‘Bats and Crows: Ambiguity as Journey in
Mudrooroo’s Master of the Ghost Dreaming Series’

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Abstract

Mudrooroo’s Master of the Ghost Dreaming series pits identity as a journey and is more interested in the notion of re-presentation than representativeness. This paper draws on notions of the trickster (a deliberately incoherent, non-archetypal, and slippery figure) alongside the symbolic ramification of water (representing fluidity, movement and impermanence) to read Mudrooroo’s use of the journey motif. As both trickster and water are neither purely disruptive nor creative, so too is this literature neither purely disrupting colonial textuality and presence nor attempting to purely create or represent colonised presence. In a sense, the use of trickster and water motifs allow for a textualisation of the ‘messiness’ and ‘liminality’ which identity in the twentieth century came to embody. In addition, contemporary concepts of ‘trickster discourse’, particularly the work of Gerald Vizenor aid analysis of Mudrooroo’s fictional journeying as a physical, psychic, supra-textual celebration of chance, ambiguity and repetition to evade fixed notions of identity. The combining of the terms ‘trickster’ and ‘discourse’ also allows for a focus on language in a reading of Mudrooroo’s novels. This is because trickster is the language, as Doueihi asserts, or the ‘mind trickster’ as Vizenor terms it, never fixing meaning or representation because it is continually being enunciated and re-enunciated. Mudrooroo’s ‘trickiness’ is to create a pastiche of intra-textual and intertextual ambiguous and moving images. That is, the emphasis on movement is enacted within the structure of the texts with references to canonical, colonial and Indigenous referents and to other elements within the larger oeuvre of his own work. The strategic repetition and ambiguity characteristic of trickster discourse allows for the ‘world’ to be re-traveled endlessly.