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An Odyssey into the “Black Pacific”: A Reassessment of Mudrooroo’s *The Undying*

The aim of this article is to reexamine Mudrooroo’s novel *The Undying* (1998) through the prism of the concept of “black Atlantic” which I borrow from Gilroy and propose to transpose to a “black Pacific.” This paradigm shift has the potential to eschew the pitfall of a bifocal approach (black v. white) and to take into consideration a larger and more complex set of cultural coordinates which have had an impact on the shaping of Aboriginal identity.

Although Bhabha’s *Location of Culture* has often been hailed as one of the main landmarks in terms of thinking beyond the dual polarity of earlier postcolonial theories – in particular the opposition centre/periphery theorized by Balibar and Wallerstein in *Race, Nation and Class*, and transposed to the postcolonial field by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back* – Bhabha’s paradigm owes a lot to previously formulated theories and in particular to the notion of “double-consciousness” developed by W. E. B Du Bois.¹ Du Bois had already evidenced the relevance of the “double-consciousness” of the black diaspora and somehow paved the way for Gilroy’s later theorizing of the black Atlantic.

In the context of Australian Aboriginal literature,² such theoretical positioning would be a way of gradually shifting the focus away from the traditionally opposed entities such as black Australia v. white Australia or Australia v. Europe. This area of investigation is all the more interesting as Mudrooroo’s novel recounts an odyssey which takes the characters from one island to another, and symbolically uproots them from one cultural entity to bring them into contact with another. Besides, this articulation of smaller entities into a larger continuum is inscribed at the heart of the novel through a topography which foregrounds an archipelago, in other words an articulation of small entities which link up with a larger one and according to a logic of cross-cultural exchanges.

The story line of the novel recounts the journey home of a group of Aborigines who are trying to return to their island. They are accompanied by Wadawaka, an African man and a former slave. Having escaped from a white settlement, they reach the mainland where they come into contact with another tribe and decide to form an alliance with them in order to unite against the threat posed by colonization, embodied not only by the British soldiers but also by Amelia, a vampire. The Aborigines eventually win the final battle, their totemic animals fighting the European metamorphoses – Amelia the vampire and Captain Torrens the werebear.

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1. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois defines the concept of “double-consciousness” as a “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others [...]. One ever feels his twoness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (2). To him, the black man craves to reconcile those two selves and merge them without losing one of them in the process. Both are important in defining him and he would not recognize himself in either one separately. As a consequence, what stands out is that need to consider those two identities as *in relation* to one another, and not as completely distinct, giving thus the theoretical grounding and departure point for this article.

2. I deliberately use the expression “Aboriginal literature” even though its validity has been called into question in the late 1990s as a result of the debate around the Mudrooroo case, as will be explained later on.

This paper aims to demonstrate that “identity [is less to be seen through its relationship to roots and rootedness than to be considered] as a process of movement and mediation that is more appropriately approached by the homonym routes” (Gilroy19). Consequently, I will show that the novel fits into a tradition of Atlantic writing transposed to the Pacific, before mentioning the aesthetic crossings at work. The last part will be devoted to a closer analysis of the notions of knowledge and progress, their role in the dominant discourse of European modernity and the way they are reassessed in the context of cross-cultural encounters which serve as a backdrop to the novel.

Contextualizing the “Black Pacific”

