

## An Endeavor for Identity in Mudrooroo's "Wild Cat Falling"- A Critical Study

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I need the clefts and crevasses of, well, of a city about me.  
Surrounded by man-made rock, I am at home and can  
hide away from all that I must hide away from; but, but, I  
drag the world in after me, and my misery is exposed on a  
stage for all to see.

---- Mudrooroo

The hybrid is already open to two worlds and is  
constructed within the national and international,  
political and cultural systems of colonialism and neo-  
colonialism. To be hybrid is to understand and question  
as well as to represent the pressure of such historical placement.

----Kumkum Sangari

In 1965 the first young intellectual of aboriginal blood, *Mudrooroo's*, addressed the country with his first novel "Wild Cat Falling". He is considered as Australia's most gifted writer. He generates the perennial source of inspiration through literary works for the consolidation of aboriginal culture. through his prolificity, bold experimentation and aesthetic sensibility, has made immense contribution to Australian as well as world literature in English. His choice of unconventional subjects and characters has been determined by typical or reminiscent of the harsh poverty-stricken living conditions of humanistic philosophy. The choice of characters in a novel is determined to a large extent, by the exigencies of the period in which the novel is written and by the writer's own interest, wimps, and idiosyncrasies. That is why there is a noticeable change in the concept of hero from time to time. *Mudrooroo* uses literature as a means to modify society has led readers to dub him as a propagandist, despite his repeated emphasis on the fact that Australian content demands an identity for the aborigines. Also inseparable from any meaningful discussion of Johnson and his fiction today, is an issue that is conceivably one of the most sensitive and controversial in Australian literary history – what has become known in contemporary times as 'passing'. The notion of 'passing' is enormously

complex and falls within the culturally coded exegesis of racial classification in Australia. The possibility of passing as either white or black emerges from the interracial human entanglements of colonial encounter and the violent reconstruction of selfhood this may well entail. In the Australian context, the concept also touches on the ongoing question of non-Aboriginal control and authority over Aboriginal peoples' perceptions of dominant processes and expressions of imperial thought.

*"Wild cat falling"* explores the character of an aboriginal youth who grows up on the ragged outskirts of a country town, falls into a petty crime. He is sentenced to imprisonment for 18 months. In this novel Mudrooroo shows more clearly the displacement of modern aborigines and their inability either to find a place in white society or lead their life according to the traditional ways. The eighteen months imprisonment pushed him under the impression that the society is a fake heaven.

The novel opens with the release of a young aborigine who doesn't feel any variation between imprisonment and freedom. He feels that it is better to be a prisoner instead of leading abortive life in city where he was alienated & marginalized. The protagonist defines himself throughout the novel using motif of a cat. It will be a great surprise for the readers of the novel *"wild cat falling"* the protagonist appears as an optimist by retrospection of his heroic memories. In reality he is a pessimist who has strongly decided to lead a reclusive life. More over the protagonist appears with no hope for future.

*"Today the end and the gates will swing to eject me, alone and so-called free ..... Going out side into the fake heaven, I have dreamed of these last Eighteen Months". (3)*

Protagonist is engaging himself in quest for social knowledge, self - knowledge to get his own mark in society. He started observing all the prisoners who are going to be released: some feel that they are uncomfortable to face the world, some secretly scared of to face the world but the protagonist confirmed himself that the life will be worse the moment he stepped out.

The day has come and he moves to superintendent's office to collect payment for the days he worked in jail *"March, really step out to show my acquaintance, that I am on my way"* (22). He steps out with so-called freedom. He assumes that as he was born at the bottom of the world, he has to work for him to be the best bodgie. Before his release, he was haunted with various queries in his mind. He looks for abet, and place after his release from all possible directions to enter into an abstinent society.

*"Cars zoom past, laden tucks lumber and clatter to and from the wharf. Fremantle is a busy port buzzing with movement, everyone but me with some where to go, while I was inside some zealous prison worker asked me if I know where I was go in I said a ticket was put into my hand when I was born, but if it gave a destination, well, time had smudged the ink and so far no collector had come to clear the matter up." (31)*

At outside, he has seen the rigidness of social classes in juvenile section, hierarchical structure of screws and their use of power on their subordinates.

*"I soon found out whom to trust and mix with and who to avoid, summed it up. Pretty quickly and decided to make my Mark." (5)*

Mudrooroo has shown the hero in many dimensions. He expresses numbness. He feels all love is fantasy. Even sexual relations are through power, but not with love. He wants to love & makes love too, but all physical attributes of his mates and then he felt guilty and full of remorse. He has gone the maximum extent to analyze difference between sexual act and rape.

The conditions have drawn him to think physical relations. This junction gives a chance to see women's conditions and how they are treated and how their lives are encountered by the white society. The important person in this context is his mother who often restricts him not to move, play, and talk to aboriginals. She often insists him to live with white, think like white men. It shows that she is not at all interested to have relation with aboriginals' kids.

