness in the face of male force multiplies after her marriage to Elliot: with her unborn child vampire-like robbing her strength (cf. *PP* 150), Ivy is ruthlessly exposed to her husband's violent temper (cf. *PP* 149–53, 160). Her trauma continues after her institutionalization in the form of inhuman physical examinations for the sake of a professor's reputation (cf. *PP* 170–1) and never leaves her. In an uncanny transgenerational repetition of male abuse, Mary is later equally used and discarded by the father of her daughter,

4 Nicholas ABRAHAM, »Notes on the Phantom: A Complement to Freud's Metapsychology,« 1975, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, 1987, by Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, ed. and trans. Nicholas T. Rand, vol. 1 (Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 1994) 171.

5 Nicholas T. RAND, »Secrets and Posterity: The Theory of the Transgenerational Phantom,« 1975, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, 1987, by Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, ed. and trans. Nicholas T. Rand, vol. 1 (Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 1994) 167.

6 Cf. Alexis WRIGHT, »Requiem for Ivy,« *Meanjin* 55.4 (1996): 610, note.

Buddy Doolan: »He seemed to feel he could walk in or out as he pleased. It did not really matter to him. So long as he had somewhere to put his dick. Momentary love. Wherever, whoever, without ties« (PP 228).

Yet the Gothic in the shape of those ever-present crows also comes to the fore in broader terms, and through the adaptation of these European Gothic signifiers in an Aboriginal context the Gothic quality of white efforts in subduing Aboriginal culture becomes apparent. Being a traditional trickster character, the crow is held in great esteem by the indigenous peoples of Australia:

Now, the Crow plays an important part in the tradition and legends of [Unaipon's] race. Although he is an embodiment of all that is mischievous and evil, yet there are some very good and great things he has taught us [. . .]. There are many stories told of the Crow by different tribes.⁷

The good it did then won it a place among the stars:

A light touch upon his [Crow's] shoulder caused him to turn, and he beheld a figure rising heavenwards, who beckoned: »Come up, a place awaits you in Wyerriewarr.« Now tonight you will see the Crow, no longer a symbol of Darkness and Evil, but a shining Star, ever onward fulfilling his mission for which he was intended.⁸

As Gerald Vizenor argues, a tribal trickster figures as liberator and healer in a narrative and operates as »a communal sign shared between listeners, readers and four points of view in third person [sic] narratives«.⁹ If one takes a closer look at contemporary popular TV culture, however, one finds the trickster character as among those exotic tropes which are, like the trope of the Indian burial ground, exploited as sources of a commodified Gothic.¹⁰ In the case of the crows featuring in *Plains of Promise* this cultural tradition of the trickster is also completely erased and instead replaced by Christian notions of crows as »the Devil's work« (PP 4). This religiously endowed belief has by now found its way into popular Gothic culture of Anglo-American traditions, the best-known examples of these dark-winged Gothic creatures being Edgar Allan Poe's poem »The Raven« of 1845, Alfred Hitchcock's classic movie *The Birds* of 1963, and *The Crow* of 1994, a movie which entailed its

7 David UNAIPON, »The Mischievous Crow and the Good he did,« 1924/1925, *Legendary Tales of the Australian Aborigines*, ed. Stephen Muecke and Adam Shoemaker (Carlton: The Miegunyah P-Melbourne UP, 2006) 86–7.

8 Unaipon, »Mischievous Crow« 119.

9 Vizenor 187.

10 See for example episode 2/15, »Tall Tales«, of the TV series *Supernatural*.

very own grim Gothic reality. Thus exposing the palimpsestic nature of colonialism and Christian mission work (cf. *PP* 66), Alexis Wright reveals the creeping loss of Aboriginal identity and culture through white assimilation policies to the point of complete obliteration.

The extent to which white notions of nature as Gothic surroundings have already been internalized in the vicinity of the mission is demonstrated in the way some Aboriginal inhabitants fear the bush, as in the wake of the murders of two women from the widows' camp, »[f]ear entered the widows' camp: the women whispered to themselves at night and jumped up screaming at the slightest sound in the surrounding bush« (*PP* 70). Similarly, the snakes Dorrie collects suddenly transform and

[i]n their efforts to escape they attacked each other, becoming entangled in a wild frenzy that grew even wilder as other snakes were attracted to the scene. Dorrie had never seen this happen before. She had never felt as frightened as she did at this moment. (*PP* 124)

What used to be a resource of power and strength has turned into a dreaded menace due to white policies of estranging black people from their land and thus their culture:

The night might have been enjoyed once. He [Elliot] thought of the days when the spirits and the black people would have spoken to each other. But the blackman's enforced absence from his traditional land had inspired fear of it. They had to alter old, ongoing relationship with the spirits that had created man and once connected him to the earth. (*PP* 75)

While this white-induced Gothic of nature relies on conventional though reversed binaries of black and white, the alienation of black people from their land and culture is also paralleled on a spiritual level often referred to as magic realist:¹¹ in order to find a remedy to the evil which has befallen the mission, the Elders send Elliot on a traditional journey »to travel the songlines to the dangerous country. Ivy's mother's country« (*PP* 43). He follows his »Dreaming line« (*PP* 72) and observes the laws of his people and land with utmost care so as not to disturb any »malignant powers« (*PP* 72). Along the way, he encounters spirits thunderously felling ghostly gum trees (cf. *PP* 75–6) and the dead returning and fighting each

11 See for a critical discussion of labelling *Plains of Promise* magic realist Cornelis Martin RENES, »Discomforting Readings: Uncanny Perceptions of Self in Alexis Wright's *Plains of Promise* and David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon*,« *Eucalypt* 2 (2002): 78–80.

other (cf. *PP* 81), until he stumbles into a traditional ceremony. This ceremony is introduced in menacing terms of storm, dust, and fire (cf. *PP* 83), and for Elliot it seems a frightening combination of man and spirit: »The singing proceeded in languages he did not know. He [Elliot] was surrounded by faces without expression or identity. Spirit and man. Man and Spirit. All the same« (*PP* 84–5). Yet the fear this Gothic description of traditional culture inspired in Elliot is soon revoked, and the events reveal their healing character: the foreign ceremony succeeds in returning millions of seabirds to the water (cf. *PP* 86) and the spirits of the dead renew Elliot's life when he is near death (cf. *PP* 82). By offering antithetic perspectives on the Gothic of nature and the spirit world, Alexis Wright once more draws attention to the whites' devastating influence on Aboriginal culture and thus points at the loss of traditional knowledge on mission grounds and the mission's power »to reshape mind« (*PP* 82):

Who could initiate the proper procedures to investigate the matter these days? Several generations had slipped by since anyone had to do this kind of thing. »Everyone lives mission life now,« people at St Dominic's said [. . .]. »Are we really different people now or not?« [. . .] Had there been too much interference with the old ways? (*PP* 36)

In contrast to the spectres of white policies still haunting Aboriginal life today, there are also other, in European terms more conventional, ghost stories within the text which highlight the difference between European and Aboriginal understandings of the Gothic. There is the story of Bob who returns in the shape of a vengeful terrier to haunt those he holds responsible for his death (cf. *PP* 187), a pattern well-known from European tales. Additionally, the ghost car appearing on the gravel roads of the Gulf country (cf. *PP* 247–8), by now turned into an urban legend, tells a similar story of revenge typical of European ghost stories. Despite their Gothic origins, these stories work as a comic relief in the Gothic reality of Aboriginal trauma, and this deliberate departure from European conventions exposes them as inadequate examples of Gothic horrors, thus the inherent Gothic nature of colonialism is even further intensified. These Western Gothic standards are not transformed into an Aboriginal Gothic but maintain their European form, whereas European Gothic signifiers and their Western meanings are internalized and thus transform traditional Aboriginal society in a subversive agenda of challenging the Gothic quality of the postcolonial experience.

In *Plains of Promise*, the removal of Aboriginal people by white authorities, first to missions and then to white foster parents, is epitomized in Ivy Koopundi's family, and their trauma emphasizes the only too real Gothic of colonialism. Themselves

symbolized in the family of waterbirds chased from the »Disappearing Lake« (PP 302) by greedy crows – turning whites into blacks –, Ivy and her mothers and daughters stand for Aboriginal identity and culture reclaiming their ancestral place: when Mary and Jessie fly over Ivy's home country (cf. PP 302), the water finally returns to the lake which had been dry for thirty years. Thus ending on a reconciliatory note, *Plains of Promise* not only indigenizes the Gothic, but also exorcizes the Gothic of white policies the Aboriginal way.

b. Past Discovered: Vivienne Cleven's *Her Sister's Eye*

A similar clash of European and Aboriginal understandings of the Gothic and Gothic stock characters pictured in *Plains of Promise* plays an equally important role in Vivienne Cleven's novel *Her Sister's Eye* of 2002.¹² Envisioning the Gothic legacies of the colonial past, the novel spins two separate yet traumatically entwined tales of colonial and patriarchal violence around its black and white protagonists. It details the social relations of the townspeople and their involvement in colonial wrongs, focusing on the Drysdale family, the Red Rose charity organization ladies as well as around the black protagonists Archie Corella, Murilla and Sofie Salte, and Doris and Nana Vida. These seemingly segregated worlds of blacks and whites constantly intersect in a play of hide and seek of memories, a feature narratively echoed in the novel's non-linear storyline: mosaic-like, its bits and pieces only fall into place at the end, only then fully revealing the gruesome truth silenced for more than a generation.

Not only socially, but also topographically divided into a white centre and black fringe by the Stewart River, the parched country town of Mundra provides the backdrop for a Gothic unfolding of abuse and suppressed memories, of »horrors of our past« (SE blurb). At first sight, these horrors come in the all-too familiar guise of conventional European Gothic tales, but their twists and turns transgress the rigid limits of their European ancestors and transform them in order to mirror the Gothic reality of colonialism and patriarchy: there is the story of Caroline Drysdale, widow of the town's patriarch Reginald Drysdale, and her plight as Gothic heroine, which is disturbingly connected to the truth behind the uncanny arrival of Archie Corella, a stranger who comes to Mundra from nowhere and unsettles the memories of its black community. Although both stories follow recognizable Gothic patterns, they ultimately distort those very conventions and through indigenizing their underlying dichotomies expose how patriarchy determines colonial structures –

12 All quotations from and comments on *Her Sister's Eye* refer to Vivienne CLEVEN, *Her Sister's Eye* (St. Lucia: U of Queensland P, 2002); this edition is referred to in the text as (SE p).

and how Gothic *fiction* eventually pales besides the very real horrors of Aboriginal history.

The first character to combine classic Gothic features with a gruesome history of literally unspeakable horrors is that of Archie Corella. His face disfigured by a scar across his face and he himself seemingly with neither past nor memory thereof, Archie is prisoner of »his own nameless fears [...] always there, lurking like a rabid dog, snarling in the back of his thoughts [...]« (SE 12). Reminiscent of the Gothic wanderer, this epitome of isolation who has traded his soul for a prolonged lifespan and roams the earth in perpetual exile as a damned creature, Archie is in constant search for something he cannot name, always hoping to find his peace (cf. SE 12). This image of his being eternally punished for some horrid crime is further intensified when Nana Vida tells of the boy *she* knew by the name of Archie Corella, a boy who had died some forty years ago – killed by a horse which had kicked him in the head (cf. SE 76, 151, 211). Thus casting an indigenous character in the role of the uncanny avenger, Vivienne Cleven at first sight reiterates colonial Gothic dichotomies, but a closer look reveals how she uses this strategy to expose the pettiness of Gothic fiction when compared to the trauma of Aboriginal suffering at the hands of white people: as neat as Archie seems to comply with the attributes of a Gothic wanderer, as complex is his role in literally bearing the trauma of colonization.

In recent years, academic interest in the issue of narrating trauma has resulted in a number of studies all of which analyse how the traces of trauma and its pathological symptoms are embodied in individual characters and voiced through particular narrative techniques as a means to convey the impact of communal traumatic experiences.¹³ From a medical perspective, as Judith Herman details, the traumatic event is banished from consciousness and cannot actively be remembered, thus the event turns into something literally unspeakable and its story »surfaces not as a verbal narrative but as a symptom«.¹⁴ Common symptoms trauma patients may show are specified by Herman as hyperarousal, which leaves the victim permanently alert, intrusion, which manifests the non-linear memories of the traumatic event through flashbacks and repetitive nightmares in the victim's mind, and constriction, which leads to an altered state of consciousness.¹⁵ Projecting these pathological features onto contemporary narratives dealing with the legacies

13 Cf. for example Cathy CARUTH, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1995), Cathy CARUTH, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1996), Kalí TAL, *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*, Cambridge Studies in American Literature and Culture 95 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), and Laurie VICKROY, *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction* (Charlottesville: The U of Virginia P, 2002).

14 Judith Lewis HERMAN, *Trauma and Recovery* (London: Pandora–HarperCollins, 1994) 1.

15 Cf. Herman 35–42.

of communal trauma, Laurie Vickroy then identifies several narrative strategies paralleling these symptoms, as there are »textual gaps (both in the page layout and content), repetition, breaks in linear time, shifting viewpoints, and a focus on visual images and affective states«. ¹⁶ Furthermore, Vickroy sees the memory of the traumatic event, which cannot actively be remembered, virtually carved into the character's body, in which scars symbolize traumatic memories otherwise not accessible. ¹⁷

When viewed through the lens of trauma narrative research, that which was introduced as a clear-cut Gothic monstrosity, the scar causing people to call Archie »fucken freak, weirdo, scarface« (SE 12), now shows the true colours of colonial Gothic reality, being living proof of a past too terrible to be voiced. Additionally, Archie's strange behaviour, his loss of memory, and the painful visions haunting him all tell the story of a man suffering from a severe trauma.

Like the experience of any trauma victim, the memory of the traumatic event is buried deep in Archie's subconscious, denying him access whenever he actively tries to remember (cf. SE 12, 15, 131):

[A]ll the time he'll rack his mind for anything that'll tell him who and what he *really* is. [...] [M]emory rushing away like water soaking into the earth. Memory, that sometimes refuses to tell him anything. [...] [H]e has no past. [...] When he tries to think back to when this started, he gets lost. (SE 87–8, emphasis in the original)

Then there are those images, voices, feelings, even smells, which Archie encounters while struggling to keep hold of whatever traces of memory he may grasp:

At times, he really thinks he's going mad, especially when the images come to him like a flickering film, fuzzy and distorted at the edges. Then there are the smells, weak as the scent of watery perfume.

But it's the voices that drive him to despair, echoing and pleading, mocking sometimes. For some reason he always feels guilty, like he should *do something*. (SE 88, emphasis in the original)

Especially aural flashbacks play an important role in Archie's recovering of memory, once triggered by a car backfiring (cf. SE 87–8, 154) while at other times he hears unknown voices pleading for help (cf. SE 102, 161, 209). These flashbacks and sensory pieces of memory increasingly complete the picture of Archie's trauma in the course of the story until they culminate in an explosion of stimuli and pain:

¹⁶ Vickroy 29.

¹⁷ Cf. Vickroy 32.

The side of Archie's face throbs angrily and the pain spreads to the back of his neck. Already he knows where it's going. He crashes back into the undergrowth, howling like a cornered animal. [...]

Within that time he feels the tingling shoot all the way up to his shoulders, exploding in the top of his head. [...]

He waits for the void that will claim him, and somewhere in the far reaches of his mind he tries to hold it back, tries to keep it down like always.

[...] A red film crosses his vision.

It's almost here now.

Archie writhes on the ground, burrs and twigs digging into his flesh.

His head falls to the side and that is when he sees it. A snake. It slithers by him, dead eyes mocking his torment. And that makes him cry out with unstoppable terror.

Above him somewhere Archie hears noises. *They've come for him.*

»Leave me alone! Leave me alone!« he screams as the dark rivers of pain wash over him.

help me

raymond d d d r a a y m m o n n d d h e e e l l l p p p p m m m e e e e e e

(SE 208–9, emphasis in the original)

Down the old dirt road, the direction he has never walked before but which holds the key to his past (cf. SE 168–73), Archie in a maelstrom of vision, memory, and pain finally remembers. He remembers he is Raymond Gee, the son of Joe and Lillian Gee, the only black woman daring to go into town every Tuesday in order to buy things and to meet some friends, defying white abuse and threats. He remembers how he had to helplessly watch his sister Belle die at the river-bank, shot by Edward Drysdale, Caroline's father in law; he remembers how he heard her last words pleading for help: »»*Raymond, help me* ... «« (SE 213, emphasis in the original). He remembers how Drysdale smashed his face with the butt of his rifle and how he himself left town, how he

[w]alked the roads for the best part of his life until he started to forget things. Over the years his mind closed off those images.

At some point he became Archie Corella, and Raymond Gee became someone he didn't know, Raymond Gee didn't exist. At times his mind would try to make him relive the incident at the riverbank but he couldn't see those things.

He would walk for years until he'd walked full circle. Came back home without even realising. (SE 215)

This image of the wanderer returning to his origins, a place of suffering rather than of a diabolic pact, considerably distinguishes Archie/Raymond from the classic Gothic wanderer and instead transforms this stock character of the Gothic cast into an incarnation of Aboriginal trauma. Archie's development of unearthing his personal trauma is paralleled by Nana Vida, who embodies the voice of the community and its dealing with the communal trauma exemplified in the fate of Raymond and Belle Gee: in her talks with Doris, Nana Vida at first refuses to share her troubling memories with Doris, as »[s]ome things are better left alone« (SE 75), but later on, she decides to speak the unspeakable, to tell Lillian Gee's story and that of her children (cf. SE 138–56) despite there being »too much sadness« (PP 146) for it to be told. The story of communal suffering, however, does not stop with the murder of Belle Gee but unfolds further, affecting Mundra's whole black community, as Nana Vida reveals in the story of »Drysdale's men« (SE 224), the male counterpart of the racist Red Rose Ladies' Committee: outraged with black people coming to the town's carnival, Drysdale's men decide to drive to the blacks' camp at night and »to teach them a lesson« (PP 225). Yet instead of shooting Murilla and Sofie's mother, one of the men accidentally kills Edward Drysdale and then blames it on one of the black men – a gruesome synecdoche of colonialism and its lack of justice when the colonial subject is concerned.

Unlike Archie/Raymond's traumatic ordeal, the memory of which ultimately proves too much to bear for an individual and results in his death (cf. SE 219–20), however, the communal trauma experienced by the blacks of Mundra needs to be transformed into memory and passed on by telling the stories of suffering the *Aboriginal* way in order to be overcome:

›What I [Nana Vida] told you [Doris], pass on girl. Keep this alive, tell em all. Funny thing, is history. If you remember what others went through to get ya here then all is not lost. Some died for you, others fought for you. Always remember where you're from. There's hope. Always hope.« (SE 229)

What seems the right way for individual trauma – »[a] lotta people survive by forgetting the sorrow in their lives« (SE 224) – does not succeed in cases of collective traumatic histories. Instead, the suffering which haunts indigenous life as trauma trails needs to be transformed into songlines of memory in order to reclaim a powerful Aboriginal identity.¹⁸

18 The idea of trauma trails turning into songlines has been stated by a participant in a study conducted by Judy Atkinson in black communities as part of her postgraduate research on indigenous trauma, cf. Judy ATKINSON, *Trauma Trails Recreating Song Lines: The Transgenerational Effects of Trauma in Indigenous Australia* (Melbourne: Spinifex P, 2002) blurb.