*"Its not joking matter," she says." If we get seen with that not we'll be chucked out of this place quick smart ..... You've got to prove you do, and don't you forget it (10)*

In some cases the protagonist possesses abstruse personality who has acidulous life even after his release. He is the first in a series of alienation, and a humble seeker of true reality behind the appearance of social life. The moment he happened to see June he is under the impression that is it the reality of illusion or the illusion of reality? He changes his attitude to grab her attention towards him. There his attitude shows his curiosity for recognition. He awaits a chance to have a conversation with June where he thought June provides a considerable contrast to the deny character. The protagonist feels that if he goes out with that woman his life circumstances are going to be more fortunate. He expresses *"She's a nice doll this one."* (88) The long conversation between June and the protagonist made them reveal about each other. During their conversation without any brazenness he says to her that he is coming from the prison as an answer provided to June's question. He has also given the details of his educational background.

*"I went to an ordinary school for a couple of years, " I tell her." " there I learnt the art of survival against mob rule. Then I got copped for stealing and I was sent to a home where I was educated in the simple techniques of crime and learnt to survive the harshness of Christian charity. In the noongar camps I learnt the art of being completely unexplainable and of sabotaging every make – believe effort to improve the native's lot. I also learnt to take raw alcohol and raw sex. In jail I graduated in vice and aver come my list illusions about life. Now I know that hope and despair are equally absurd."(41)*

The way the protagonist explains about his qualifications shows that his awareness about his status in the society, keep a hold of himself and the principle "live and let live." He is looking for some one who helps to solve individuals' worries, internal conflicts or issues in relationship, deep seated psychological traumas and over whelming incidents in one's life. In the process of continuous conversations with June, he appears as he has lost control over him both mentally and psychologically. Generally the loose of control leads to dissolve a potentially balanced image of any human being. The status of imbalance, deep sorrow which he feels that the life offered him a scene of alters desolation. At the end of their conversation, he realizes that all solutions are with in him.

*"Well. If you've got any guts  
You'll give them away and start again.  
"I'm too old now" I say  
"How old?" she asks.  
"Nineteen"  
"Practically Methuselah"  
"Too old to laugh or Cray any more. So*

*Old my bones ache”..... Flyblown descendants of the disposed erupting their hopelessness in petty crime” (44)*

Mudrooroo wants to explore a sense of belonging, a feeling of loss and abandonment which they have its genesis in a traumatic childhood and troubled teenage years spent in Australia’s welfare institutions. Even after his release the protagonist feels that still he is in prison because of the various issues in the society look like prison walls which restricts his every moment. Before he steps out from the prison he dressed as “*Grey uniform of belonging*” (16) to exhibit himself as one of the “*Citizen of the world*” (16). He tries his best at every moment to hide his aboriginal heritage. Though he exchanged his dress but unable to find a place for him in the society. He is still “*looking for a place*” (37).

His original insight and worried experiences have given a great passion to make his life very happy and comfortable or to become acme instead of appease and antipathy. He feels his aboriginality itself is anathematized.

*“I suppose I’m not what they call Australian. I’m just an odd specious native fauna cross-bread with the migrant flotsam of goldfields.” (69).*

The novel “wild cat falling” is a mirror which shows the lives of cynical young aboriginals are in dilemma whether they need to practice contemporary aboriginal traditions or need to adopt traditions of white, to lead a better life in the white society. In the world that who really doesn’t have experience about aborigines at all they will get a glimpse of slice of life that is unfamiliar to them. The protagonist is also in the same dilemma since his childhood, “*My mum was half –caste*” (42). Every movement after his release forces him reminisce his childhood experiences. Since his childhood he shares his ideas with schoolmates about the disadvantages of indigenous people in relation to white society.

*“My mum says you’ve got to go or you can’t get on”.*

*“Get on where?” Asks the first boy.*

*“Search me” I say” get a job I s’pose”*

*They look at me with dark and doubtful eyes (12)*

It is very difficulty for individuals to attempt to reintegrate with society after spending in prison. Throughout the novel he has been struggle by humiliation, marginalization, and atrocity. At every moment he looks for someone fraternize with him. It has shown very clearly while he is interacting with prettiest, astute and “*swell doll*” (38). Where as the protagonist has been portrayed as bucolic, bigotry and who doesn’t have any hope on life. He strongly believes that he is anathematized.

*“Not so good” I say “I’m one of the permanent unemployed- unemployables. No rich family to bludge on either” (39)*

Trevor Shearton’s novel “White Lies” in which three white men who have sexually shared a black girl buy their way out of guilt with a cash payment to her and the illegitimate child. Due to their bad economical conditions may be forced to change the black women life styles. Who ever were born through such women in the society obviously has to endeavor for identity? It may be the same with Jessie, the protagonist’s mother who has a physical relation with Mr. Willy. The absence of white father, the displacement of mother’s aboriginal heritage, and her passion for identity are the most significant causes for the ‘wild cat’ loss of identity. He expected to be with mother and father “*I’m just so pleased when Mr. Willy takes me out.*” (34)

When they have gone to hill place for wood cutting his father says to his son that the world is a big place. It is the only situation where 'wild cat' has got a chance to go with his father. Willy would have taken his son into the society instead of the hill spot he would see the external beauty of the world .

*"Get a good view from up there?" Mr. Willy asked  
The whole world," I say.*

*"Hmm," says Mr. Willy and shakes his white head.*

*"The world's big place, son."*

*"I know," I say. And I feel it is a good and a wonderful  
World"(36).*

In each moment of his life he stares at every thing so strangely as he comes across first time in his life. He is marginalized by the limitations of the white society and all his emotions like happiness are burnt. Happiness is a great feeling which arises at every heart in a pleasant situation. *"I suppose she expects me to smile back"* (37). 'Happiness' and 'identity' both remain as perennial dreams of 'wild cat'.

As it is mentioned he often throws himself into reminiscence of childhood incidents. Some times he confesses himself that he has done a great bungle, so it is the reason for his struggle for identity. He has been suffering from feeling of isolation since his school age where he had become a funny teddy bear for white kid's happiness. He would have cared his mother's suggestions to make his life happy in white society.

*"mum had said when I told her how the white kids laughed at me and kicked my case along the road. She hoped I'd make friends with but I never did. They played with me at school when they had to, but outside the school gates they only picked on me. I didn't tell her at first until she got wild about the case and my torn shirts."* (48)

Identity crisis is not only a problem to 'wild cat' but also to his mother . She has a physical relation with Willy and aspired to undergo a major transformation from her aboriginality. The protagonist faces a bitter experience when he and his mother are ordered to come to courthouse for which he has stolen the money and the comics from Mr. Cox's shop. While they are entering to the court house he expresses that *"no one notices a coloured woman and a boy. Nobody knows"* (51). His mother has shown abet to over come his guilty. The same sort of abet he looks even after his release. Instead of abet in the society he experiences aloof and appease. He is very happy with his mother abet *"never mine, son. Every thing will come out alright."*(53)

The main character mind fully loads with problems. With this state of mind what ever the problem he comes across while he is passing on he applies to his life. He has seen the a car machine parts are separated for repair. He looks at it and feels that it is also become victim like him. *"I have sense of fusion with this machine ..... I am always separate and alien from everything and anyone."*(113) Most of the time protagonist appears with full of dejected feelings and abstruse.

He happens to meet Denise. She is a part time prostitute with whom he had an off again\ on again sexual relationship. Denise offers pills to the protagonist and says *"The pills will hit you in a minute. They're great kicks."* (57) Though aboriginals are ill-treated but when it comes to adopting new cultures aboriginals are also equally high in rank with whites. To increase their intoxication they have habituated swallowing pills. Protagonist has seen Denise on bed, the way Denise lies on the bed stimulates *"floods in to me."* (59) Though he is in intoxication and his mind is filled with flood desires, he says *"I want to be unmoved by everything like a God."*(59)

Some of the things can be tolerate in life up to some extent, if things go beyond their hands a person adopts hyperactive attitude. He says:

I have now swell feeling of power now.  
 ..... Sort of god- like ..... my strength at the world (111)

He doesn't care any relation. He finds fault with every one as they are cause for his displacement in the society, "*Did she expect me to thanks her for bringing me in to this stinking world?*"(113). His frustration can be seen in his words "*The stink of the old is worse than jail.*"(114) He looks at every one with a single idea. After his release he adventitiously has come to know from his mother about Jeff with whom he has an acquaintance. He knew him since they spent together in an orphanage and coincidentally he met him in jail. Jeff got released from Jail on the same day. They are not really friends but only acquaintances. Jeff is not a bright individual but very loyal to his friends. But he says to his mother "*I don't have any friends.*"(114). All are cause for his deject and dislocation. His life itself is a mysterious thing for him. There are many around him but no one supports him to perish the so called social boundaries. His experiences after release make him decide to dream for alternative realities. The word "dream" shows a psychic status of the character compiles both metaphysical and spiritual concept, for which there is no adequate English rendering (Mudrooroo's 41).