Determined by this Gothic plot crafted in colonial fashion is yet another classic Gothic story, one concerning the Drysdale family. As Nana Vida tells Doris, Caroline Drysdale is the daughter of Lucinda and Barry Hughes, a white couple who socialized with black people and were friends with Lillian Gee (cf. SE 78, 145) – a fact which led to Caroline's being ostracized by the town's society (cf. SE 165–6, 184, 200) and despised by her husband (cf. SE 187).

The central place in which both strands of the narration meet is the Drysdale mansion, a picture-perfect example of a Gothic powerhouse of Australian colouring:¹⁹

[T]he run-down Queenslander [...] crouched forward out of the undergrowth as though it was exhausted from weathering too many storms. Mossgreen shutters hung carelessly from large fly-screened windows. Embracing the house like a protective arm was a white rust-speckled, wrought-iron verandah. The iron was fashioned like a delicate lace petticoat. The rotting, worm-bored steps had two planks missing from the bottom and the once cream-coloured walls were skinned and blistered, the timber exposed. Up near the roof, the gutters hung precariously, water dripping steadily from their rusty mouths. And the door looked down from this sad vista, glaring back at him [Archie].

The house seemed to buckle and sweat underneath the sweltering sun. Archie could almost hear the wood expanding, as though the house was a living thing, crying its protest. (SE 9–10)

Additionally, the nature surrounding the house is equally scary, with a feral cat h(a)unting in its vicinity (cf. SE 95, 107–8), and literally dead, as »skeletal trees bend in death, their gnarled branches reaching skyward like the grasping talons of a witch. Everything that was once alive and green died a long time ago« (SE 38). And like its European precursors, the Drysdale house is a forbidden place: »you [Archie] must keep away from the house at all times« (SE 19). Its lengthy characterization as a site of archetypal Gothic villainy, however, is instantly belied by Gothic reality, for Sofie Salte's use of the term »scary house« (SE 32, 52, 57, 59, 126) is ambiguous, referring to the Drysdale mansion as much as to Donald's work shed. Within this shed, Donald's »very own space« (SE 20) he forbids Archie to ever come close to (cf. SE 20), the truly unspeakable happens and the Gothic reality of child abuse is enacted. There are little girls' dresses hanging around (cf. SE 41, 102), and the truth is revealed in the words of a fairytale gone bad:

19 See for examples of Australian buildings replacing the Gothic castles and mansions of Europe McGahan's *The White Earth* or the haunted Queenslander in Dorothy HEWETT, »The Darkling Sisters,« *Secret Lives: 34 Modern Australian Short Stories*, ed. Barry Oakley (Melbourne: The Five Mile P, 2003) 166–85.

Once upon a time it were a sad day. The trees they bend over and cry from sadness – cry eye all ova the place. The river wash up all the tears.

There was a man, he name boo, Mister Peekaboo. He be waitin by the bushes, the river bushes.

Mister Peekaboo grab a hold a Sofie! Oh, bad troubles there. He turn wild as the bull, he bust a gut: Get over here!

Sofie, she cry up. Oh, ya must scat cat! Sofie wanna run too fast. ›Boo, getcha fucken arse way from here!‹

The moon sick up n all, even too the stars felled outta that sky. Dark n everythin. Peekaboo twist yellagreen eyes.

Come on, girl, he say, laughin way down there.

Grabbin Sofie he has hands into that place, pink, soft place, bad man.

Scat Cat! Sofie's words big, heart beatin too fast. Too scaredy, she want her sister's eye, Rilly, RILLY.

Then he finish up, look at Sofie n smile. Off in the bush he go. Gone to the scary house. (SE 56–7, emphasis in the original)

The sheer amount of both black and white girls (cf. SE 60) abused by Donald Drysdale, however, remains buried beneath a layer of »shame and guilt« (SE 168). Through this ploy of trans-placing the locus of Gothic villainy from its traditional Gothic surroundings to a place of everyday life, Cleven questions the validity of traditional Gothic conventions and their existence in a reality too near to be enjoyed safely.

The Drysdale house itself, however, is the site where the well-known classic of the Gothic heroine incarcerated is enacted, a site reserved for a Gothic storyline charged with traditional European ingredients of male dominance. Reminiscent of the madwoman in the attic, Caroline Drysdale – introduced by her son Donald as »losing her bloody marbles« (SE 9) – has for her whole life been kept prisoner in her house, first by her husband and later by her son. In the course of the story, it is revealed that her husband Reginald speaks of his wife as »need[ing] a good head doctor« (SE 114) and informs Murilla of Caroline's unstable state of mind:

Maybe you have formed some sort of useless alliance with my sick wife. Perhaps she's been trying to convince you that I've been beating her, hmmm. Murilla, the poor woman does these awful things to herself. Yes, I have to go in and keep the door locked so that she doesn't hurt anyone or smash the house. (SE 112–13)

Reginald's hardship as caretaker of his wife is then publicly announced by his affair Polly Goodman, who »took it upon herself to tell everyone ›the truth‹ about poor Reginald and Donald living up in that house with ›a crazy woman‹« (SE 118) – once

more repeating classic structures of a woman's unpredictable lunacy. Yet while accounts of Caroline's alleged madness solely rely on direct speech, statements made by Reginald and his peers, the narration itself allows for another reading of her character, a reading which situates Caroline as an abused Gothic victim entrapped by her vile husband: even though Reginald himself pretends to be a caring husband helplessly facing his wife's mental decline, the text nevertheless endows him with all the traits a stock Gothic perpetrator needs. While sporting the airs of a gentleman (cf. SE 113), his outward appearance is that of a classic Gothic villain:

Reginald Drysdale was a lofty, pencil-thin rake of a man. [...] His long, triangular face was always a light shade of red, as though anger was constantly brewing. Sitting neatly on top of his narrow, bloodless lips was a thin, perfectly even, grey-black moustache. His pitch-black hair would be oiled and parted to one side of his head, not a single strand out of place. (SE 108)

This narrative passage contradicts the picture of a devoted husband which is delivered in direct speech and instead portrays Reginald as a pedantic and thus possibly violent man. In the course of the narration, this characterization is supported by the observations of the Aboriginal protagonists, who witness the truth hidden behind the literal Gothic walls of the Drysdale house which cover the physical and psychic abuse Caroline is subjected to (cf. SE 108–12).

Through the character of Caroline Drysdale, the double meaning of the madwoman as suggested by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their study *The Madwoman in the Attic*²⁰ is demonstrated in a critique of the underlying patriarchal assumptions of Gothic fiction: although Caroline conforms to the male stereotype of the monstrous female in the eyes of the Drysdale men, her behaviour is her only means of female anger and rebellion. Projected onto indigenous female writing, »the female schizophrenia of authorship«,²¹ which for Gilbert and Gubar lies at the heart of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century female writing, takes on a double meaning in *Her Sister's Eye*: while Caroline Drysdale is seen as the classic monstrous double of virtuous Polly Goodman, chair of the Red Rose Committee, from a male perspective, Vivienne Cleven defies such easy ascriptions and distorts them in order to comment not only on the patriarchal tradition of the Gothic but also on the double colonization of Aboriginal women. If, as Gilbert and Gubar argue, »the madwoman in literature by women is not merely [...] an antagonist or foil

20 Cf. Sandra M. GILBERT and Susan GUBAR, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 1979, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale Nota Bene, 2000) 77–80.

21 Gilbert and Gubar 78.

to the heroine [... but rather ...] the *author's* double²² then both patriarchy and colonization are successfully rejected through the character of Caroline Drysdale – and her black alter ego, Sofie Salte: Caroline finally succeeds in overthrowing patriarchal dominance by possibly being involved in both Reginald and Donald's death, first leaving her husband's room with a mysterious bottle minutes before he dies of a heart attack (cf. SE 188–91) and then seen with wet clothes the day her son drowns in the river (cf. SE 103–5). At the end of the novel, Caroline is the only member of the Drysdale family left, a fact which again shows how in her character the gruesomeness of the patriarchal as well as the colonial Gothic emanating from the Drysdales and their supporters are manifested: after the death of Edward Drysdale is blamed on an Aboriginal man who is then charged with murder, his wife Nelly »walks into town and stands in front of the Drysdale shop, cursing the Drysdale name forever« (SE 228). Although she seemingly acts the part of the evil witch, it is Nelly who ultimately liberates Caroline Hughes from the role of Gothic madwoman assigned to her.

Apart from those classic Gothic tales torn in pieces, thereby revealing the trauma hidden beneath, *Her Sister's Eye* also incorporates traditional Aboriginal elements inextricably linked to the traumatic Gothic nature of both patriarchy and colonialism through the character of yet another ›madwoman‹. These events which tell of indigenous connections to nature, particularly the Stewart River, start as Gothic episodes but then transform their discursive strategies and thus emphasize the strength of Aboriginal culture to not only transgress but to completely break down the unyielding boundaries of the traditional Gothic and to indigenalize its very concepts. A case in point is Sofie Salte's mental relationship with the river, in which »*the old ones*« (SE 136, emphasis in the original) live, and its fish. In her own words, she is »a river girl« (SE 33) and, being a fish herself and »one hell of a swimmer« (SE 55), the fish are her mates (cf. SE 54–5). This connection to water and its creatures, which recalls at once Ludjee and her Dreaming animal, Manta Ray, of Mudrooroo's vampire trilogy, is manifested in maban realist terms and emphasizes the ambiguity of Aboriginal Gothic – ambiguous, however, only from a white European point of view. On the one hand, it shows Sofie's immersion in Aboriginal culture, while on the other it results in the Gothic escape of sexual abuse, as the fish persuade Sofie to lure Donald to swim in the river where Sofie/the fish drown(s) him:

What to do
Only one thing to do
 What that is
Cut his water off

22 Gilbert and Gubar 78; emphasis in the original.

How to

Bring him this way

[...]

Mister Peekaboo comed down to the river that awful scat cat day. Not even knows, as mad as he were that it were his big time.

Sofie say: Swimmin.

Boo say: Yeah, with no clothes on.

Laugh he do. His trousers everything off. White like fish belly in the water. He swims right in the middle and a thing happened. The secret thing.

›Help me! Let me go! Let me go you, little bitch! I'll fucking kill you! You bitttchh!‹

That Sofie knew that no person can help when the river say what gonna happen.

That the way things be. Dancin on water won't do good a tiny bit.

Face blue like the sky hands reachin at Sofie he go bubblin under there to the fish house. That ol house a mud. (SE 57–8, emphasis in the original)

This Gothic quality of Sofie's watery powers seem to be a legacy of her father Jimmy, whose story is equally ambiguous towards Gothic motifs: although Nana Vida sees him die in the river, he appears on the river bank without a scratch only minutes later. As Nana Vida says,

›Much later, when I thought about it, I knew how impossible it was. Jimmy Salte died that day. I knew then that the Saltes weren't normal people.‹

Doris shatters the air with a nervous laugh. ›Nan, dead people don't come back!‹

›No, not like that. There's things in this world you or I'll never understand.‹ (SE 81)

This ambiguity surrounding the river, offering conventional Gothic meanings to the white European eye which at the same time are fraught with indigenous cultural traditions, completes the transformation of many Gothic ingredients into an Aboriginal Gothic which tells of power and strength found in an indigenous identity: what from a European perspective looks like the horrible undead or the lunatic murderer are stories of indigenous maban powers derived from nature. Classic Gothic images of the doomed wanderer, the madwoman, and the dead returning are divested of their European readings and filled with new and empowering content, transforming these spine-chilling Gothic must-haves into mere stereotypes paling beside the true horrors of male abuse and colonial suppression. The perpetrators of these horrors, however, still share the features of their classic models, be it the attire of a gentleman (cf. SE 113) or »strange eyes« (SE 2, 8, 96, 102). In this quality, they parallel the Gothic character of the Drysdale mansion: »a place with its own shying« (SE 22), the house is the Gothic cover for the horrid reality enacted behind

its walls. Through this distinctive use of unchanged stock elements of the European Gothic tradition, Vivienne Clevon shows how only the tip of the grim iceberg is visible in classic Gothic fiction whereas the true horrors of colonialism have never been far enough to induce the feelings of delight Burke sees stimulated by terror.²³ With the overall design of the narrative resembling a trauma narrative – the story is told from various perspectives in constantly shifting temporal uncertainties and breaks linear time – *Her Sister's Eye* reveals the trauma of colonization through indigenizing the Gothic tradition to the extent of denying it its transformative absolution: Gothic *fiction* may be changed to affirm the strength of the formerly victimized as in the case of Caroline Hughes, but the horrors of Gothic *reality* are pressing too close to end other than in death, as is the case of Archie and Sofie who both do not endure the trauma they have been subjected to. Only by passing on its memory within the community can the communal trauma of colonization be healed and Aboriginal identity regain its strength, emerging from the Gothic through transformation.

c. Plains Undermined: Beck Cole's *Plains Empty*

The third work fraught with phantom images is Beck Cole's *Plains Empty* of 2005,²⁴ a short film picturing the story of a young Aboriginal woman, Sam, who has recently moved to a remote South Australian mining town where the ghosts of the past come alive after her boyfriend has left to work on yet another far-away mining site. Warned by her man to stay away from the town and, most of all, from their creepy neighbour, Sam enters what seems a classic cinematic ghost story which centres on the haunted female heroine.

In addition to the issues of Aboriginal Gothic *writing* already addressed in previous chapters, an analysis of films by Aboriginal filmmakers further requires a discussion of both their filmic representation in white Australian cinema and the use of Western visual technology by Aboriginal people in order to adequately assess the cultural opportunities indigenous filmmaking offers for overcoming those very representations. It is necessary to illustrate the development of indigenous filmmaking from its early examples of Aboriginal TV stations in remote Australia to today's features which are screened in cinemas nation- and worldwide. Even though, as Marcia Langton argues, there are considerable differences between Aboriginal videos from remote Australia and internationally marketed films produced by

23 Cf. Burke 36–7.

24 All stills from and comments on *Plains Empty* refer to Beck COLE, dir., *Plains Empty*, DVD (Film Depot, 2005); this edition is referred to in the text as (*PE mins.*). Quotations are transcribed using the film's post-production script.

Aboriginal artists living in urban Australia,²⁵ both nevertheless share the same history of representation in both ethnographic and commercial cinema and are confronted with the same ideological issues concerning the adaptation of modern visual technologies.

Especially indigenous access to mass media and their production technologies, in particular in remote communities, has sparked much controversy among ethnographic scholars, as media are considered a threat in terms of promoting Western cultural values as well as perpetuating indigenous dependency on white technology and institutions to an even greater extent than in the literary scene. On the other hand, media are also seen as a powerful means to strengthen Aboriginal culture.²⁶ Faye Ginsburg has described this uneasy relationship between mass media and Aboriginal culture in terms of a Faustian contract which allows indigenous people to find new modes of expressing their identity at the cost of losing their traditional culture.²⁷ Elsewhere, she lists the shortcomings both such a Faustian bargain model and its academic competitor, the idea of a global village, have when it comes to an adequate assessment of Aboriginal culture and media:

The Faustian bargain model [...] regards ›traditional culture‹ as something good and authentic that is irreversibly polluted by contact with high technology and media produced by mass culture. This view is very clear about what cultural domination can mean but suffers from a view of indigenous people as frozen in time and tradition. By contrast, the idea of the global village [...] optimistically suggests that new media can bring together different cultures from all over the earth, creating a sense of community, one associated with village life, through progressive use of new communications technologies. Here, people and societies are recognized as constantly changing rather than determined by state, economic, or technological imperatives [sic]. However, the important, specific ways in which cultures differ and people experience political inequality are erased in an ethnocentric utopian vision of an electronic democracy.²⁸

Considering new discursive approaches in anthropology and cultural studies, Ginsburg instead suggests to understand indigenous media in terms of Appadurai's

25 Cf. Marcia LANGTON, ›Well, I heard in on the Radio and I saw it on the Television...‹: *An Essay for the Australian Film Commission on the Politics and Aesthetics of Filmmaking by and about Aboriginal People and Things* (Sydney: Australian Film Commission, 1993) 12.

26 Cf. David MACDOUGALL, »Media Friend or Media Foe,« *Visual Anthropology* 1.1 (1987): 54.

27 Faye GINSBURG, »Indigenous Media: Faustian Contract or Global Village?« *Cultural Anthropology* 6.1 (1991): 96.

28 Faye GINSBURG, »Aboriginal Media and the Australian Imaginary,« *Public Culture* 5.3 (1993): 560–1.

»mediascapes.«²⁹ Addressing issues of globalization, Appadurai proposes a framework of five dimensions of global cultural flow which constitute contemporary relations between the global and the local and which he terms ethnoscapés, mediascapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, and ideoscapes.³⁰ Mediascapes, he argues, refer to the distribution of technological means throughout the world to produce images as well as to the images which are created by these technological means themselves. They are situated in a complex framework of local, national, and transnational interests and the trope thus takes into account both the social change of culture and the global interdependencies of media practices.³¹

Although in my analysis I will concentrate on form and content and the way in which directors engage with the discourse of Aboriginal representation on screen, it is important to note the extent to which indigenous filmmaking still largely depends on government funding, white training institutions, and white film crews to realize feature-length productions. Apart from regional media associations, which mainly broadcast community-based video productions,³² only CAAMA, Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association operating from Alice Springs, and to some extent Goolarri Media Enterprises, located in Broome, have their productions screened nationwide. As to filmic features, Sally Riley, manager of the Indigenous Unit of the Australian Film Commission, AFC, in an interview points out that »[t]he scripts are there but they need developing. [...] We [the Indigenous Unit of the AFC] don't have enough money to fully fund a feature [...]«.³³ In 2005, the AFC launched the Long Black feature initiative, and Riley states that as at 2007 there are nine scripts for indigenous features in development.³⁴ Feature films by Aboriginal directors or writers, however, are still scarce, and *The Black Book* lists only five features by indigenous directors and one by an indigenous writer as

29 Cf. Ginsburg, »Aboriginal Media and the Australian Imaginary« 561.

30 Cf. Arjun APPADURAI, »Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,« *Theory, Culture & Society* 7.2 (1990): 296, an essay which has also been published in Arjun APPADURAI, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Public Worlds 1 (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996) 27–42.

31 Cf. Appadurai, »Disjuncture and Difference« 299.

32 *The Black Book*, an online directory listing indigenous organisations and individuals working in the arts, media, and cultural industries, lists five regionally operating media associations which are not restricted to radio broadcasting but include video productions and community television programs, cf. *The Black Book*, Blackfella Films, 2008, 16 Aug. 2008 (<http://www.theblackbook.com.au>) path: The Directory–Category »Media Associations«.

33 Virginia BAXTER and Keith GALLASCH, eds., *Australia's Indigenous Arts* (Sydney: Australian Council for the Arts, 2000) 42. At the time of Riley's interview, the money the AFC Indigenous Branch actually gets amounted to AUD 800.000 annually plus AUD 40.000 for interactive media, cf. Baxter and Gallasch 43.

34 Cf. Sally RILEY, »Revolutions: The AFC Indigenous Branch,« *Dreaming in Motion: Celebrating Australia's Indigenous Filmmakers*, ed. Keith Gallasch (Sydney: Australian Film Commission, 2007) 4–6.

well as only four short features and another 131 short dramas which never made it into theatres but have received broad critical acclaim. On the technical side, Riley notes that an increasing number of indigenous production-crew members have been trained at AFTRS, Australian Film, Television, and Radio School,³⁵ yet *The Black Book* still lists only a small number of indigenous people trained in technical disciplines such as audio engineers (13), boom swingers (4), camera operators (25), or costume designers (3), and there currently are no unit or location managers or staging and prop personnel listed.³⁶ A comprehensive case study concerning the machinery of non-indigenous mediascapes and their influence on indigenous filmmaking has been published by Thomas G. Donovan and Brody T. Lorraine, who investigated the role the AFC played in scuttling the commercial success of the finally unreleased film *Jindalee Lady* of 1992, the first feature directed by an Aboriginal artist, Brian Syron: according to their research, the AFC preferred the first Aboriginal feature film to be directed by Tracey Moffatt and through the publication of Marcia Langton's *Well, I heard in on the Radio and I saw it on the Television...*, in which *Jindalee Lady* received a rather devastating review, the AFC attempted [...] to change the course of history, devalue and diminish Syron's moral copyright in his work and undermine Donobri's 1992-1993 promotional strategy for *Jindalee Lady*. The AFC implied that Syron's place in Aboriginal feature film history, as the first Aboriginal feature film director, was a false provenance [...].³⁷

Certainly, the mediascapes surrounding Aboriginal filmmaking in Australia and elsewhere still decide which artistic product finally becomes an object of critical analysis, but the socio-economic circumstances described above are not the only controversial subject of anthropological research. Equally contested are issues of form and content when it comes to the appropriation of Western media technologies. In his 1986 report on indigenous television at a Warlpiri community in Yuendumu, Eric Michaels gives explicit detail of how Western mass media seem incompatible with traditional information networks: »Mass Media are logically and practically the inverse of the personal Aboriginal information exchange system.«³⁸ Particularly principles of secrecy regarding the Law, the entire body of knowledge governing local resources, custom and conduct, philosophy and science, and its transmission may be violated through public display of footage, as Michaels argues, since not every member of the community has the same rights to know, to hear,

35 Cf. Baxter and Gallasch 43.

36 Cf. *The Black Book* path: The Directory-Category.

37 Thomas DONOVAN and Brody T. LORRAINE, *Media Ethics, an Aboriginal Film and the Australian Film Commission* (New York: Writers Club P, 2002) 91.

38 Eric MICHAELS, *The Aboriginal Invention of Television in Central Australia 1982-1986* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1986) 5.

or to speak of something.³⁹ According to his research, the very idea of fiction cannot be incorporated into Aboriginal storytelling and its narration of truth, and there are fundamental differences between Aboriginal songs, in which moments of special significance may be repeated and elaborated on if necessary, and Western linear narratives with their ongoing plots.⁴⁰ As David MacDougall points out, both underlying narrative structures and visual imagery of Western fiction are essentially alien to Aboriginal modes of discourse.⁴¹

Yet as much as media and its mass distribution contradict Aboriginal Law and orality insofar as the preservation of stories through space and time may subvert secrecy and mortuary rites (images of deceased persons may be displayed), Eric Michaels nevertheless sees a potential for translating ritual relations into video production: traditional distinctions of one group performing and another one directing oral songs are repeated in the dichotomy of behind/in front of the camera.⁴² A number of indigenous voices support the view held by Michaels and believe that the use of moving images continues both Aboriginal visual and oral traditions and transforms them into a new form of storytelling.⁴³ An example of how white technology continues traditional communication channels is given by Bangana Wunungmurra, cultural adviser to BRACS, Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme:

At Gapuwiyak there is a place called Warrkwarrkbuyngu [sic] that the Lyalanmirri Gupapuyungu clan own. At this place back in the time of creation lived what we call a *mokuy*, or an ancestral being. This *mokuy* had a *dhadadal*, a special type of *yidaki* [didgeridoo], which it blew to give signals to other *mokuy* in other clan countries. [...] Today at Gapuwiyak we tell our elders that the Warrkwarrkbuyngu Yolngu Radio and Video is like the *dhadadal* signalling for other Yirritja *mokuy*.⁴⁴

Apart from the incorporation of mass media into remote communities' traditions and Law, cinematic features which are screened in theatres across Australia and the

39 Cf. Michaels, *Aboriginal Invention of Television* 3–5.

40 Cf. Michaels, *Aboriginal Invention of Television* 46–8.

41 Cf. MacDougall 54.

42 Cf. Eric MICHAELS, *For a Cultural Future: Francis Jupurrurla makes TV at Yuendumu*, Art and Criticism Monograph Series 3 (Melbourne: Artspace, 1987) 35, 46.

43 Cf. for example Philip DUTCHAK, »Black Screens,« *Cinema Papers* 87 (1992): 48, Langton 9, Lester BOSTOCK, Foreword, *Music/Image/Text: Indigenous Media of Canada and Australia*, spec. issue of *Australian-Canadian Studies* 14 (1996): xx, and Rosemary van den BERG, »Aboriginal Storytelling and Writing,« *Altitude* 6 (2005) (<http://www.api-network.com/cgi-bin/altitude21c/fly? page=Issue6&n=2>) par. 8.

44 Johnny BARRARRA, Bangana WUNUNGMURRA, and Jennifer DEGER, »Warrkwarrkbuyngu Media: Yolngu Culture and Balanda Technology,« *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*, ed. Sylvia Kleinert and Margo Neale (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000) 308; emphasis in the original.

globe also continue the rich tradition of visual and oral arts. In their contribution to *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*, tellingly entitled »Painting with Light: Australian Indigenous Cinema«, Ian Bryson, Margaret Burns, and Marcia Langton argue that »[t]he emergence of an Indigenous film industry [...] was not simply a reaction to earlier melodrama or ethnographic cinema, but a profound renaissance of Aboriginal visual arts in new media, including film and video«. ⁴⁵ For them, film offers new possibilities to transgress the boundaries of European stylistics, and a »multifaceted medium like film can do some measure of justice to the multidimensional realities of Aboriginal philosophy«. ⁴⁶

Thus countering the gaze of the white camera, indigenous filmmaking is historically rooted in ethnographic film, which from the early days of cinematography onwards determined the representation of Aboriginal people and their culture on screen. ⁴⁷ For Fatimah Tobing Rony the narratives of ethnographic film are closely linked to those of the horror film, an argument she comprehensively illustrates by contrasting the storylines of *Dragon Lizards of Komodo: The Expedition to the Lost World of the Dutch East Indies*, a short film showing an ethnographic expedition to Komodo, and *King Kong*, the master narrative of the monster horror film. ⁴⁸ She then argues, taking into account Noël Carroll's reasoning that horror stories are driven by curiosity which seeks proof of the monster and wants to disclose its origins, identity, and purposes, ⁴⁹ that »[i]t is this desire for proof by observation that links the ethnographic film to the horror film: from its inception, the efficacy of ethnographic film was believed to derive from its status as pure observation, pure inscription, evidence for the archive«. ⁵⁰ In this obsession with presenting visible evidence, the ethnographic film also supplements Western *historiography*, a master discourse successfully challenged by Aboriginal writers, as especially the analysis of Kim Scott's *Benang* shows, and at the same time continues Gothic discourses of the »Other«.

The very same kind of (mis-)representation is repeated in feature films, as Peter Krausz shows, who counts only »around fifty films [out of over 1.000 feature films]

45 Ian BRYSON, Margaret BURNS, and Marcia LANGTON, »Painting with Light: Australian Indigenous Cinema«, *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*, ed. Sylvia Kleinert and Margo Neale (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000) 301.

46 Bryson, Burns, and Langton 304.

47 For a comprehensive literature review and assessment of the history of visual anthropology, see Juan Francisco SALAZAR, »Imperfect Media: The Poetics of Indigenous Media in Chile«, diss., U of Western Sydney, 2004, 23 June 2008 (<http://library.uws.edu.au/adt-NUWS/public/adt-NUWS20061218.093536/index.html>) 58–75.

48 Cf. Fatimah Tobing RONY, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham: Duke UP, 1996) 163–6.

49 Cf. Noël CARROLL, *The Philosophy of Horror: or Paradoxes of the Heart* (London: Routledge, 1990) 182.

50 Rony, *The Third Eye* 170.

that represent Aborigines in any way at all within the narrative«⁵¹ – taking into account the recent burst of both Aboriginal and white films dealing with indigenous subjects, however, this number needs a thorough revision.⁵² In his analysis of Australian feature films Krausz detects certain patterns of Gothic representation: while early movies such as *Uncivilised* made use of Aboriginal people only as menacing black hordes in the background, especially the 1980s saw a commodification of Aboriginal myths and legends to advance plots of dark magic and violence.⁵³ A similar misappropriation of Aboriginal traditions is identified by Alan McKee, who pays particular attention to Aboriginal representations in horror movies in which he sees the Aboriginal most often articulated in terms of the supernatural, i.e., Enlightenment's primitive ›Other‹. According to his line of thought, this supernatural associated with Aboriginal characters is an essentially white kind of supernatural.⁵⁴ Thus, he argues, »Aboriginal religion is reduced to a mere part of a generalized, Western-based ›shamanism‹. [...] The dangerous difference of Aboriginality is controlled by articulating it within well-known Western narratives of what is unknown«. ⁵⁵ Here, horror movies reiterate those techniques and topics already familiar from colonial Gothic writing by rendering the Aboriginal invisible and commodifying Aboriginal culture. As I will show, Aboriginal filmmakers appropriate, transgress, and ›displace‹-en-scène recognizable elements of the horror film in a transformation of fictionalized Gothic ethnography, thus exorcizing the colonial past and reconstructing Aboriginal identity within and outside the boundaries of a new medium of storytelling. Like the written examples of Aboriginal Gothic, the films I chose for my analysis differ considerably from one another in their presentation and transformation of the European Gothic tradition, once more showing the rich diversity of dialogic engagement with Australia's colonial past.

Introduced as a traditional ghost story on the DVD cover's blurb, *Plains Empty* from the start prepares its audience for a conventional Gothic story. The audience is right at the beginning met with eerie music and sounds which provide the score for screenings of the titular plains during sunset, empty but for a few mounds – a truly Australian Gothic mise-en-scène announced with the words »This place is dead« (*PE* 00:36 mins):

51 Krausz 90.

52 For resources concerning Australian films with Aboriginal content visit *The Black Book* path: The Library-Search, »Indigenous Content on *australianscreen*,« *australian screen*, National Film and Sound Archive, 2008, 18 Aug. 2008 (<http://australianscreen.com.au/indigenous/>), and »Australian Aboriginal Movies and Films,« *Creative Spirits*, Jens-Uwe Korff, 2008, 18 Aug. 2008 (<http://www.creativespirits.info/resources/movies/>).

53 Cf. Krausz 90, 94.

54 Cf. McKee 200.

55 McKee 201.

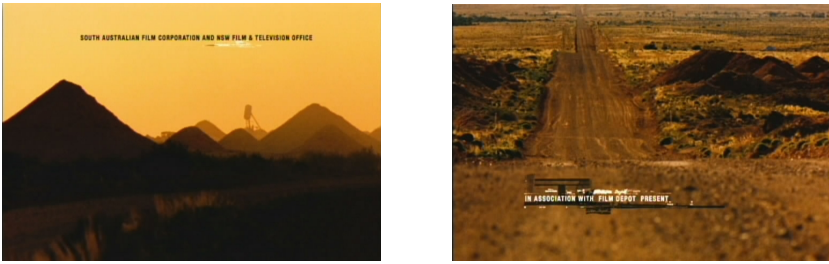


Figure 2: Opening credits, coloured in a dusty, brownish red (*PE* 00:00 mins–00:21 mins)

Against this desolate ochre backdrop of a Southern Australian mining site, quite a Bayntonian setting unfolds: there is the lonely woman, Sam, left alone in a shabby house which is situated within those ghostly plains of nowhere. Then there are »mad people 'round here« (*PE* 01:43 mins–01:44 mins), a sinister and strange neighbour, a horde of leering male patrons at the local bar, and, in reminiscence of popular Australian hitchhiking horrors, a car breaking down in the middle of the night. Unlike the famous drover's wife, however, Sam cannot even rely on a dog, as her Rottweiler T-Bone disappears chasing her boyfriend's ute and leaves her entirely on her own. Sam's position as vulnerable Gothic heroine is even more emphasized when she drives into town only to find the bar an all-male place in which the sight of a lonely woman provokes several obscene gestures. Here, the role of women as sexual objects of the male gaze is exemplified in the character of the dressy bar woman in her tight leather pants and semi-transparent blouse – a role Sam rejects with her comfortable clothing:



Figure 3: Sexualized clothing styles (*PE* 03:23 mins–03:28 mins and 02:19 mins–02:25 mins)

Into this well-known narrative of Australian horrors and the sexualized Gothic victim then intrudes the ghost of an Aboriginal girl. Superimposed over the filmed landscape, the spectral image of the girl addresses Sam with sad and entreating looks:



Figure 4: The ghost (*PE* 04:49 mins)

In what seems an all-too familiar strategy to expose the damsel to distress, Sam swerves to avoid the ghost girl and her car skids along the gravel road and breaks down. She then starts walking home alone through the nighty plains, aptly accompanied by an eerie musical score. Thus being an easy prey for the Gothic villain, Sam embodies the vulnerability of the victim which soon will be faced with the perpetrator's omnipotence. Suddenly, a car appears on the road, a scene which deliberately evokes pictures of popular urban legends of hitchhiking murders: at first, only the headlights of the ute are visible, and when the car stops, the camera adopts Sam's gaze, looking through the rear window at the driver's back. The camera then pans to the side window of the passenger seat, but the driver's face remains invisible in the darkness. He offers Sam a lift home, which she reluctantly accepts. It is only when they start a conversation that the driver's face is illuminated and shown to the audience: it is Sam's neighbour, who had already been introduced by her boyfriend as »that old prick« (*PE* 01:45 mins–01:47) and one of the mad people. Yet instead of turning into a murderous old madman unleashed, the neighbour drops Sam safely at her place. Here, the expectations of the audience are thwarted, a ploy which on the one hand breaks with traditional Gothic plots of the female victim and on the other hand opens up a space for an Aboriginal Gothic to unfold.

The spectral figure of the little girl later returns, once cleaning the floor of Sam's shack and next emerging from a make-shift mineshaft behind the hut, her unexplained presence haunting Sam in her loneliness. Taking up the sonic structure of the beginning, the girl's spectral appearance is supported by a chilling high-pitched crescendo paralleling her ascent from the mineshaft, shot as a bottomless black hole with only the girl's lamp casting diegetic light.

Her appearance becomes all the more disturbing when, in classic Gothic fashion and visual imitation of the motif of the found manuscript, Sam discovers a box of photos in a shed behind her hut, one of which contains the girl's picture. As it seems, Sam is led there on purpose: at first, the door of the shed is locked, but after Sam had gone to investigate what seems to be a dog's howling, she finds the door open. Here, the shots play with well-known patterns of horror movies: whereas the

locked shed, like its surrounding landscape, is tinged in bright sunlight, the open door looms gloomily against an artificially bright sky. Thus the audience's attention is drawn to the dark door and its uncanny change. Inside the shed, providence once more strikes in the form of a small tin falling down, directing Sam's attention to a box on the floor, illuminated through the open door as if by a spotlight, which holds the key:



Figure 5: The use of darkness and light directs the audience's attention (*PE* 11:09 mins–11:15 mins and 11:35 mins–11:43 mins)

In the course of the narrative, these classic Gothic structures, which are emphasized with the help of cinematic lighting, are combined with issues of white and black power relations, Sam's strange neighbour being another point in case: on the one hand, his character recalls the wise old man – the post-production script even lists him as »old man« – operating as *deus ex machina*, a familiar Gothic device of advancing the plot and revealing the hidden truth so that rightful order may be restored. Yet on the other hand, the very story he recounts tells of the marginal role Aboriginal domestics hold in a white society – a situation which itself needs to be challenged in order to achieve restoration through transformation:

SAM: Can you tell me about the photo?

OLD MAN: Wilson owned this land. He owned her, too. [...]

SAM: Tell me more about this Wilson fella.

OLD MAN: Wilson, huh! What do you want to know about that old bastard for? Hated everyone and everything ... Except that mongrel dog of his. When it went missing she had to go out and find it. Never did. And then she went missing.

SAM: Then what?

OLD MAN: Well, like I said, we live with the heat, with all the flies, live with the dust. And we put up with the ghosts.

(*PE* 20:00 mins–21:10 mins)

Constructed by the neighbour as the familiar ghost of the repressed returning to unsettle the white community, the little Aboriginal girl here embodies the black maid so easily exchangeable and who is defined only through her position as domestic hand without being allowed an identity of her own.

Gothic patterns are further played with in the night scenes of *Plains Empty*, which start with Sam's generator failing and requiring her to go outside her hut – another classic scene of the innocent victim walking outside into the night – despite knowing better – and then falling prey to whatever lurks in the darkness. This Gothic commonplace is again emphasized by the lighting used in this scene, which only consists of an artificially beaming moon as backlight and Sam's feeble torch light:



Figure 6: Sam restarting the generator in diegetic lighting (*PE* 08:19 mins–08:45)

At the end of the scene, however, the generator starts working again and a light bulb illuminates the shed, followed by a shot of the bright morning sun, a frame which ostensibly signals the end of a Gothic night and averted peril.

Yet instead of conforming with the familiar expectations raised by these frames, Beck Cole distorts them and holds them against the audience by adding sounds which entirely contradict the images on screen: whereas the nightly scenes only operate with diegetic sounds, as for example a low wind, the fan slowly stopping, or the generator gradually restarting, it is the next shot, the extreme long shot of the landscape the next morning, which features non-diegetic sound. Consisting of low music infused with the distinct sounds of panpipes, the musical score accompanying the seemingly safe light of the day creates a menacing presence of haunting. Throughout the film, similar extreme long shots of the landscape convey an image of security only to be negated by the same uncanny sounds already heard at the beginning of *Plains Empty* (cf. *PE* 10:21 mins–10:30 mins, 16:50 mins–16:57 mins, 18:29 mins–18:32 mins). Here, Beck Cole plays with notions of what Alan McKee sees as a distinct feature of Australian horror films, the equation of the

Aboriginal with a terror of place.⁵⁶ In a self-referential deconstruction, Beck Cole filmically reveals the colonial shortcomings of both ethnographic and horror films with regard to this »unsafe ground« of Aboriginal relation to the land now settled by whites:



Figure 7: Unsafe ground (PE 15:33 mins)

In *Plains Empty*, this anxiety of place is further addressed through the character of Sam's neighbour, whom she encounters ranting outside his shack and shouting into the darkness one night (cf. PE 13:26 mins–14:30 mins), presumably also haunted by the ghost of the little girl. In a picture-perfect mimicry of the settler unsettled by unfinished businesses of the past, the neighbour gives in to the haunting and thus conforms to white perceptions of the uncanny home. For him, the ghost embodies the vengeful spirit of the European tradition which in Australia is well known from colonial Gothic stories such as Ernest Favenc's »Doomed« of 1899, in which the ghost of an Aboriginal woman haunts the men who have killed her. The neighbour's constant references to place and belonging in his dialogues with Sam then show how Beck Cole cleverly has the past melt into the present in order to explore issues of place and identity, at first after the old man has picked her up on the road:

SAM: Did you see anyone else on the road?

OLD MAN: Just you.