The main character has a long journey from fremantle jail to Perth, where he again comes across the "*poor old mum.*" (114) He dislikes to converse with his mother who lives at "*a cheap furnished room not far out from Perth.*"(113) His mother has collaborated with the whites and has placed her own sense of belonging and has forced her son to be a mere subject of white society for which he could never forgive his mother and he hates his mother. At the end of the novel he comes to know that his mother has come back to the noongar camp and knows that she is in her deathbed, he observes:

*"So now she has gone back to die with them and be buried in that back part of the cemetery in a nameless noongar grave, serves her right. She has it coming to her. Pretending to be better than the rest of them, keeping me way from them, giving me our like a sacrificial offering to the vicious gods of the white man's world."* (123)

After he leaves the place, he decides to stop "*A terrible tiredness*" (120) by pointing "*Rifles springs up defensively.*"(120) "*You look done in, Boy*" (120), he heard an old deep voice. He is sure that it's not a white man's voice by which "*I release the safety catch.*"(120) the protagonist is very good at reminisce. He tries to remember where he has seen him. He remembers

*"He must be the one that kids said was a magic man..... language of bush animals."*(122)

The old man and the protagonist have a long conversation in which the old man has revealed the secret and called him with an identity "*Jessie Duggan's boy,*" (121) and says their binding relationship that could not be perished by any one. The protagonist also says to the old man that how he is forced to keep noongar heritage aside, and constrained to practice live and learnt to think like white men. He has lived in dreams and illumination and under a notion that "*I haven't got a country,*" I say "*Don't belong to any where*"(126) until the old man reveals the bounded relation between them. For the first time he feels a sense of belonging when he is called with 'an identity' and he feels that he has returned to spiritual roots of aboriginality.

The moment the old man has given the ultimate illumination, the care he has taken, the affection he has showered on the protagonist makes him feel that his belongingness is identified. More over he stands as a bridge between the protagonist and his noongar community.

The old man also plays a role of father when he is in bush to escape from copper. The protagonist feels as *"The cat want to live a long tome like the old crow."*(127)

At the end of the novel the unnamed protagonist confesses himself and got enlightenment, *"Why not stick around and face up to some thing for a change? Great thoughts."*(130-131) when the copper comes to arrest him for his attempt to murder, he experiences kindness, pity, humanity from the copper even he has done a worse thing in his life. The protagonist has very impressed by the magic word used by the old man *"Jessie Duggan's boy"*(121). The copper *"asks my name and charges me with attempted murder."*(131) and takes him from the old man's house with a specific identity. He develops a strong passion on life which stimulates a great desire to live with a new sense of belonging.

*"I want to live more than I ever knew before. I even feel I might know just a little how to live."*(130)

The various snippets of song lyrics used for an effective part of the novel. Because 'wild cat falling' is almost non-stop parade of different voices – and many of them are musical one. From the earliest quotation of *"Love me tender, love me long. All my dreams come true"* (4) to the repeated involution of blues lyrics such as *"Trouble In Mind"*, the novel is shot through with melody and rhythm, especially African American rhythm.

In a perceptive article on the significance of such influences upon Australian Aboriginal Literature, Emmanuel S. Nelson underlines the significance of the blues genre as it informs both the style and structure of the novel. As the notes, the extracts from five different blues songs waves into the next of 'Wild Cat Falling' resonate a 'desolate sense of isolation'. Nelson also proposes that the entire book takes the form of "an extended blue song" and notes that the tripartite structure of the novel resembles the typical form of a blue lyric:

*A typical blue song follows three stages: the singer first indicates his sorrowful mood by introducing his private tale; then he reveals the depth of his personal pain by tragic –comically exploring it in detail; and he concludes the song with an assertion of transcendence through reconciliation with his painful condition."*<sup>11</sup>

Nelson's observation is a tantalizing one, but is also ultimately flawed: Mudrooroo uses non-Aboriginal structures in his novels, but always within a Black Australian framework. The protagonist of Wild Cat Falling is influenced by the blues when he is in a non-Aboriginal environment, but it is noteworthy that the blue refrains cease in the final chapter of the book. The rediscovery or illumination he undergoes then is a much a repudiation of the self – pitying blues of the life as it is an exploration of his Aboriginality. The blues song provides us with a way into the scarred psyche of the protagonist, but it is, explicitly, a Nyoongah song that gives him – and us a clear way out of his predicament of rootlessness (*Mudrooroo – A critical study – Adam shoemaker: 23-24*).

Mudrooroo concepts of literature as closely related to life are a by-product of his humanistic ideas. It is his own ardent love for aborigines and his pity for the suffering, wretched, subjugated humanity that lead him to believe that all writers for the sake of man and the function of literature is to enable man recognize his dignity. To the extent that the convergence of concern with identity in postmodernism has been diagnosed as a response to 'a Crisis of cultural authority specifically of the authority vested in Western European culture'. This culture – clash between Australia and its immediate geographic neighbors is exemplified by deferent life styles in such activities as aborigines bonding system of political government, religious traditions and superstitious, food culture and sexual behavior patterns. The changing Australian consciousness

of Asia is reflected in the themes and the authorial, perspectives prevalent in contemporary Australian literature.

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