SAM: Because I saw a little girl; [pause] I think she was lost.

OLD MAN: There's a few of them out here.

(PE 06:41 mins–06:53 mins)

And later, after he had told Sam the story of Wilson's girl and how she went missing when in search of his dog, he goes on:

56 Cf. McKee 202; for a discussion of how colonial ghost stories reflect current issues of place and belonging in literature, see p. 17.

SAM: What does she want from me?

OLD MAN: Well, how the hell would I know? Perhaps you ought to leave –

(*PE* 21:16 mins–21:25 mins)

Characterized as lost and un-belonging, Sam, from the old neighbour's point of view, unsettles his existence and embodies the uncanny return much like the ghost girl does, whose story bears an eerie resemblance to Sam's: like the girl, Sam searches her dog, T-Bone, who disappears right at the beginning of the film (cf. *PE* 02:02 mins–02:08 mins), and echoing the girl's death, Sam almost falls into an abandoned mineshaft (cf. *PE* 15:53 mins–16:09 mins) herself. On the other hand, Sam is equally disturbed by the girl's ghost, at first re-enacting the old man's behaviour, culminating in her getting drunk and shouting into the darkness (cf. *PE* 17:08 mins–18:29 mins), a night after which Sam packs her bag and wants to leave. These fragments epitomize her own uncertainty of identity and place, yet instead of giving in to it, Sam decides to take action and to literally unearth the secrets buried beneath the plains' mineshafts. She descends into the mineshaft behind her hut, leaving the audience with a 40-second shot of a black hole in the pebbly ground before she returns with a lamp in her hands, the very same lamp the Aboriginal girl carried when Sam first encountered her on the nightly road. Again, the sound used in this scene furthers the Gothic mood of the *mise-en-scène*, yet operates inverse to prior scenes, as the menacing cello-like sounds do not accompany the landscape but the dark entrance to the mineshaft. The sounds then change to only the wind howling and breaking the eerie silence, until finally only Sam's off-screen sobbing is heard:



Figure 8: A black hole – the audience cannot witness the story unfolding underground (*PE* 22:30 mins–23:08 mins)

Hidden from the camera, the former ›lens of power‹,⁵⁷ and thus rendered invisible to the viewer's gaze, Sam uncovers the story of the Aboriginal girl which the audience can only guess: as it seems, the girl fell into the abandoned shaft while she was searching for her master's dog. Yet nobody ever cared enough to search for her, instead, she was left to die only metres away from the hut Wilson lived in – not she as an individual mattered, but the tasks she could perform. In a clever side blow on ethnographic documentaries, which seek to capture every tiny bit of Aboriginal life and culture on film for their white audience to witness, Beck Cole ignores the audience and deliberately bars it from witnessing the closure of the narrative.

By keeping the Aboriginal characters off-screen, *Plains Empty* at the surface replays colonial patterns of *absence*, but on a different layer transforms them into a powerful Aboriginal *presence* by excluding the audience from the plot. The Gothic nature of the story is transformed as well, from familiarly uncanny patterns of landscape and un-settlement to a Gothic rendering of the ›haunted earth‹ of ›mining towns [...], where colonial forces excavate and cut into the Indigenous soil, unearthing, generating, but also burying, violent histories‹.⁵⁸ Denoting a resolution to the Gothic threat(s) addressed in the film, the ending then features a sunlit *mise-en-scène* underscored by requiem-like piano sounds (cf. *PE* 23:49 mins–24:06 mins). Unlike earlier scenes of the film in which the musical score accompanying extreme long shots of the titular plains consisted of eerily menacing sounds, the score and fast-motion shots of the next dawn – which stand in sharp contrast to the Gothic sunset of the film's beginning – convey a sense of relief and peace, thus marking the end of the Gothic. The girl's ghost is set free in traditional fashion through a proper burial, and at the same time, her Aboriginal identity is acknowledged in Sam's quest to reveal the girl's story. Through its cunning use and *non*-distortion of familiar Gothic tropes – the innocent and seemingly vulnerable woman and the unsettling ghost of vengeance – *Plains Empty* comments on the everyday Gothic inherent in the relationship of white and black Australia: the perception of the ghost as an unsettling Gothic menace by white Australians is contrasted with Sam's desire to uncover the girl's individual story. This challenge of white (mis-)representations is most obviously expressed in the DVD's front cover, on which Sam has replaced Wilson in what seems an exact reproduction of the photo she finds in the film, with the sun seemingly reflected in the form of the

57 ›Lens of power‹ is a term used by Kerstin Knopf in her recent study on indigenous filmmaking in North America, cf. Kerstin KNOPF, *Decolonizing the Lens of Power: Indigenous Films in North America*, diss. U of Greifswald, 2003, Cross/Cultures 100 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008).

58 Gerry TURCOTTE, ›Spectrality in Indigenous Women's Cinema: Tracey Moffatt and Beck Cole,‹ *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 43.1 (2008): 17.

Aboriginal flag.⁵⁹



Figure 9: Sam in Wilson's place (*PE* DVD Cover)

Using the Gothic patterns visible on the surface of *Plains Empty*, which enact a conventional ghost story and include a number of stock elements well known from both European and Australian Gothic tales, Beck Cole explores current concerns of place and identity in a clever deception of audience expectations. Through her editing of Gothic imagery, sound, and plot she transforms worn-out Aboriginal (mis-)representations into an Aboriginal Gothic of place and self which acknowledges the ghosts of the past instead of keeping them buried. Instead of allowing the repressed history to uncannily return, *Plains Empty* embraces the past and has it melt into the present in order to exorcize its spectral reminders of identity and belonging.

59 Gerry Turcotte notes this similarity of the sun's reflection with the Aboriginal flag in Turcotte, »Indigenous Women's Cinema« fn. 41. Nevertheless, he admits it might be nothing but a mere optical illusion.

5. Trans-Muting Cinema: Tracey Moffatt's Films

a. Family Melodrama Assimilated: *Night Cries*

This last chapter of my thesis is concerned with a critical analysis of two films by visual artist Tracey Moffatt, her short film *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* of 1989¹ and her 1993 feature *beDevil*. Notwithstanding Moffatt's repeated demands to be viewed as an internationally renowned artist regardless of her Aboriginal heritage,² her work often deals with indigenous issues and questions of black and white relationships. Drawing on manifold aesthetic icons from both white and black Australia in her photo series and films, Moffatt presents her agenda of life in contemporary Australia in highly stylized terms. In her short film *Night Cries*, she envisions a possible sequel to Charles Chauvel's Australian classic *Jedda* of 1955³ and engages with the older movie's problematic ideologies of race and power relations. *Jedda* is the story of the orphaned Aboriginal girl Jedda, who is taken on as her own child by Sarah McMann and who is shown to embody the tension between a white education and an Aboriginal parentage. In the course of the movie, Jedda is kidnapped by Marbuk, a tribal Aboriginal man, and brought to his clan despite his knowing he is breaking Aboriginal Law. Having gone insane, Marbuk then kills Jedda by pushing her down a rock only seconds before her fiancé-in-waiting can reach her. In *Night Cries*, then, Tracey Moffatt creates a what-if scenario, telling the story of a middle-aged Aboriginal woman who is bound to care for her dying white mother, both of them being entrapped within their histories.

The technicolor aesthetics of *Night Cries*' studio landscape and interior are set against the chilling soundscape of the titular cries, thus creating a cinematic style torn between melodrama and the Gothic. Yet what at first seem to be two diametrically opposed modes of writing share many similarities in their original form. Not only did both stage melodrama and the Gothic novel develop in the same age of social and political unrest – Jean-Jacques Rousseau's play *Pygmalion*, credited as the first melodrama, was written in 1762 and first performed in 1770; its Gothic counterpart, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, was published in 1764 –, but they are also, as Peter Brooks points out, concerned with the same subjects:

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- 1 All stills from and comments on *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* refer to Tracey MOFFATT, dir., *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy*, 1989, DVD (Ronin Films, 2004); this edition is referred to in the text as (NC mins.).
 - 2 Cf. Patricia MELLENCAMP, *Five Ages of Film Feminism* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1995) 259.
 - 3 All stills from and comments on *Jedda* refer to *Jedda*, 1955, dir. Charles Chauvel, perf. Ngarla Kunoth, Robert Tudawali, and Betty Suttor, The Chauvel Collection, DVD (ScreenSound Australia, 2004); this edition is referred to in the text as (J mins.).

Melodrama shares many characteristics with the Gothic novel, and not simply in the subjects that were traded back and forth between the two genres. It is equally preoccupied with nightmare states, the clausturation and thwarted escape, with innocence buried alive and unable to voice its claim to recognition.⁴

His list of popular connotations of the term ›melodrama‹ reads like a description of the Gothic novel:

the indulgence of strong emotionalism; moral polarization and schematization; extreme states of being, situations, actions; overt villainy, persecution of the good, and final reward of virtue; inflated and extravagant expression; dark plottings, suspense, breathtaking peripety.⁵

These Manichaeic dichotomies, which lie at the heart of both melodrama and the Gothic alike, in classical Hollywood cinema then constituted the basic framework of thrillers, action films, or adventure movies – films which, according to Steve Neale, were considered melodramas by the industry.⁶ In film studies, however, quite a different concept came to be understood under the category of melodrama, one which is epitomized in the 1950's family melodramas. Their major features indeed have little in common with Brooks's characterization of the stage melodrama, and Thomas Schatz describes the family melodrama as »centered upon the nuclear unit, and by extension, upon the home within a familiar (usually small-town) American community«. ⁷ As Schatz further argues, the nuclear family provides an ideal background for voicing 1950s America's anxieties over gender roles, generation relationships, class, and society.⁸ Within this classic structure, highly emotional moments are rendered symbolically overfraught and emphasized through sound before the story culminates in a happy ending, as Mercer and Shingler outline in their basic model of the cinematic family melodrama.⁹ It is especially its distinctive use of sound and highly developed mise-en-scène which constitutes an important aspect of the family melodrama, a term which in its original sense means a play endorsed with music. This is summed up by Geoffrey Nowell-Smith who considers

4 Peter BROOKS, »The Melodramatic Imagination,« 1976, *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film and Television Melodrama*, ed. Marcia Landy (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1991) 63.

5 Brooks 58.

6 Cf. Steve NEALE, »Melo Talk: On the Meaning and Use of the Term ›Melodrama‹ in the American Trade Press,« *Velvet Light Trap* 32 (1993): 69.

7 Thomas SCHATZ, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1981) 226.

8 Cf. Schatz 227.

9 Cf. John MERCER and Martin SHINGLER, *Melodrama: Genre, Style, Sensibility*, Short Cuts: Introductions to Film Studies (London: Wallflower P, 2004) 13.

both the visual and sonic style of film melodrama as the only means to express the emotional excess which is repressed in the film's narrative:

What is characteristic of the melodrama, both in its original sense and the modern one, is the way the excess is siphoned off. The undischarged emotion which cannot be accommodated within the action, subordinated as it is to the demands of family/lineage/inheritance, is traditionally expressed in the music and, in the case of film, in certain elements of the *mise-en-scène*. That is to say, music and *mise-en-scène* do not just heighten the emotionality of an element of the action; to some extent they substitute for it.¹⁰

Thomas Elsaesser, commonly credited as the first to have used the term family melodrama, similarly argues that music in melodrama »is both functional (i.e., of structural significance) and thematic (i.e., belonging to the expressive content) because used to formulate certain moods – sorrow, violence, dread, suspense, happiness«. ¹¹ As to the *mise-en-scène* of the melodrama, he states that

[m]elodrama is iconographically fixed by the claustrophobic atmosphere of the bourgeois home and/or the small-town setting, its emotional pattern is that of panic and latent hysteria, reinforced stylistically by a complex handling of space in interiors [...] to the point where the world seems totally predetermined and pervaded by ›meaning‹ and interpretable signs.¹²

The emotions thus communicated through music and style have their origin in the conflicts seething below the surface of the nuclear family, conflicts which centre around patriarchal dominance.

The generic conflicts played out in the family melodrama can be analysed using the work of feminist film theorists like Laura Mulvey and E. Ann Kaplan. Laura Mulvey identifies three different instances of the male gaze at work in cinema: first, there is the gaze of the camera, then there is that of the audience which is made to identify with the third form of the male gaze, that within the filmic narrative itself.¹³ The male gaze here determines the cinematic representation of women and reduces the female appearance to the visual and erotic, a process Mulvey characterizes as

10 Geoffrey NOWELL-SMITH, »Minelli and Melodrama,« 1977, *Movies and Methods: An Anthology*, ed. Bill Nichols, vol. II (Berkeley: U of California P, 1985) 193; emphasis in the original.

11 Thomas ELSAESSER, »Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama,« 1972, *Movies and Methods: An Anthology*, ed. Bill Nichols, vol. II (Berkeley: U of California P, 1985) 172.

12 Elsaesser 183.

13 Cf. Laura MULVEY, »Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,« 1975, *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, 6th ed. (New York: Oxford UP, 2004) 847.

»to-be-looked-at-ness«.¹⁴ But it is exactly this male concentration on women as erotic objects, failing, for example, to notice women as mothers, which for E. Ann Kaplan »leav[es] a gap not ›colonized‹ by man, through which [...] woman can begin to create a discourse, a voice, a place for herself as subject«.¹⁵ She draws on a feministically appropriated usage of psychoanalysis to explain the subversive potential of the role of the mother and her relationship with the daughter, both silenced and marginalized in patriarchy.¹⁶ In her analysis of the representation of mothers and daughters in female-oriented melodramas, Jackie Byars expresses the same dissatisfaction with classical theories of psychoanalysis when it comes to those melodramas' focus on female communities.¹⁷ Those films, she argues, dissolve the monolithic coherence of male-centred filmic narrative: although they still depend on the completion of the classic triad of the nuclear family, they nevertheless position women not only in relation to and as the men's ›Other‹, but also in relation to other women.¹⁸

A popular example – and an adaptation itself – of this sub-genre of the family melodrama is Joshua Logan's *Picnic* of 1956,¹⁹ which is analysed by film scholars in terms of the virile male intruder-redeemer figure and which is also appropriated in the opening sequences of *Night Cries*.²⁰ *Picnic* stars Kim Novak and William Holden and focuses on Hal Carter, a former college football star turned drifter, whose arrival in a small town in rural Kansas causes considerable sexual unease among a group of single women.²¹ Although covering not more than 24 hours, the story of *Picnic* calls into question various issues of family, sexual relations, and class. This well-known melodramatic classic is made visible in *Night Cries* in the form of a textual quote which in its whiteness disrupts the previously black screen. The quote is taken from a scene in which Rosemary, the middle-aged maiden school-teacher, enjoys the sunset of July 4th with her suitor Howard. Moffatt, however, deliberately leaves out the part of Howard commenting on Rosemary's observation. Thus she eliminates Rosemary's only hope to escape spinsterhood and to conform to male-dominated standards of the married woman. Most of the scene in *Picnic* features the view of a magnificent sunset and the musical score is made of a choir

14 Mulvey 841; emphasis in the original.

15 E. Ann KAPLAN, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera* (London: Methuen, 1983) 2.

16 Cf. Kaplan, *Women and Film* 2, 201–2.

17 Cf. Jackie BYARS, *All that Hollywood Allows: Re-Reading Gender in 1950s Melodrama* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1991) 148–9.

18 Cf. Byars 157–8.

19 All stills from and comments on *Picnic* refer to *Picnic*, 1956, dir. Joshua Logan, perf. Kim Novak, William Holden, and Rosalind Russell, DVD (Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2006); this edition is referred to in the text as (*PI* mins.).

20 See for extended analyses Schatz 228–33 and Byars 146–58.

21 An anecdote has it that William Holden was made to shave his chest as not to cause impure thoughts in female moviegoers.

singing the popular tune of Caroline Norton's »Juanita«. In *Night Cries*, however, it is only the words which recall the setting of *Picnic*, as the quote intrudes the all-black opening frame which up to then only featured indiscernible yet chilling sounds.

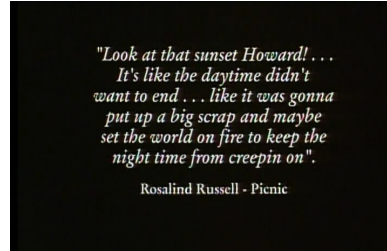
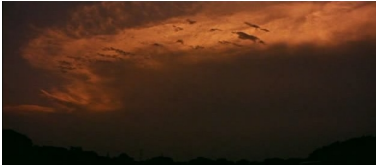


Figure 10: Sunset of *Picnic* (PI 52:57 mins–53:08 mins) and its transcript in *Night Cries* (NC 00:57 mins–01:12 mins)

Here, Tracey Moffatt already begins her Gothic endeavour of assimilating 1950s family romance: instead of presenting a crowded mise-en-scène in which emotionally charged music substitutes for narrative action, she does without any scenery and music at all and uses a nocturnal non-diegetic soundscape to deconstruct the cultural meaning of the quote. The Gothic then culminates in the words fading again to a black screen while a crescendo of animal cries mingled with human screams announces the climax before the film's title appears on screen, written in a classic horror font which recalls various Gothic details such as vampire fangs, batwings, or daggers:

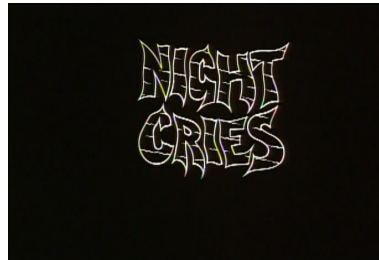


Figure 11: Title recalling standard horror fonts (NC 01:14 mins–01:18 mins)

In order to emphasize the film's opposition to melodrama more clearly, the subtitle then slowly fades in: *A Rural Tragedy*.

Thus setting the mood for a Gothic appropriation of the family melodrama, Tracey Moffatt then goes on to Australianize her agenda by using a hauntingly exact replica of the interior of the McManns' homestead from *Jedda* as main setting.



Figure 12: Interior of the McManns' homestead (*J* 09:54 mins) and its appropriation in *Night Cries* (*NC* 03:28 mins)

Moffatt's explicit reference to Charles Chauvel's film on the one hand further emphasizes her occupation with generic questions of melodrama, but on the other hand also introduces issues of assimilation: it is not only the notion of the male, but also that of the imperial gaze which is challenged through a reworking of their classic examples. As my analysis will show, *Night Cries* Gothicizes both patriarchal ideas as promoted through melodrama and notions of assimilation with genuinely melodramatic means and by deconstructing assimilationist icons.

As E. Ann Kaplan has noted, to make *geographic* sense of the dark and unknown, many films about Africa begin with showing a map – a technique also employed and even expanded in *Jedda*, whose opening title shows a patronizing text superimposed over a map of Australia:

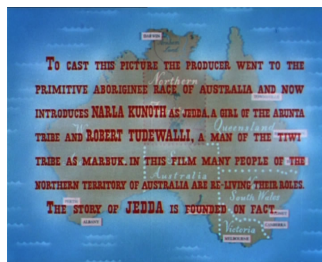


Figure 13: Opening title of *Jedda* (*J* 00:27 mins–00:42 mins)

Besides the prominent metaphor of the map underlying the introductory comment, the words themselves read like a perfect example of patronizing anthropology and white historiography. Furthermore, the first and last words heard in the film are those of a voice-over spoken by the half-caste stockman Joe, played by Paul Clarke

(billed as Paul Reynall) in an act of blackface minstrelsy, a performance tradition of heavily painted white actors portraying black characters in stereotyped and even racist fashion.²² Whereas *Jedda* and *Marbuk*, who both die at the end of the film, are played by Aboriginal actors – a fact of which the opening title shown in figure 13 makes exotic use – Joe is played by a white man in black make-up. This shows how *Jedda* aims at picturing Aboriginal people as a dying race. In both instances of voice-over – and throughout the film –, the voice of the main character, Jedda, is silenced and substituted by a male voice which is made spokesman for the film's attitude towards assimilation: »Was it our right to expect that Jedda, one of a race so mystic and so removed, should be of us in one short lifetime?« (J 1:24:56 mins–1:25:04 mins, own transcript). Repeating the view of Doug McMann, who argues with his wife over the separation of races (cf. J 15:14 mins–17:35 mins), Joe's voice-over once more centres the white male's gaze and perspective and suppresses any female or black agency.

In *Night Cries*, however, that which is marginalized in *Jedda* takes centre stage: the relationship between the white mother and her black foster-child. With the possibility to engage with recent issues of the Stolen Generations, Moffatt's short film focuses on what in both melodrama and *Jedda* has been silenced and in its gruesome explicitness tears their underlying ideologies to pieces. This effect is created quite literally through the cinematic techniques used which resemble sequences of still photographs rather than a filmic narrative: while an extreme close-up pan is used for the first frames shot in the home of the now middle-aged daughter and old mother, the rest of the film is dominated by abrupt cuts. Only this first pan, moving from the broken window to the daughter's unnerved face, then fading into a basket full of laundry and moving on over a range of spoiled food until it finally rests on the the mother's prosthetic eating device (cf. NC 02:16 mins–03:11 mins), has images dissolve into one another and thus conveys the impression of a smooth cinematic rhythm. The rest of the film is disrupted due to shot/reverse-shot editing and fast cutting – in some scenes, the single shots last no longer than two seconds – which alternates between mother and daughter. This lack of continuity editing on the one hand shows how little Tracey Moffatt is concerned with telling a story, but on the other hand, it also conveys a sense of rupture and unease which emphasizes the Gothic of her rendering of continued assimilation.

Through this technique, both black trauma and white nightmares are pitted against each other, most notably in the close-up scenes which shift back and forth between an agonized sleeping mother and her daughter in broad daylight and

22 See for a discussion of Australian blackface minstrelsy Benjamin MILLER, »The Mirror of Whiteness: Blackface in Charles Chauvel's *Jedda*,« *Spectres, Screens, Shadows, Mirrors*, ed. Tanya Dalziell and Paul Genoni, spec. issue of *JASAL* (2007): 140–56 and his forthcoming PhD thesis.

which last no longer than three seconds per cut (cf. *NC* 07:17 mins–07:44 mins):

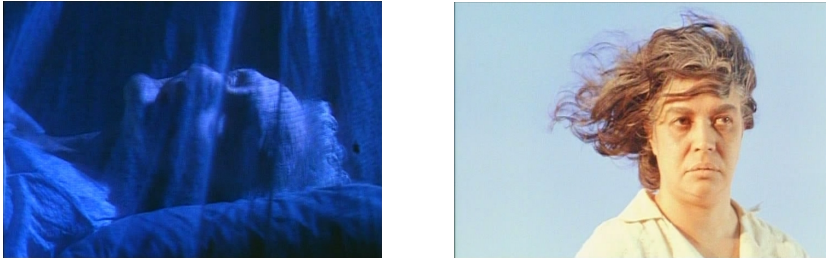


Figure 14: Close-ups of mother and daughter, the gaze turned away from each other (*NC* 07:40 mins–07:44 mins)

Typically used for dialogue situations, shot/reverse-shot editing is usually characterized by shots alternating between characters which face each other.²³ By positioning her characters in exact opposition to the typical pattern, turned away from each other, Tracey Moffatt emphasizes the lack of dialogue between mother and daughter. For E. Ann Kaplan, *Night Cries* is the aesthetic rendering of a dual trauma mutually unnoticed, that of the daughter's childhood and that of the mother's aging – both linked to Australian policies of assimilation.²⁴ As Marcia Langton puts it, the film

play[s] out the worst fantasies of those who took Aboriginal children from their natural parents to assimilate and ›civilise‹ them. Perhaps the worst nightmare of the adoptive parents is to end life with the black adoptive child as the only family, the only one who cares. Moffatt's construction of that nightmare is subversive because the style and materiality of the homestead set is so reminiscent of Aboriginal poverty.²⁵

This dependency on the black child also challenges common white assumptions of always having to care for black people, a reversal which is made apparent again in a direct comparison of *Jedda* and *Night Cries*: in figure 12, Sarah McMann prepares a bottle of milk for the infant Jedda, a scene which is contrasted with the aging mother barely able to eat on her own and depending on her daughter to feed her (cf. *NC* 03:22 mins–03:59 mins). Here, ›the white man's burden‹ has turned into ›the black woman's burden‹.

23 Cf. David BORDWELL and Kristin THOMPSON, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 7th ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2004) 505.

24 Cf. E. Ann KAPLAN, »Trauma, Cinema, Witnessing: Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* and Tracey Moffatt's *Night Cries*,« *Between the Psyche and the Social: Psychoanalytic Social Theory*, ed. Kelly Oliver and Steve Edwin (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002) 109.

25 Langton 47.

The Gothic extent of this trauma is visualized by Moffatt not only through her use of furious and thus discomfiting editing but also through the colour schemes she uses for different parts of her film. While scenes taking place in the present show the vivid technicolor colouring with all its sharply contrasted and intensely saturated hues as well as artificial backgrounds, flashbacks are characterized by their slight blur due to overexposure and less saturated, almost black and white, colouring. By reserving her technicolor aesthetics, which recall the vivid watercolour paintings of Albert Namatjira as much as big 1950s Hollywood productions, for the present, Moffatt explicitly links the contemporary with 1950s family melodrama on a visual level and once more unmasks the questionable cultural ideologies of this genre.

Although equally overfraught with visual symbols as its melodramatic precursors, *Night Cries* still disrupts the inherent structure of the family melodrama and counters its pleasant liaison between sight and sound by adding soundbridges to its abrupt cuts. The sounds work against the images they accompany and prevent a precise imitation of melodrama, thus defying a narrative closure of the film. This distortion of melodramatic compositions is particularly evident in the way the performance of Aboriginal singer Jimmy Little is incorporated into the film: his voice singing his 1963 hit »Royal Telephone« is heard over a black void way before he suddenly appears on screen (cf. *NC* 01:25 mins–02:10 mins for the sound and *NC* 01:35 mins–02:05 mins for Little's appearance). Equally interesting as the relation of sound to picture is the relation of sounds to other sounds preceding and following Little's song. Unlike the abrupt cuts dominating the visual level, Tracey Moffatt lets the song fade smoothly into what is left of the titular cries and then has it, equally smoothly, fade out to a ghostly wind howling over the painted landscape of the studio set. Throughout the film, the visual appearance of Jimmy Little is marked by sounds not fitting its presence: first, his voice is silenced and replaced by a hissing noise resembling that of a radio searching for a proper station (cf. *NC* 10:37 mins–11:01 mins). Then, his figure alternates with images of the little girl crying at the beach while the terrifying shrieks of the seabirds and the agitated drums accompanying them remain a constant sonic menace which culminates in a final thunder before ending in utter silence – all the time completely muting Little's »Royal Telephone« (cf. *NC* 12:47 mins–13:17 mins).

In the character of Jimmy Little, Tracey Moffatt's critique of assimilation and melodrama is most obviously enacted. While the continuous discrepancy between sound and images on the one hand distorts a reading of *Night Cries* as comforting adaptation of melodrama, its use in scenes showing Jimmy Little also reveals the horrors of assimilation. What Laleen Jayamanne refers to as the »aesthetics of

assimilation«²⁶ is Gothicized through equally aesthetic means: the gospel sung by an epitome of successful assimilation is silenced and replaced by static noise and menacing cries. Here, Moffatt's Gothic appropriation of assimilationist melodrama is enacted through sounds which belie the images they accompany.

Besides the deconstruction of Jimmy Little in his capacity as assimilationist icon, his silent intrusions into scenes showing the claustrophobic relationship between mother and daughter also emphasize the appalling reality of assimilation on a personal level. Trauma is pitted against melodrama when the harsh sounds of the whip and the daughter's laughter from the outside break into the quiet comforting lullaby of the music box the mother listens to within the house and then even silences Jimmy Little's mute performance of Elvis Presley's »Love me Tender« (cf. NC 09:40 mins–10:51 mins) – an instance of silencing later repeated in the beach scenes.

Throughout the film, the Gothic soundscape invoked at the beginning and recorded in the film's very title are added to most of the scenes in *Night Cries*, emphasizing the rupture between the audible and the visual. Black screens are filled with ear-piercing shrieks and cries, thus dissociating sound from images and Gothicizing the black void left in Australian history. The aesthetic assimilation of Aboriginal Australian artists in the 1950s and 1960s is countered with equally aesthetic means: the vivid watercolour paintings of Albert Namatjira, which also inspired Carl Kayser's photography in *Jedda*, provide the artistic model for the heavily artificial and colourful backgrounds against which the dire traumas of mother and daughter is pitted, whereas Jimmy Little and his song »Royal Telephone« is usurped and bereft of its intended comforting end. Against this backdrop of deconstructed assimilationist icons the fragments of a relationship between the middle-aged black daughter and her dying white mother unfold.

Although the relationship between mother and daughter takes centre stage and hence resists traditional patriarchal values as communicated in the family melodrama, their relationship is strained due to its similarity to that between Sarah McMann and Jedda. The generic gaps left in *Jedda* are filled in *Night Cries*, yet issues of assimilation remain unresolved. At the same time, the film opens up a space for the revision of Aboriginal representation in white films: the most traumatic instance the daughter is subjected to takes place at the beach, where the little boys cover the little girl in what seems seaweed. On a closer look, however, the seaweed turns out to be film stock which almost strangles the little girl (cf. NC 12:21 mins–12:37 mins). It is the (mis-)representation of Aboriginal people in both ethnographic and fictional films made by white people which in this scene finds its

26 Laleen JAYAMANNE, »»Love me tender, love me true, never let me go«: A Sri Lankan Reading of Tracey Moffatt's *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy*,« *Toward Cinema and its Double: Cross-Cultural Mimesis* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2001) 6.

visible expression in the suffocating menace of the film stock. The intensity of this scene is further heightened through the repetitive shots of the little girl trying to extricate herself from the film stock again and again. Neither her absent mother, who at first is seemingly oblivious to her daughter's hysteria and then suddenly disappears from the rock she was sitting on, nor the silenced Jimmy Little can console the little girl. Here, the wounds of assimilation are violently re-opened through the flashback the now middle-aged daughter suffers.

Yet *Night Cries* eludes absolute meanings and narrative closure and thus defies maintaining the status quo. At the end, the stylistic devices so artfully cultivated throughout the film collapse and leave no noticeable colour scheme to distinguish past and present from each other:

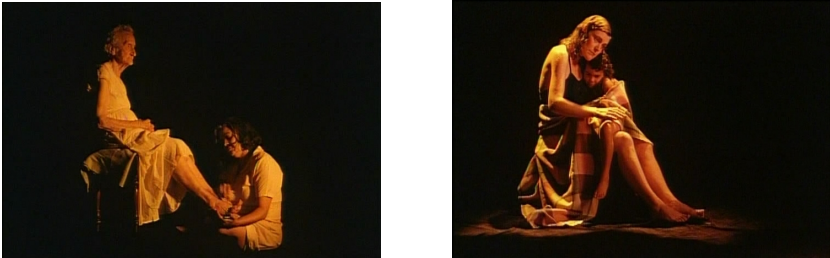


Figure 15: The daughter gently washing her mother's feet (NC 11:01 mins–11:31 mins) and the mother lovingly comforting her daughter (NC 13:17 mins–13:31 mins)

Both present and past instances show the same yellow colouring and feature the same closure of only diegetic sound, which in the first scene is made of the watery sounds and both women slowly humming »Onward Christian Soldiers« and in the second amounts to nothing but silence. There is no soundbridge – except for the last seconds of the second scene, when the low rhythm of a respirator can be heard if the volume is turned to maximum. The sound of the respirator continues in a gradual crescendo as the only sound accompanying the images of an abandoned living room which slowly fades into the night until a baby is heard crying and the daughter seen lying curled next to her mother's dead body (cf. NC 13:31 mins–14:21 mins). The last aerial shot shows mother and daughter in a final scene of sorrow, the daughter's face illuminated by the glow of a single lamp and immersed in the same yellow which was so prominent in the scenes of comfort shown in figure 15:



Figure 16: The daughter curled in foetal position besides her mother's dead body (NC 14:36 mins–15:26 mins)

When the light of the moon fades out, the cries of the baby, which are synchronized with the daughter's movements of sobbing, are slowly drowned by Jimmy Little's voice singing his »Royal Telephone«. Unlike his first performance at the beginning of the movie, however, when he sung an a-capella version, this time the full original recording is heard.

Despite the Gothicized aesthetics of melodrama and assimilation which informs *Night Cries*, the ending avoids a narrative closure of subversion. Instead, it transgresses the constraints of pure critique: Tracey Moffatt here overturns her own stylistic concept of sound being dislocated from images and flashbacks intruding within their own range of colours. My reading of this last scene, however, is undecided. On the one hand, it can be argued that Tracey Moffatt opens up a space for reconciliation which in death is inhabited by both mother and daughter. On the other hand, this last scene may symbolize the ongoing sense of loss and bitterness within contemporary Australian society resulting from a lack of open discussion of the Stolen Generations up to the 1990s, leaving the daughter with her grief as well as unanswered questions.

b. Documentary Appropriated: *beDevil*

i. »Mr Chuck«

A more recognizable kind of Gothic than that of her experimental short *Night Cries* lies at the heart of *beDevil*,²⁷ Tracey Moffatt's first feature film of 1993. *beDevil* is a loosely connected series of three ghost stories all of which deal with recent Australian anxieties about race, history, and identity. In »Mr Chuck« (BD 01:28 mins–25:08 mins), the first of the ghost stories, the ghost of an American GI from World War II is rumoured to haunt the site of his death, a cinema which has been

²⁷ All stills from and comments on *beDevil* refer to Tracey MOFFATT, dir., *beDevil*, 1993, DVD (Ronin Films, 2004); this edition is referred to in the text as (BD mins.). Quotations are own transcripts.

built upon the swamp into which he drove his tank. The second story, »Choo Choo Choo Choo« (BD 25:11 mins–53:53 mins), tells of a ghost train and the little blind girl it killed, whereas »Lovin' the Spin I'm in« (BD 53:54 mins–1:22:49 mins), the final part of the trilogy, is the story of an unhappy and doomed love. The three ghost stories are not told directly but through the narration of present-day characters of diverse origin, a narrative strategy which allows the Gothic to transgress its discursive boundaries and intrude into the documentary. In *beDevil*, the Gothic not only stems from its spectral embodiment but also from what is almost casually dropped by the people telling the ghost stories. By combining images of what looks like video-shot interview situations with seemingly film-shot sequences of the past, Tracey Moffatt creates a filmic argument between past and present, film and video, all aspects of which are pervaded by an Aboriginal Gothic.

Especially the concept of documentary and its anthropological equivalent is scrutinized in Gothic terms in *beDevil*: through the use of documentary footage in »Mr Chuck« and »Choo Choo Choo Choo«, Tracey Moffatt challenges the representation of Aboriginal people in ethnographic media.²⁸ Mixed with standard Gothic tropes, the genre of documentary gains an ominous shadow which emphasizes the dark undercurrent of this mediator of white historiography. Already in the first minutes of *beDevil*, the stark contrast between a stereotypical horror movie and unemotional documentary is evoked: *beDevil* starts as if shot from the point of view of a crocodile slowly and noiselessly moving through the scrub and swamp, ready to attack the three Aboriginal children sitting on a log (cf. BD 01:28 mins–04:36 mins). This reptilian movement of the camera is accompanied by a recognizable non-diegetic Gothic theme of swelling menace usually employed to indicate the unnoticed approach of lurking horrors. To serve the expectation of the horror-wise literate audience even more, the shots alternate between the innocently playing children and the fog crawling over the bubbling swamp. In good Gothic movie tradition, the innocent victim, unaware of the horrors to come, tempts his fate by letting his legs dangle in the water. To prepare the audience for the final strike, a fast-paced cello sets in ere the little boy is seemingly drawn into the swamp. The music then culminates in high-pitched piano chords while the camera swiftly moves up to the sky along the stems of skeletal trees. Before the screen is blackened out, the swamp is seen churned as if from a crocodile hurling its prey back and forth until its surface becomes smooth again and all sound is drowned. The gory details, it seems, are left to the audience's imagination.

Yet this Gothic refiguration of archetypal horror conventions quickly disappoints the audience's expectations, as the next scene shows the older Rick laughing

28 An overview of the first seventy years of Australian ethnographic film from 1898 onwards is given in Ian DUNLOP, »Ethnographic Filmmaking in Australia: The First Seventy Years,« *Studies in Visual Communication* 9.1 (1983): 11–18.

and telling of his experience at the swamp: »The ghost swamp. Yea, that was me. I was seven at the time. I was ok. They'd fish me up« (BD 04:53 mins–05:35 mins). To validate the truth of his account, the camera for a second cuts back to the scene at the swamp, showing an unharmed Rick struggling in the water. Although the expectations of horror buffs are thwarted in this scene, its mise-en-scène opens up a space for the subliminal Gothic reality of Aboriginal life. In stark contrast to the highly aestheticized filmic images of the Gothic beginning, the scene featuring the older Rick displays the video-shot brightness of documentary footage and shows him in front of a bright white background while being interviewed. He is separated from the interviewer by a transparent window which is made visible when Rick leans his palm against it, thus the shot both visualizes an Aboriginal man in custody and the seemingly invisible yet palpable barrier and hierarchy of ethnographic media.



Figure 17: The visual contrast between film, stylized by Gothic means, and ethnographic video footage (BD 03:22 mins and 05:34 mins)

The degree to which white documentary differs from an Aboriginal perspective on life in Australia is most clearly demonstrated in the discrepancy of Rick and Shelley's divergent opinions on the island they live on: whereas Rick »hate[s] that place, that ›island‹« (BD 05:56 mins–06:02 mins), Shelley, the elderly lady in »Mr Chuck«, refers to it as »[o]ur island home« (BD 06:12 mins–06:13 mins) she has always loved. In visual and aural terms, this is expressed in shots of the island and its typical Australian lifestyle. Reminiscent of tourist brochures, the first images of the island appear in the style of intros known from American soap operas such as *Dallas*, *Dynasty*, or *Falcon Crest*. Usually characterized by aerial pan shots indulging in the wealth and vast estates of the titular families, these intros find their way into *beDevil* in the form of the very same aerial shots moving along important Australian places of leisure, infrastructure, and suburbia finally culminating in a zoom towards Shelley's house:



Figure 18: Aerial shots of Bribie island, conveying an image of wealthy white Australia (*BD* 07:30 mins–08:51 mins)

The musical score of these shots again recalls 1970s and 80s American TV series and their main themes²⁹ and thus paints a picture of an all fine and dandy Australian life. This effect, however, is later in the story reversed through a Gothic substitution of the musical score with sounds of iron rods, chains, severe beating, and shouting – followed by a sudden silence (cf. *BD* 22:10 mins–22:46). The images thus accompanied now show typical recreational activities and places of white Australian life: the beach and ocean, shopping malls, camping sites, fishing, and playing cricket. Here, the combination of sight and sound reveals the picture of a deeply torn society, a picture which is further intensified by the following shot of a heavily bruised Rick, who is barely able to open his eyes. When the sound of steps and someone grabbing an iron rod is heard again, he fearfully winces and turns to the right as if anticipating another violent attack (cf. *BD* 22:46 mins–22:56 mins). While the beating and shouting is only conveyed in aural form, the documentary lens of the camera deliberately conceals the corresponding images and does not synchronize sound and sight until the abusive act(s) has/have stopped. As Gelder and Jacobs have suggested, this incongruity of image and sound may also refer to a more historic level and relate to the brutal dispossession of Aboriginal people at the hands of the whites³⁰ – yet instead of cultivating the violently seized land, white people seem to focus on recreation and leisure, thus turning the ruling of *Terra Nullius* to greatest absurdity. Through this technical device, the role of the camera as agent of white historiography which delivers visual evidence is radically deconstructed and Gothicized.

Another instance in which the camera fails to record the gruesome details of Aboriginal life is concerned with the abuse the younger Rick is subjected to at the hands of his stepuncle. When Shelley tells of Rick's childhood, she is cut in mid-sentence, »I shouldn't say it, but I don't think his home-life was ...« (*BD* 11:13 mins–11:15 mins), followed by a sudden lightning and a harsh string – before

29 The first allusion which came to my mind was the main theme of *The Love Boat*, which aired in the USA from 1977 until 1986.

30 Cf. Gelder and Jacobs, »Postcolonial Ghost Story« 195.

Shelley resumes her part as interviewee. What is silenced in this documentary-styled part of »Mr Chuck« is later brought to its aural fore despite the camera's gaze still rendering the actions invisible: the camera withdraws from its position of seemingly participating character to that of an outside observer, from sitting on the bed with the three Aboriginal children to sharing the immaculately white children's gaze outside the impoverished house. This process of receding is visualized by slowly zooming out of the room, then the window, and finally out of the garden until the gaze stops on the street outside the house (cf. *BD* 19:48 mins–20:26 mins). What happens inside is kept behind virtually closed doors – and windows. Instead, shots relating to what was originally supposed to be the Gothic part of the story, the ghost of Mr Chuck, are inserted, blotting out any real-life horrors (cf. *BD* 20:26 mins–20:36 mins). The only evidence the camera captures of the abuse are short cuts to blood running down a drainpipe (cf. *BD* 20:42 mins–20:44 mins and 20:57 mins–20:59 mins), before it cuts back to the comforting peace in Shelley's house. Aurally, however, the violent abuse is made accessible for the audience: while the stepuncle is visualized only in the form of a black shadow before the camera zooms out, a dog's loud bark instead of human shouting announces his appearance, and sounds of the abuse are played in slow motion, thus adding a dark and distorted timbre to the stepuncle's voice and demonizing his actions.

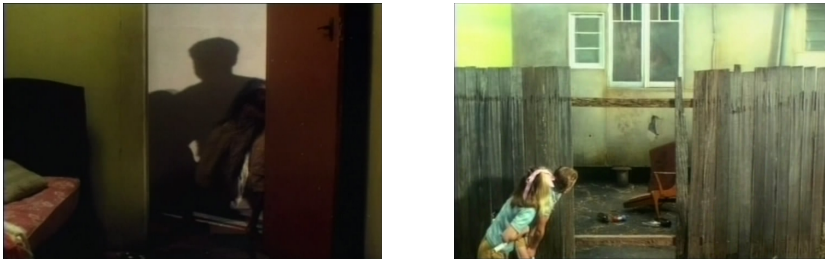


Figure 19: Visualizing only the stepuncle's dark shadow, the camera refrains from giving visual evidence of the abuse (*BD* 19:53 mins and 20:17 mins)

Later, when cutting back from the actual ghost story to the blood coming out of the drainpipe, the camera does again not remain with this image but is quickly tilted up to the bathroom window out of which quiet sobbing and crying is heard. The movement of the camera here visualizes what Shelley then voices orally, the failure to act: »Yes, I knew that was going on. We on the island all knew. We could have helped that child. We could've ... « (*BD* 21:00 mins–21:17 mins).

The way the original story of Mr Chuck is presented in *beDevil* works much in the same pattern as the the story of Rick's continued abuse, and thus contrary to traditional horror films: the ghastly horrors are cut out and the story is left unfinished. Narrated by Shelley, who is introduced in a video-shot interview

situation in which the camera's gaze is that of the interviewer, the story of Mr Chuck »is the only true tragedy we've had [on the island]« (BD 06:15 mins–06:21 mins). At these words, the camera starts panning around Shelley's living room, starting with an example of commodified ›primitive art‹ and moving along old photographs from the time of World War II before returning to Shelley. The story itself is narrated as follows:

SHELLEY: During the Second World War, the island was full of American soldiers. Yanks, Yanks, Yanks. Everywhere. They were stationed here. Then, one night, a poor GI, a strange type, whom I knew, drove his tank straight into the quicksand swamp. Sank. Without a trace. And was never found. The children in the area have always told tales about him. Ghost of the GI, pulling them in.

(BD 06:24 mins–07:23 mins)

In the background, the appropriate sounds of the Australian night and voices seemingly coming from the very past Shelley tells of work to support the gloomy mood of a ghost story, yet Shelley's facial expressions and interaction with the interviewer instantly undo this effort. The camera, however, lingers on the image of a white GI captured on one of Shelley's photos upon which for a split second the face of a black man seemingly painted white appears (cf. BD 07:26 mins) – as it seems, the institution of blackface which featured prominently in *Jedda*, is turned upside down here –,³¹ followed by the surreally echoing cry of a seabird.

References to a *black* GI are repeated throughout the film, most obviously visualized in the movie poster Rick steals at the construction site of the cinema out of a box of many posters. When Rick slowly unfolds the poster, the musical score, which before consisted of natural diegetic sound, suddenly turns to eerie foreboding music. Furthermore, one of the construction workers soon afterwards by chance fishes a soldier's steel helmet and ammunition belt out of the swamp:

WORKER: It says ›Made in the USA‹. [. . .] Amazing, no rust.

RICK: And I was thinkin' of that dumb GI bastard down below.

(BD 15:57 mins–16:13 mins)

Even the superimposed image of a ghostly black man, which first appeared after Shelley told of the drowned GI, is seen again in the shots substituting for Rick's abuse (cf. BD 20:26 mins–20:35 mins), again accompanied by the sudden eerie sound of an organ:

31 See p. 153.



Figure 20: Black men – a ghostly image (BD 20:30 mins–20:33 mins) and on a movie poster (cf. BD 13:24 mins–13:26)

The constant repetition of images referring to the dead GI and what seems to be his ghost combined with well-known musical scores conditions the audience to see the ghost as embodiment of the dispossessed returning in haunting terms and unsettling white commercialism. Yet it is interesting to note that only »Swamp Ghost« is listed in the end credits of *beDevil*, thus a space is opened up for multiple readings of this spectral apparition. The Gothic emanating from the titular ghost story is reduced to a mere shadow of itself in comparison to the real-life Gothic Rick encounters both as a boy and as an older man. It works as a filmic substitute for what the camera gives no visual evidence of, and it is Rick who is directly confronted with both the seemingly fictional horrors of the GI's ghost, painted in gruesome celluloid pictures, and the true brutality of abuse. The filmic techniques used by Tracey Moffatt emphasize to what extent white historiography fictionalizes what it visually tried to erase and how it substitutes fiction for fact: similar to the beginning of the story, »Mr Chuck« ends on picture-perfect Gothic terms complete with an innocent victim left helplessly in the face of evil. Again, fog is crawling over the mud, no diegetic sound is heard anymore, instead, foreboding strings, which have gained fame through *Psycho*, start to play, and Rick lies unconsciously on the wooden floor of the dark cinema, his legs again dangling in the bubbling mud (cf. BD 23:29 mins–24:59 mins). His account of what happened to him sounds equally menacing: »I...i...i... it stank worse than shit ... and it was down there. And it was ...licking my feet. And, and, it ... it was ... and it was breathing my legs. And its tongue ... was all over ... my feet!«. (BD 24:05 mins–24:57) The aesthetics exactly copy that of the Gothic scene shown in the first few minutes of *beDevil*, thus guiding the expectations of the audience towards assuming that Rick now finds the end already envisaged in the beginning.

The inserted video-sequences of Shelley closing her eyes and of the bruised Rick telling of his encounter with the GI's ghost, however, connect the filmic surrealism to the brutal reality of Aboriginal life: Rick indeed found a Gothic end, yet not in terms of the celluloid horrors used to tell the ghost story, but in terms of a life full

of abuse to which the camera turned a blind lens. In order to visualize how fiction becomes fact and fact is fictionalized at the lens of white historiography, Rick's abuse at the hands of his stepuncle exhibits the same celluloid-styled aesthetics as the scenes concerned with the original ghost story. Yet both fact and fiction elude narrative closure, thus *beDevil* denies the Gothic story the kind of exorcism it is usually granted. Right after Rick finishes his account of the past, the younger Rick opens his eyes, fearfully staring at the camera/the thing which is about to grab him, but instead of offering the audience the desired closure at the moment of highest suspense, the camera cuts to a crystallized blue screen, leaving only high-pitched and fast-paced strings (cf. *BD* 24:56 mins–25:00 mins). This blue screen then shutters to pieces and reveals the empty hole in the floor of the cinema, the pace of the camera's zoom synchronized with that of the still-playing strings, until finally the face of a man emerges from the mud beneath the hole, spitting mud onto the camera's lens before the screen is blackened out (cf. *BD* 25:05 mins–25:08 mins).

By ending on this discomfiting note, the ghost being awakened rather than laid to rest, »Mr Chuck« negotiates issues of mutual haunting and dispossession by usurping the master discourse of white historiography and subverting it through Gothic aesthetics. It tells of shameful secrets deliberately concealed beneath the visual reality of the camera and made accessible only through sound and storytelling. Yet it not only adds a traditional oral component to the documentary but essentially casts a doubt on the evidential character of visual evidence obtained through a hierarchic power relation of white and black.

ii. »Choo Choo Choo Choo«

This process of deconstructing the documentary also plays a key role in »Choo Choo Choo Choo«. Similar to »Mr Chuck«, this second story of *beDevil* cleverly combines sequences of filmic aesthetics and video-shot footage in order to pit the traditional ghost story against its present-day afterlife. Unlike the first story, which focused on individual abuse and the camera turning a blind eye, »Choo Choo Choo Choo« is more concerned with the concept of documentary itself and deconstructs its misrepresentation of Aboriginal people with its own Gothic devices. The gap left by this subversion of ethnographic media is then filled with a strong female Aboriginal identity looking back at both the imperial and the male gaze.

Again, the traditional ghost story is presented in an all-too easily recognizable Gothic style and the filmic images of a highly stylized studio set which serve as an indicator of the past. In the middle of the night, an Aboriginal family living next to and maintaining a remote part of a railway track is roused by their house shaking and its rattling sound to which some surreal chimes are added. The night is silent except for a woman's echoing cry »She's here! She's here!« (*BD* 26:24 mins–26:26

mins), which hauntingly recalls *Poltergeist's* »They are here« and which then fades into the ghostly far-off whistle of a steam locomotive. Then the camera cuts to the plains, taking a motionless stand right on the track while the loud noise of an approaching train is heard. Seconds later, the same cut is used again, only this time, the sound of the train is even closer.



Figure 21: The camera's gaze follows the empty track (*BD* 26:28 mins–26:30 mins and 26:35 mins–26:37 mins)

Here, the audience, who is made to identify with the camera's gaze, is uncomfortably positioned in the midst of the Gothic terror evoked through image and sound. To relieve this tension, the camera cuts back to the interior of the house and the husband's slow movements before it returns to his wife Ruby, who runs along the track in fright. Inside, an unreal silence builds up, especially when a lamp is lit, whereas outside the sound of a freight train immediately driving past is almost deafening. Fast cuts, both visual and sonic, set the fast-paced rhythm of this Gothic scene and alert the audience to the climax it is about to witness. Despite its immediate aural presence, no train is visible, yet Ruby tries to follow the waggons of the passing ghost train with her gaze, and even her hair and dress are flowing from the airstream:



Figure 22: Ruby's gaze following the ghostly train, repeated in fast succession (*BD* 26:40 mins–27:07 mins)

Following its uneasy position on the track, the audience is now released from the Gothic grip of the camera's gaze and returns to the comfortable position of witnessing the horrors unfolding on the screen. By looking at Ruby, probably the innocent victim, from an observer's perspective who finally even withdraws to an almost god-like aerial position, the audience experiences the very distance from terror needed to fully enjoy it in all its Gothic sublimity and derive the desired satisfaction exactly as elaborated on by Burke:³²



Figure 23: The audience withdraws even further (*BD* 27:03 mins–27:15 mins)

This change in perspective from insider to outsider is a cinematic technique well-known from genre classics, whose stereotypical characteristics Tracey Moffatt wittingly appropriates in her dark vision of the Australian outback. Yet instead of signifying the impending end of the victim whose position the audience so uncomfortably inhabited, »Choo Choo Choo Choo« only begins its Aboriginal Gothic story: when Ruby collapses, the same female voice from the off again hauntingly echoes »She's here!« (*BD* 27:08 mins) before the title and a prototypical soundtrack fade in.³³

The next shot brings the viewer to the present and to an all-Aboriginal netball team driving to a picnic at Ruby's old house. As the audience learns, the focus is on the older Ruby, who tells of her experience at the railway site to the camera. Similar to the interviews in »Mr Chuck«, the scenes showing Ruby and her team while driving to and preparing their picnic feature a video-style look which acts both as an indicator of the present and marks those sequences as a usurpation of documentary footage.

Through her deconstruction of the genre of documentary, Tracey Moffatt challenges assumptions of ›the gaze‹ in a number of ways. While in »Mr Chuck«, she stages an interview situation to call attention to the unequal power relations of ethnographic media, in »Choo Choo Choo Choo« she deconstructs the entire

32 Cf. Burke 36–7.

33 This music, which is repeatedly used in »Choo Choo Choo Choo«, reminded me very much of the recognizable opening theme of *The Simpsons'* Halloween-themed episodes called »Treehouse of Horror I–XIX«, the first of which aired on 25 October 1990.

system of cinematic looks identified by Laura Mulvey.³⁴ Further developing what bell hooks refers to as »the oppositional gaze«,³⁵ the gaze of the black female spectator who resists identifying with the gaze of the white male and consciously deconstructs the images of black women on screen,³⁶ Tracey Moffatt literally returns the gaze:



Figure 24: Ruby with mirror sunglasses beckoning the camera to focus on her (BD 27:15 mins–27:22 mins) and later wiping the lens of the camera (BD 45:42 mins–45:45 mins)

These stills exemplify Moffatt's subversive use of the moving picture, as the supposed object of the male gaze, the black woman, looks back at the camera and thus at the viewer. Hiding the ›primitive‹ gaze of the ethnographic object behind the women's mirrored sunglasses and having Ruby actively engage with the camera's lens, Tracey Moffatt visualizes the »fourth look«, the gaze which looks back at the audience.³⁷ Furthermore, the diegetic gaze which operates within the filmic narrative itself is an all-female gaze embodied in Ruby's netball team. The eradication of the male gaze operating the camera – as director, Tracey Moffatt takes control of the camera's gaze – is followed by the eradication of men as objects of anthropological research: from its earliest examples of the late nineteenth century to the 1970s, ethnographic media in Australia focused on Aboriginal men as objects of study,³⁸ but »Choo Choo Choo Choo« is centred around women only. Here, the validity of the cinematic looks is not only questioned, but rather shaken to its very core – the preeminence of the male gaze.

Through the visual dismantling of the gaze, Moffatt exposes the binaries of ethnographic media, whose hierarchical power structures have already been made visible in »Mr Chuck«. At the same time, control over the ethnographic object's

34 Cf. Mulvey 847.

35 bell hooks, »The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators,« *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End P, 1992) 115–31.

36 Cf. hooks 122.

37 Cf. Paul WILLEMEN, »The Fourth Look,« *Looks and Frictions: Essays in Cultural Studies and Film Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994) 107.

38 For an overview of ethnographic filmmaking in Australia, see Dunlop 11–18.

image is regained: when the camera zooms to a member of Ruby's team sipping wine, she chases the camera off with the words »Don't do that, get! Get! Get!« (BD 42:53 mins–43:04 mins). Unlike as in »Mr Chuck«, when the camera ruthlessly films Shelley's tears she would rather hide (cf. BD 21:19 mins–21:28 mins), in this scene of »Choo Choo Choo Choo« the camera then instantly cuts to a total of Ruby's old house and the railway track. Here, the inability to control the camera has passed from the black object to the former white subject in a reversal of colonial binaries.

The self-confident appropriation of the ›lens of power‹, the black female gaze looking back at and interacting with the camera/audience, returns again in the form of food television: as Catherine Summerhayes has noted, the preparation of *haute cuisine* was, »with few exceptions, [...] the exclusive domain of European male ›expert‹ chefs«. ³⁹ French cuisine, however, was first introduced at least to the American housewife by Julia Child in her TV show *The French Chef*, which aired from 1963–1973. According to Krishnendu Ray, it was her who domesticated cuisine, »making American what was French, bringing into the home what was usually cooked in the restaurant, and normalizing what was extraordinary«. ⁴⁰ Thus demystifying French cooking and undermining the male dominance of professional cuisine, Julia Child nevertheless kept all this in a kind of domesticity deemed proper for women. ⁴¹ In her version of television cuisine, Tracey Moffatt repeats the revolutionary act of displacing French cooking, yet she is not content with only mildly challenging traditional assumptions but rather directly confronts them through the dialogue and mise-en-scène of *beDevil*. Despite the poor surroundings – Ruby's old house and a dumping ground – Ruby and her netball team prepare for a festive banquet:

OLDER RUBY: [*poking the ground with a stick*] Ah well, you can see the girls and I've been busy. This is a wild pig, being cooked underground. We've already marinated it over night in juniper berries, wine, and fresh herbs, [*points to the left*] herbs of this area. We've stuffed the pig with bush onions and we'll serve it with sweet potatoes and yam. But while we're waiting on it, we've got the entrée happening. [*inviting gesture to the left, then she walks to Maudie and with a pair of serving-tongs grabs a crab to hold it into the camera*]

39 Catherine SUMMERHAYES, *The Moving Images of Tracey Moffatt* (Milan: Charta, 2007) 131.

40 Krishnendu RAY, »Domesticating Cuisine: Food and Aesthetics on American Television,« *Gastronomica* 7.1 (2007): 51.

41 Cf. Ray 53.



Figure 25: Bush cuisine I (BD 44:00 mins–44:22 mins)

This is a yabbie. It's very much like a fresh water prawn or shrimp. The flavour, though, is a lot stronger. We're tossing them around here in some canola oil, a pinch of chili, and garlic. [Maudie talks in an Aboriginal language] Oh, sorry. Of course [Ruby shrugs with shoulders] time. [Aboriginal voices are heard from the off, then the camera pans to two Aboriginal women holding a living snake on a stick. Maudie answers loudly in an Aboriginal language; Ruby then translates] She's telling them that she can't cook it now, but take it home and she'll make it into a snake terrine. Served with a walnut vinaigrette. [Cut to Maudie and Ruby preparing yabbies on a plate with some sauce]



Figure 26: Bush cuisine II (BD 45:17 mins–45:38 mins)

Just a common Hollandaise, actually.

(BD 43:24 mins–45:38 mins, own stage directions)

The food is prepared on a long table complete with white linen table-cloth, fine china, wine-glasses, and silver cutlery. In the same vein, the expensive wine one of Ruby's teammates sips a glass of – according to Catherine Summerhayes, who quotes from Moffatt's script, it is a thirty-dollar bottle of Petumla Chardonnay⁴² – is stored in an artful wine-cooler. All of these items seem rather out of place in the bush surroundings and more fitting for a French five-star restaurant, yet their use as props

42 Cf. Summerhayes, *The Moving Images* 131.

is part of a carefully arranged *mise-en-scène* which challenges racial assumptions of the socio-economic status of Aboriginal people. Additionally, the food itself unsettles white expectations of cooking: juniper berries, which are originally used in Scandinavian cuisine, are mixed with »herbs from this area«, the snake terrine will be »served with a walnut vinaigrette«, and the native yabbies are decorated with a »common hollandaise«. Here, *haute cuisine* is Aboriginalized through the use of native ingredients, a mixture most precisely – and comically – summarized in Ruby's angry words to Maudie, who had just told her in an Aboriginal language how the yabbies should be properly spread with sauce: »Ok. Ok! OK! You don't have to carry on, bloody Queen Victoria bush cuisine!« (BD 46:10 mins–46:19 mins). In presenting this mixture of traditional »bush tucker« and European food being prepared by Aboriginal women in the form of television cooking shows, Tracey Moffatt creates an Indigenized *haute cuisine* which intrudes into the domain of white man,⁴³ thus again taking control over the misrepresentation of Aboriginal people and women in particular.

Tracey Moffatt, however, does not only address the male looks of cinema through the appropriation of documentary in »Choo Choo Choo Choo«, but again also concepts of white historiography. In Charleville, the traditional ghost story introduced in the sequence featuring the younger Ruby and her family has become part of the town's touristically marketed history. It has even entered the communal imaginary of its citizens who joyously welcome the camera and unanimously repeat the motion of a steam locomotive's rods for its lens. Accompanied by the gay sound of »Ghan to Alice«, the camera moves through the town as if parading along its streets lined with a cheering crowd. It then cuts to a total of a grand old Queenslander, »Historic House«, the local museum, which is stuffed with old typewriters, telephones, maps, and other memorabilia of white civilization and progress. The camera is welcomed in by a Chinese shopkeeper asking »want to hear spooky story?« (BD 29:27 mins–29:29 mins). Inside, Charleville's history of white explorers and rich cattle and sheep stations is neatly blended into the story of the town's very own ghost. Bob tells of the old train driver who hanged himself because »something had happened in his past, something haunted him. Bedevilled he was. He couldn't live with it anymore« (BD 30:38 mins–30:45 mins). The whole story, it seems, needs multiple narrators, and the camera is referred to Mickey, an old alcoholic who tells of the spirits who come to visit him during the night, but they are »not the little girl« (BD 31:56 mins–31:57 mins). Leaving the audience thus still mystified about the train driver and the little girl, the camera cuts from Mickey's kitchen back to the past of Ruby's house.

43 In this, she has anticipated the current TV show *Outback Café* of Indigenous chef Mark Olive.

The next narrator of the little girl's story is the older Ruby: »Then there was this little girl who had like this« (*BD* 34:43 mins–34:46 mins):



Figure 27: Ruby denotes the girl's blindness (*BD* 34:46 mins–34:49 mins)

Yet Ruby also breaks off in the middle of the blind girl's story and leaves her mystery intact: »But first, let me tell you about my husband« (*BD* 34:49 mins–34:51 mins). The story which *beDevil* now visually narrates no longer centres around the town and its ghost, but on the past haunting of the Aboriginal family living at the site of the railway track: when Ruby's husband returns from a hunt, he is caught by a sudden storm and finds a little doll which he throws away – and which mysteriously reappears again and again. The musical score of eerie sounds so typical of Gothic movies frenetically follows his terrified run through the surreal surroundings of graveyard-like plains until it culminates in an extremely high-pitched and piercing noise. Visually, the camera cuts from Ruby's husband to the railway track until he falls down and is confronted with the doll once again, from which the noise seems to emanate. When he returns home, his experience at the track has left him temporarily zombified, a Gothic instance in an otherwise blissful late afternoon – was it not for the dark and surreal plains whose tombstone-like rocks cast long shadows indicating the approaching night:



Figure 28: The menacingly dark and stylized studio set (*BD* 37:16 mins–37:20 mins)

Instead of any Gothic sounds, a dismal silence accompanies this afternoon tea – until the husband gets up and ghostly chimes and low strings start to play from

the off, rendering the diegetic silence of the studio set even more uncanny (cf. *BD* 37:38 mins). As in »Mr Chuck«, both images and sound seem to guide the literate audience through the highly normative spectral discourse of the Gothic ghost story. Brief images of a ghostly leg kicking out from behind a wall (cf. *BD* 38:42 mins) and of blonde hair slowly dropping from the verandah enforce this uneasy conventionality.

The camera then follows Ruby around the house, again accompanied by the eerie sounds and chimes of Gothic mysteries. For quite some time, the camera lingers in an aerial position diagonally opposite the house, a shot which in its immobility and through its Gothic tune emphasizes the isolated ghostliness of the studio set (cf. *BD* 40:02 mins–40:40 mins). Once inside and at her baby's cradle, Ruby hears what sounds like a child's voice played backwards (cf. *BD* 41:18 mins–41:37 mins) – a time-worn filmic technique to make the voices of fiendish demons audible. Here, the literate audience identifies the house as a haunted house⁴⁴ and Ruby and her family as the unlawful occupiers who will meet a grisly end. When the sound eventually announces the final revelation and Ruby and her husband simultaneously turn, the camera cuts to a blue screen (cf. *BD* 42:49 mins–42:53) – like in »Mr Chuck«, the audience is denied the anticipated narrative closure and its expectations have once more been thwarted.

Yet the camera returns to the scene and ties up to the ghost train met at the beginning of »Choo Choo Choo Choo«: the ceiling again rattles and the camera frequently cuts to the railway track. In this latter sequence, however, the images of the townspeople miming the train's movement and the girl's blindness are cut into the dark night of Ruby's past, suggesting a final closure to the story. Again, a ghostly train drives past Ruby who cowers at the track – this time visible for a split second – and vanishes into the night and foreboding silence (cf. *BD* 51:17 mins–51:30 mins). Then, a low tapping is heard, and the camera cuts to a slightly raised position facing and approaching the terrified Ruby and thus occupying the perspective of the Gothic menace:

44 The original working title of *beDevil* actually was *Haunted House*, cf. Donovan and Lorraine 90.



Figure 29: The camera has taken the point of view of the presumed Gothic threat (BD 52:14 mins–52:22 mins)

Finally, it seems, the audience can settle back and enjoy the Gothic horrors unfolding on screen and restoring the rightful order – first disposing of Ruby, then of her sleeping husband and sister-in-law, and lastly, of the children. Yet once again, *beDevil* refuses an easy narrative closure, instead, the camera cuts to the older Ruby leaving the site of the bush banquet:

OLDER RUBY: A little blind girl. She was killed on the tracks while the train driver [pause]. Blind, she was blind. Her and her family used to live in this house before we moved in. Man, she used to drive me crazy when she come. [yelling from the back of the ute when driving away] She's here, she's here!

(BD 52:24 mins–52:46 mins)

The final shots of »Choo Choo Choo Choo« then show the image of the little girl, played by blonde Aboriginal girl Karen Saunders, superimposed on the image of the railway track before the screen fades to black (cf. BD 53:34 mins–53:51 mins).

Once again, Tracey Moffatt deprives the Gothic story of its narrative closure and leaves its mysteries undisclosed. Similar to the arbitrary death of the GI in »Mr Chuck«, the reason for the girl being killed by the train remains hidden: instead of focusing on the ghost, Moffatt is interested in *being haunted*. The absence of black agency and black women in ethnographic media haunts the screen she Aboriginally Gothicizes. In a number of ways, she challenges and subverts the male gaze of cinema and ethnographic media, thus exorcizing the Gothic inherent in white historiography and visual culture.

iii. »Lovin' the Spin I'm in«

The last story of the trilogy, »Lovin' the Spin I'm in«, again challenges dominant discourses of reality, and it does so by simultaneously subverting both Western and the other two stories' take on this concept. It reverses the carefully twisted

distinction of filmic and video-shot stylistics predominant in »Mr Chuck« and »Choo Choo Choo Choo« and reserves the artificial studio sets for both present and past scenes, with only a few shots showing the vivid colours of video productions. Past and present are equally stylized and only distinguished from one another through the tint of a gory red which serves as signifier of the past.

The story itself is again fragmented and visualized rather than narratively developed. It tells of »mystery deaths [and a] doomed couple« (BD 54:37 mins–54:44 mins), as the newspaper pages pinned to a warehouse door suggest. Right from the beginning, unease is created through the cunning relation of sound and image: the first frames which show the ghostly silhouette of a dancing woman are accompanied by a rather becalming score which seems at odds with the fast movements of the woman. Then, the camera cuts to a real-life sugar-cane field, moving as if in flight through its sharp canes (cf. BD 54:23 mins–54:33 mins). The soundtrack, however, features the voices of a happy couple, a laughing woman courted by a chanting man. While the image on screen slowly dissolves into red smoke – at first, the impression of blood superimposed on the canes and running down the lens is evoked – which in turn dissolves to the warehouse door and the newspaper pages pinned to it, the happy sound of bells and giggling continues. The moment the camera cuts to the newspapers, the soothing bells of the beginning change into slow-paced strings commonly used to create suspense. Here, the classic pattern of an unsolved mystery is used to introduce the spectral cast, as the audience expects yet another ghost story to unfold.

The Gothic quality of this last story, however, does not emanate from a haunting presence but seems to rest solely on the mysterious fate of the two lovers, Beba and Minnie. Their story is painted in the gory red of the past and dominated by allusions to voodoo magic which is performed by Minnie – the title, »Lovin' the Spin I'm in«, aptly embodies this, as it is taken from a song called »That old black Magic«:



Figure 30: Minnie preparing a potion and zombifying Beba, all tinted red (BD 59:40 mins–1:00:16 mins)

The foreboding musical score, consisting of the frantic beating of drums, chanting, and *Psycho*-like strings, follows the rhythm of the shots, thus emphasizing the

Gothic nature of this scene. The story of Beba and Minnie itself is told by many voices, each artificially staged for its particular audience. First, it is Voula, the Greek woman living opposite the old warehouse, who tells her son the story of Emelda, Beba's mother:

VOULA: Let me tell you about Emelda. . . . You know she's not from around here, she's from the Torres Strait Islanders. Her people are still quite traditional in their ways, especially concerning things like marriage. Emelda had a son [*pointing out of window*], Beba. He was her only child, she was never the same after he died.

(BD 57:17 mins–57:44 mins)

The camera then tilts down to Dimitri, Voula's husband, who tries to »explain the whole situation« (cf. BD 58:32 mins–58:33 mins) to the impatient investors of ›Dimitri's Casino and Marina‹ which is planned to be built on the site of the old warehouse:

DIMITRI: There were these two kids from up north, emm, from the islands, I think. Beba was this islander dude, and Minnie this hippie chick. But guys, [*incomprehensible*] twelve years back. . . . These kids, they ran [*incomprehensible*]. [*dissolve to natural images of a sugar-cane field*] They needed work, so I put 'em on.

FONG: Oh, you're so nice, Dimitri. [*cut back to Dimitri in front of warehouse door*]

DIMITRI: Nice, I'm nice. [*laughing starts*]

CONOS: He's a real nice bastard! [*cut to flight through sugar-cane field, voices audible in the background*]

DIMITRI: It was about marriage. The whole clan [*incomprehensible*]. They had to get the hell out. [*cut to red-tinted past*] And then the mother, Emelda, came looking for them. Found em down here. Geez, what a fuss she caused.

CONOS: I wanna see the contract, Dimitri!

DIMITRI: And then, after Emelda moved in with them, that's when things got reeeally strange. [*long pause in which the story is continued only visually in Gothic style with red images and an eerie musical score*]

CONOS: "Dimitri we're not interested in that story now because it all winds up there [*fades out*].

(BD 58:39 mins–59:44 mins)

Voula then continues her story, whose visualization takes places entirely in the past:

VOULA: Well, they weren't happy. Minnie . . . Minnie would act crazy and get him all hooked up. Then you'd hear them start. [*long pause, only music and quarrelling are heard; then cut to present-day Spiro and Voula*]

SPIRO: But, why were they like that, Ma?

VOULA: Emelda knows. That's why she's so sad.

(BD 1:01:04 mins–1:01:39)

Voula and Dimitri's oral performance is visually framed by a window and the warehouse door, respectively, and both stages are part of a bigger stage-like studio set framed by their house and the old warehouse on the opposite side:



Figure 31: Voula and Dimitri's performance staged for the filmic frame (BD 57:38 mins and 58:39 mins)

The story thus staged and framed at the same time allows for the participation of its audience and is structured as a conversation of many narrative voices. It melts both the filmic restrictions of representation – the frame being the natural border of the filmic image as well as that of the characters/actors in »Lovin' the Spin I'm in« – and Aboriginal traditions of orality, fusing both into a Gothic form of visualized storytelling. Even Voula's words to her son Spiro before she starts to tell the story reflect the Aboriginal way of dealing with and sharing (secret) knowledge: »[*talking first in Greek, then in English*] It's not for you to know! . . . Well, perhaps you could know« (cf. B 57:02 mins–57:12 mins).

Throughout »Lovin' the Spin I'm in«, the story of Emelda, Beba, and Minnie is thus composed of many fragmentary episodes told in a staged setting to an audience it is intended for. It is made up of textual, visual, and aural elements which are independent of one another but still do not reveal the whole story. Frida Kahlo impersonator Luke Roberts – equally framed by his window – is shown in a mock dialogue with Diego Rivera, at first only muffled, but then his voice

takes centre stage. He mysteriously hints at betrayal, yet no direct connection to Minnie and Beba is made: »If you'd only listen to me! No! I'm not having an affair with Trotsky. I know you think I have. But I'm not! What about you? Who are you seeing? ... Don't deny it! I've seen you with her. What number is she?« (BD 1:04:31 mins–1:05:14 mins). Similarly, images of violent fires in a sugar-cane field often intrude the visual narrative of Minnie and Beba's life, as does the ever-present smoke and a single shot of (highly inflammable) flour trickling to the ground inside the warehouse (cf. BD 1:10:02 mins–1:10:04 mins). The audience of *beDevil* can draw its own conclusions from a number of narrative sources, foreboding and frightening music, and visual fragments left to speak for their own. Thus a number of possible – and conflicting – realities and stories can be constructed from the filmic presentation of Beba and Minnie's past, but no *true* story is offered. In »Lovin' the Spin I'm in«, the issue of differing perspectives on the past and reality already visualized in »Mr Chuck« and »Choo Choo Choo Choo« is taken a step further: it is not only the intentional distinction of film and video as well as that of many narrative voices which constitutes the discourse of reality, but the deconstruction of the concept of reality itself. Through the fragmentary and inconsistent aural and visual stories of »Lovin' the Spin I'm in«, the entity formerly known as reality is radically called into question.

Despite the many and recurring Gothic references in image and sound used to deconstruct any understanding of reality, however, there is no ghost story circulating among the characters on stage. It is rather a sense of memory and dispossession which starts to haunt the living and which (de-)materializes only at the end of the story in the form of traditional ghosts and spectral images. Before Emelda is removed from her rooms above the warehouse, the continued presence of Minnie and Beba inside the warehouse is only hinted at: in the first of those scenes, the camera slowly pans to a total of the red warehouse door and a crack underneath. In the bluish dark of the night, a red light and shadows of movement as well as smoke rising from the bowl Emelda placed in front of the door are seen to come from the inside of the warehouse, accompanied by low strings and muffled sounds which also seem to come from the inside (cf. BD 1:10:11 mins–1:10:57 mins). Later, after the artist/Frida Kahlo also leaves his/her rooms, s/he lights a candle, leans to the warehouse door, and quietly says »adios« (BD 1:14:22 mins–1:14:23 mins). Afterwards, however, the spectres' presence leaves the warehouse and intrudes the home of Dimitri, Voula, and Spiro. At first, smoke crawls out of the reddish inside of the still-closed warehouse, then the camera's rapid movements indicate someone's gaze – or a spectral being's movements – around the stage-setting and up to Spiro's window (cf. BD 1:14:45 mins–1:15:28 mins).



Figure 32: Prior to Emelda's eviction, the spectral presence remains inside, yet afterwards it is unleashed (*BD* 1:10:11 mins–1:10:57 mins and 1:15:01 mins–1:15:07 mins)

The musical score supports the Gothic quality of this scene, adding the loud sounds of a cello and spine-chilling strings which culminate in a frenzy when Spiro awakes and sees the shadowy outlines of Minnie and Beba in his room (cf. *BD* 1:15:40 mins–1:15:57 mins). After their ghosts have left, there is a sudden silence and only the diegetic sounds of Spiro's rollerblades and the nightly harbour are heard when he goes down to investigate the now-open doors of the warehouse and the red smoke emanating from the inside (cf. *BD* 1:15:57 mins–1:16:35 mins). When he enters the warehouse, the red smoke pervades the picture, and a carefully drafted choreography of a very corpo-*real* Minnie and Beba unfolds to the score of uncanny music (*BD* 1:16:35 mins–1:18:30 mins). Spiro joins the two of them in their dance, but when he stops to watch, he is seemingly glued to the warehouse-floor – like the presence of Minnie and Beba is intrinsically tied to the warehouse itself. Here, past and present collapse into one another, and both pictures and sound defy an easy distinction of what is past and what is present. The spectral becomes corporeal – or does the corporeal join the spectral?

This fusion of past and present is entirely abandoned when Dimitri enters the warehouse: both the red smoke and the unreal reddish interior dominating the dancing scene have vanished altogether from the warehouse. Instead, the ghostly outlines of a dancing Minnie for a split second intrudes the present reality of Dimitri – who suddenly stops inside the warehouse, petrified with horror (cf. *BD* 1:19:34 mins–1:20:19 mins). He is never shown to leave the old warehouse, but in the morning the investors return and enter it – only to hurry out of it in hasty flight (cf. *BD* 1:21:30 mins–1:22:03 mins). Yet they remain caught in an eternal spin inside their car (cf. *BD* 1:22:11 mins–1:22:48 mins).

The dispossession of Emelda, and with her of Beba and Minnie, has triggered the Gothic unfolding of events, as it seems. Unlike the first two stories, in which a defiance of Gothic conventions and audience assumptions predominates, »Lovin' the Spin I'm in« ends on a Gothic note of horror caused by the displacement of Emelda. The memory which has haunted her but never materialized in the form

of proper spectres has now transformed itself into the corporeal return of the dispossessed.

»Lovin' the Spin I'm in« is in many ways different from the first two stories of *beDevil*, as it is not the haunting itself which takes centre stage – as it does in »Mr Chuck« and »Choo Choo Choo Choo« – but rather the cause which eventually unleashes the ghosts. The difference in focus is visualized in the stylized studio set used for both past and present and the lack of video-shot sequences which were skilfully set in opposition to the filmic images in the first two stories. As Glen Masato Mimura has noted, the closing story of *beDevil* »has not been tamed into »mere« realism«, and its past has not yet been severed from its present as in the other two stories.⁴⁵ While the visual distinction of past and present is used to challenge both ethnographic media and the dominance of the white male's gaze in »Mr Chuck« and »Choo Choo Choo Choo«, issues of looking are not broached in »Lovin' the Spin I'm in«, which concentrates on the haunting presence of the dispossessed.

The stylistic aesthetics of *beDevil* are closely related to the style employed by director Masaki Kobayashi in his *Kwaidan* of 1964,⁴⁶ a quartet of traditional Japanese ghost stories which is based on the literary adaptation of these stories by a white author, Lafcadio Hearn, also called *Kwaidan*. And indeed, Tracey Moffatt uses the same artificial and vividly coloured studio background and obviously man-made fog in her film. Additionally, the stories visualized in *beDevil* have their origins in Moffatt's shared Aboriginal and white background, and the figure of Ruby in »Choo Choo Choo Choo« is even modelled on her Aboriginal mother.⁴⁷ Much like Kobayashi's film was promoted as »the essence of the Japanese« (*KW* Trailer 02:26 mins–02:40 mins), *beDevil* at first sight seems to be a mixture of white and Aboriginal ghost stories. This impression is especially prominent in the middle story, when Ruby, who is haunted by the blind white girl killed on the railway track, sees the Min Min lights, an Australian visual phenomenon:

OLDER RUBY [voice coming from the off]: When we lived out here, strange things would happen. Sometimes we'd see these things in the sky. Our old people would call them »Min Min Lights«. Those old Murray people, they never knew what they were, and neither did we. They just used to come.

(*BD* 33:51 mins–34:18 mins)

45 Glen Masato MIMURA, »Black Memories: Allegorizing the Colonial Encounter in Tracey Moffatt's *beDevil* (1993)«, *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 20 (2003): 121.

46 All comments on *Kwaidan* refer to *Kwaidan*, 1964, dir. Masaki Kobayashi, The Criterion Collection, DVD (Criterion, 2000); this edition is referred to in the text as (*KW* mins.).

47 Cf. Turcotte, »Indigenous Women's Cinema« 13.

The combination of this Aboriginal tale from the *Dreaming*⁴⁸ with a traditional European tale of the ghost haunting the site of his/her death most obviously shows how both Aboriginal and white narrative traditions are blended with each other. Yet *beDevil* defies such an easy reading of its indigenized Gothic. Instead, the conventional European Gothic is deconstructed and devoured by the underlying Gothic reality of Aboriginal life: that which is deemed Gothic by a literate audience is withheld from a conclusion, and the Gothic nature hidden from the camera's gaze is made audible through the film's soundtrack. The repressed Gothic of Aboriginal reality takes centre stage and marginalizes the Gothic of the European tradition. Unlike *Kwaidan*, *beDevil* is not a film telling of traditional ghost stories and does not reconcile European with Aboriginal tales, but rather superimposes the Gothic of Aboriginal reality upon the images of the European ghost story – much like the ghosts' images are superimposed on the filmic frames.

Several subliminal images, though not Gothic in themselves, support the Gothic quality of Aboriginal experiences. In »Mr Chuck«, a shadow of Rick drinking from a bottle (cf. *BD* 18:09 mins–18:11 mins) hints at the problems of alcoholism in Aboriginal communities – an image which in »Choo Choo Choo Choo« returns in the form of a bottle of Evian from which Maudie drinks (cf. *BD* 27:56 mins–27:58 mins). Similarly, when the camera pans across the people parading on the main street of Charleville, an Aboriginal man is shown standing in front of a job centre:



Figure 33: Aboriginal man standing in front of a job centre (*BD* 29:18 mins–29:18 mins)

This image again brings to the fore the very real Gothic life faced by many Aboriginal people in Australia which has entered the public's gaze as a regular image.

Through her artful use of image and sound Tracey Moffatt also indigenizes the Gothic representation of Aboriginal people: she confronts those misrepresentations of Aboriginal people in cinema by taking control of the camera and thus the filmic image and sound. Her use of stylized studio sets and video-shot sequences of

48 See for one possible origin of the Min Min lights in the *Dreaming* June E. BARKER, »The Min Min Light: A Space Story from Northwestern New South Wales,« *Gadi Mirrabooka: Australian Aboriginal Tales from the Dreaming*, ed. Helen F. McKay, World Folklore Series (Englewood: Libraries Unlimited, 2001) 97–9.

documentary not only attacks and usurps ethnographic media but also draws attention to the lack of Aboriginal media protagonists both in front of and behind the camera. Ultimately returning the gaze, Moffatt leaves the audience with a joke at the end of *beDevil*: after the actors have appeared in the end titles, the Chinese shopkeeper Bob Malley returns to the screen. He is shown in dialogue with George, asking him to come down: »George! [...] You come down and meet the film people! [*pointing to the camera*]« (BD 1:23:35 mins–1:23:54 mins). Then, the end credits listing those involved in the production of the film are introduced with the words »The Film People«. Again, a clear-cut distinction is made between the actors staging the stories and the production people who through their editing are ultimately responsible for the final film – and the kind of reality constructed by its frames. From start to end, Tracey Moffatt thus plays with the notion of media as medium and as mediator between event and audience through her aesthetic style and deliberate choice of *mise-en-scène*, cutting, and sound editing. In order to expose the stylized aesthetics of traditional Gothic movies, she includes into her stories as diegetic sound what in the filmic Gothic tradition is clearly characterized as non-diegetic sound (cf. BD 36:30 mins, 42:41 mins, and 1:18:46 mins), thus revealing the fictionality of the Gothic – and the factual reality of her Aboriginal Gothic.

Conclusion: Creation in Resistance

In this thesis I have argued that Aboriginal artists turn to the transgressive qualities of the Gothic in an act of creative resistance. Even though the history of Gothic fiction and especially its occupation with its ›other‹, the monstrous double which mirrors the literal darkness within the self, has made the Gothic a disabling and silencing master discourse, Aboriginal artists nevertheless turn to its subversive nature and thus resist its discursive binaries. Especially the Gothic binaries inherent in imperial and colonial Gothic fiction, which cast the colonial subject in the role of the literally dark ›other‹ of the white self, are deconstructed through several counter-discursive strategies. To express it in truly Gothic fashion: Aboriginal artists usurp, devour, and finally transform the genuinely European mode of the Gothic into a unique Aboriginal Gothic.

The full extent to which the texts analysed in this study transform the European Gothic into an Aboriginal Gothic will, however, remain hidden behind the foreign cultural matrix of Aboriginal perspectives which I cannot access due to my position as a cultural outsider. In fact, the very term with which I chose to describe the cultural phenomenon of ›*Aboriginal Gothic*‹ resembles in its linguistic structure that of magic realism and as such may attract the same criticism which has been hurled at that term. Yet for want of an indigenous term, ›*Aboriginal Gothic*‹ here serves to identify a counter-discursive mode of cultural productions which transforms the disabling traits of the Gothic ›other‹ into a discourse of indigenous strength and reclaimed identity. This transformative energy of what I have identified as Aboriginal Gothic shows itself in the rich and diverse dialogue into which Aboriginal voices enter with the European Gothic.

The seven novels and three films I have discussed in this thesis are a case in point and reflect the plurality of Aboriginal Gothic transformations ranging from the reversal of Gothic binaries to a negation of any Gothic qualities in fiction itself. Through its manifold expressions, Aboriginal Gothic as identified in the novels and films which I have discussed in this study shows that it is much more versatile than the original Gothic novel; it is an example of the impossibility of forcing Aboriginal identity into the rigid straitjacket of Gothic conventions and

sanctified transgressions. Instead, the indigenous artists creatively transgress the boundaries imposed upon them by colonial Gothic fiction and other narrative modes: while Mudrooroo's ancient mariner is the epitome of lost cultural identity, Sam Watson's epic battle of good and evil is the tale of undisguised brutality and violence. Like Kim Scott, whose novel centres around the Gothic chill inherent in white historiography and how this concept murders indigenous identity by writing the Aboriginal presence out of history, Tracey Moffatt is concerned with the visual evidence of historiography's filmic counterpart, ethnographic and documentary media. Their works both Gothicize white eagerness to document evidence and at the same time restore the cultural strength of orality and Aboriginal heritage. The Gothic reality of individual and collective trauma then lies at the heart of the novels by Alexis Wright and Vivienne Cleven, whose spectral reworkings of the Gothic find their visual equivalent in Beck Cole's film, in which the titular plains are far from empty but fraught with ghostly reminders of the past. Yet despite the many differences between those novels and films in terms of storyline and focus, they all make use of certain types of Aboriginal Gothic which account for the wide range of reactions it is capable of: a plain reversal of Gothic roles, an enabling Gothic, tropes of haunting in the form of phantoms and trauma, and the negation of any Gothic quality in fiction besides a Gothic reality. My classification of the different types of Aboriginal Gothic suggested here loosely draws on Broich and Pfister's differentiation between ›*Einzeltextreferenz*‹ and ›*Systemreferenz*‹, and both levels of intertextual relationships complement each other and thereby deliver a full picture of what constitutes Aboriginal Gothic.

The first and most easily discernible reaction to its European predecessor then is that of a plain reversal of the roles of Gothic victim and villain; the knight in shining white armour is turned into the redneck while the evil savage becomes the victim of white brutality. Similarly, the Gothic maiden in distress is usually embodied by a black woman threatened by white males. A case in point here are, for example, Mudrooroo's vampire trilogy, in which Captain Torrens enacts Gothic atrocities against Aboriginal people, and *The Kadaitcha Sung*, in which the trope of the maiden in distress is visualized in disturbingly explicit terms when Jelda's cousin is tortured by a white judge. Attitudes towards nature are equally turned upside down, Gothicizing that which used to be an integral part of Aboriginal culture, as in *Plains of Promise*, and de-Gothicizing that which for white people only meant an alien and inhospitable landscape, as in *Benang*. This reversal mainly takes place on a modal/generic level, the Gothic in general, but there is also Mudrooroo's ancient mariner George, who is bound to tell the story of his gradually losing his cultural identity to the insatiable appetite of the white vampire through the transformation of several individual hypotexts. There are also Tracey Moffatt's films, both of which allude to their respective hypotexts in visual terms

by creating the very same studio sets and aesthetics of photography but reverse their generic stability through the distinctive use of sound. Despite its maintaining the very binaries Aboriginal Gothic seeks to deconstruct, this pattern of reversal nevertheless challenges the ideologies and assumptions behind the construction of self/other, good/evil, white/black in a critique directed at the colonial master discourse of Gothic fiction.

A further type of Aboriginal Gothic is expressed in the deliberate exclusion of non-Aboriginal audiences from cultural peculiarities, a type which is best described as the enabling pattern of Aboriginal Gothic. This pattern on the one hand comprises the introduction of genuinely Aboriginal cultural beliefs into the appropriated mode of the Gothic and on the other transgresses its well-known boundaries in an act of Gothic ambiguity. Especially the introduction of Aboriginal elements into what is easily identified as ›Gothic‹ and the refusal to translate Aboriginal words spoken in key situations of the storyline establish a cultural matrix entirely foreign to European readers. Here, a Western audience and its sense of linguistic and generic security is unsettled while at the same time Aboriginal cultural identity is resurrected. Like the reversal of Gothic binaries, the idea of an enabling Gothic can be found in both the architextual and the hypertextual level of the works: frequent references to Dreamtime stories and traditional Aboriginal epics clearly belong to the hypertextual level even though they may remain hidden from the reader's gaze due to a cultural exclusion, whereas what I would like to call a Gothic ambiguity belongs to the architextual level. Standard Gothic tropes of the Gothic villain and ab-human are employed in both *The Kadaitcha Sung* and *Benang* but invested with a diametrically opposed meaning in order to reclaim a powerful Aboriginal identity: Harley in *Benang* has »come back from the dead« (B 163) but by this event awakens to his Nyoongar heritage, and Tommy in *The Kadaitcha Sung* is characterized as a malignant bringer of revenge only to wrest the figure of the Kadaitcha from the commodifying grip of Western horror movies. Here, the reader literate in the Western Gothic tradition is left deeply disturbed, as the stock elements of Gothic fiction are turned upside down from signs of utmost evil to symbols of Aboriginal identity and strength.

Apart from such strengthening uses of the Gothic in the works analysed here, the third strand of Aboriginal Gothic I have identified is concerned with tropes of haunting, such as phantoms and, ultimately, trauma. This third kind of Aboriginal Gothic is restricted to the generic level of intertextuality, the ›Systemreferenz‹, in that it turns the genre of the ghost story rather than particular hypotexts to Aboriginal ends. In ghost stories of European fashion, one of the most common motifs is that of revenge: ghosts return and torment the living in order to take revenge for their, usually untimely, deaths. Furthermore, ghosts and the haunting associated with them also draw attention to current cultural anxieties, a notion especially prominent

in postcolonial ghost stories, in which it is the absent indigenous presence which unsettles the white settler.¹ But the idea of the repressed returning does not fit in an Aboriginal Gothic context. There, it is the trauma inflicted upon the Aboriginal peoples of Australia which takes the shape of various phantoms and haunts the living. This trauma comes in many forms in the texts analysed in this study and is always accompanied by an uneasy silence. Especially Alexis Wright's *Plains of Promise*, Vivienne Cleven's *Her Sister's Eye*, and Beck Cole's *Plains Empty* make ample use of the classic Gothic figure of the spectre returning, but the ghosts in their stories are not the souls of the already dead. Rather, they are the spectral remnants of a suppressed memory too traumatic to remember, and the stories surrounding them do not necessarily try to exorcize these phantoms but are more concerned with dragging them – sometimes quite literally – to the surface.

There they reappear in the shape of the last and truly architextual form Aboriginal Gothic may take and which is furthest from the use of Gothic fiction in a European context, that of Gothic realities which erase any justification of a fictional use of Gothic props. When finally the traumata which I have mentioned above enter consciousness in the form of memory, they often open up a space for the everyday Gothic of Aboriginal reality. Instead of being enjoyed from a safe distance, a major aspect of the European tradition following Burke's work on the sublime,² the Gothic is an all-too near experience in everyday Aboriginal life. In *Benang*, for example, the tension between white historiography and Gothic reality is created by contrasting written records with oral testimony of the same event, and in *The Kadaitcha Sung*, the issue of Aboriginal deaths in custody is broached in Gothic terms, as it is in »Mr Chuck« and Tracey Moffatt's use of diverging sound and images. The pressing realities of the Gothic finally culminate in the idea of denying Gothic *fiction* any right to validity in an indigenous Australian context when compared to the kind of Gothic *reality* Aboriginal people face every day. A case in point here is Vivienne Cleven's *Her Sister's Eye*, in which the typical Gothic story around Caroline Drysdale is happily resolved while the Gothic realities of both Sofie Salte and Archie/Raymond take a disastrous turn, thus revealing the fictitious quality of the Gothic in its European guise.

The many intertextual relations, both on a discursive and a hypertextual level, into which the works analysed enter with the Gothic in general and specific hypotexts in particular show the versatile nature of Aboriginal Gothic. It is, however, not only the *intertextual*, but also the many *intercontextual* references which give evidence of a successful appropriation and transformation of the Gothic and both its imperial and postcolonial shapes. Aboriginal Gothic writes back not only to

1 For the discussion concerning how colonial ghost stories reflect current issues of place and belonging in literature, see p. 17.

2 Cf. Burke 36–7.

the centre of the former Empire, but also to a range of diverse cultural, social, and historical influences from Australia's own past and present as well as from all over the world. In its deconstruction of colonial binaries and belligerent oppositions, Aboriginal Gothic refuses to give away every inter(con)textual detail it contains. Again, Mudrooroo's vampire trilogy, in which Aboriginal cultural traditions take centre stage, seems an apt case in point: apart from the texts and historical figures analysed in this study, other less explicit references reveal their identity only after repeated and thorough readings, as for instance Samuel Taylor Coleridge's »The Rime of the Ancient Mariner« (1798), Thomas Moore's »Lallah Rookh« (1817), John Keats's »La Belle Dame sans Merci« (1819), the novels of Charles Dickens, the intricate relationship to Heiner Müller's play »Der Auftrag« (1979) and thus Mudrooroo's own play »The Aboriginal Protesters Confront the Declaration of the Australian Republic on 26 January 2001 with the Production of ›The Commission‹ by Heiner Müller« (1993), the myths of the Argonauts and of Clytemnestra, the figure of Ida Hahn-Hahn, the goldmine-licensing system of 1854, or the High-Court case of James Somerset of 1772 – not to mention the many references to Aboriginal culture and tradition doubtlessly inserted but not visible to the white gaze. A comprehensive analysis of intertextual references contained in Mudrooroo's vampire trilogy will probably never be accomplished, thus his texts to a certain degree refuse to yield to Western narrative traditions in an act of creative resistance, as do all of the texts discussed in my thesis. Beating the canon at its own game of gore, Aboriginal Gothic ultimately rejects the one reconciling instance of the Gothic, the inevitable restoration of order, thus finally defying a linear narrative closure and once more emphasizing the regained power of Aboriginal culture and identity.

This powerful transformation of the European Gothic tradition into an Aboriginal Gothic and its creative dialogue with the legacies of colonialism are, however, not restricted to novels or films. There are short stories and lyric works, as for example Kim Scott's short story »Asleep« of 2006 and Samuel Wagan Watson's collection of poems entitled *Smoke Encrypted Whispers* of 2004, respectively. Apart from writers, there are also many photographers who in their series of pictures take on the Gothic in uncanny terms, as does for example Darren Siwes in his recent series *Just Is*.³ The different medial shapes Aboriginal Gothic takes is an interesting field of further study, as especially new interactive media are becoming increasingly important for a global audience.

3 For a brief discussion of the uncanny in Aboriginal photography, see Uta DAUR, »Unfamiliar Homes: Strategies of the Uncanny in Contemporary Photography.« *Translating Cultures: Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific*, EASA Conference, University of Roskilde, 26 Sept. 2007. Further examples of uncanny photo-based art can be found in Natalie KING, cur., *Supernatural Artificial: Contemporary Photo-Based Art from Australia*, Exhibition Catalogue (Fitzroy: Asialink, 2005).

A further step towards an understanding of Aboriginal Gothic besides cross-*medial* analyses would then be cross-*cultural* analyses of indigenous Gothic fiction worldwide. As I have shown, indigenous Gothic in national literatures of Canada and New Zealand have already attracted scholarly attention, but a comparative view linking different national indigenous Gothic productions is still missing. Similarly, a cross-*ethnic* study of *Australian* Gothic fiction still waits to be undertaken. Especially the recent developments in both Anglo-Australian and immigrant Gothic writing show that the Gothic in Australia is particularly apt to interrogate questions of national identity. Such future studies concerned with crossing the boundaries of media, literatures, and ethnicities will then push the transgressive nature of the Gothic to a new level. But much like Aboriginal Gothic itself, its study eludes narrative closure, as there will always remain dark secrets buried beneath the surface of a foreign cultural matrix and perspective.

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