Thinking of Mudrooroo’s work along the lines of a “black Pacific” is a timely response to the predicament which critics have been faced with since the “Mudrooroo case,” which started in 1996 when Mudrooroo’s sister revealed that he who was one of the leading Aboriginal writers and a vocal advocate of the Aboriginal cause, was in fact not Aboriginal but of African-American origin. The “revelation” was closely followed by the publication of Victoria Laurie’s article entitled “Identity Crisis” in the *Australian Magazine*. The Mudrooroo case, which also needs to be recontextualized against the larger backdrop of the land claims,³ triggered a heated debate among academics and Aboriginal artists and writers and sparked a more general reflection on the question of authenticity. Annalisa Oboe’s collection of essays *Mongrel Signatures* came as a response which reasserted the need to discuss the implications of siding against or with Mudrooroo in terms of the conception of identity it implied. In the first chapter entitled “Mudrooroo and the Curse of Authenticity,” Adam Shoemaker shifts the focus from what was even called the Mudrooroo “hoax”⁴ to an analysis of Australian society, showing that “Mudrooroo just [did] not fit the available categories of Australian racial discourse” (19). For Shoemaker, the real question is not that of Mudrooroo’s intentions but the fact that he did not fit into the existing conception of Australian Aboriginality and the equation between being black in Australia at the time and being an Aborigine. For other critics, such as C. Pybus, the controversy around Mudrooroo’s identity invites us to question the “binary [racial] opposition which [had] been tacitly assumed by colonial historians” (25). Consequently, the “Mudrooroo case” can be read as paradigmatic of the definition of Indigenous identity in Australia and the underlying issues of race, ethnicity, culture but also of the impact of the cultural coordinates of being black in Australia. In his response to this national indictment of his identity, Mudrooroo argued that growing up as a black child in Australia at the time meant that he had to fall back on the main narrative, that of being Aboriginal. When putting forward this argument

3. One of the reasons why the Mudrooroo case led to such heated debates has to do with the fact that the argument of authenticity was of paramount importance in the land claim struggle of the 90s. Indeed, the Mabo court settlement (1992) nullified the concept of *terra nullius*, made inappropriate the possession of land by whites and led Aboriginal communities to claim the land as their own. Aboriginality was thus in the spotlight during that decade.

4. Just one year before the Mudrooroo case started, another case, known as the ‘Demidenko case,’ had already triggered heated debates. Helen Demidenko had won various awards for *The Hand that Signed the Paper* (1994), a novel whose plot revolved around a Ukrainian family during the Holocaust. People thought that Demidenko was Jewish, before her true identity was revealed. If this controversy already sparked the Australian debate over ethnicity and authenticity while also showing the Australian taste for works of non-fiction, Mudrooroo’s case was even more striking and perceived as outrageous since he was one of the leading writers and theorists of Aboriginal identity and had won a scholarship usually awarded to Aboriginal authors. These are only two cases amongst many others which have been described as part of an Australian ‘tradition’ of literary hoaxes.

of experience over race and ethnicity, Mudrooroo advocated a definition of identity which foregrounded the social construction of identity over a blood-based, inherited conception of identity. Interestingly enough, *The Undying* is underpinned with similar interrogations around blackness and what it means to be black, as well as what it means to be Aboriginal, since the Aboriginal characters come into contact with Wadawaka, a former slave from Africa.

Historically and politically speaking, the Mudrooroo case also needs to be re-set in the context of the connections and interactions between the Aborigines and African-Americans and in particular the impact that the Black Panthers had in Australia on Aboriginal activists. Notwithstanding the 1967 Australian referendum which saw 90% of the Australian population in favour of acknowledging that the Aborigines should become full-fledged citizens of Australia,⁵ few decisions were made to solve their daily problems, such as high poverty and unemployment levels, their poor health and the high mortality rate, to give only a few examples. Aboriginal activists, such as Gary Foley, Paul Coe, Denis Walker (Kath Walker's son)⁶ and many more decided to take the whole matter into their hands, as they thought that they could not rely on white politicians to address these issues. In 1968-1969, as the American Black Power movement was well on its way, they started reading extensively the works of black intellectuals and found new inspiration in the writings of Frantz Fanon or Malcolm X. Their idea was to derive a surfeit of strength from the inspirational drive of the black activists. They thus adopted the same semiology as their American predecessors (such as Afro haircuts and raised black fists as their emblem) but adapted their claims to their own needs and to the Australian context. As Kathy Lothian puts it: "[they found] a response to the local and unique conditions of the Aboriginal community" (195). Undeniably, the influence of the American Black Panther Party outreached the US to spread internationally, leading to the creation of other groups, such as the Aboriginal Panther Party or the Polynesian Panther Party.⁷ The influence of the Black Panthers in Australia points to a possible shift in the direction of articulating Aboriginal identity with a larger black awareness movement, ultimately leading to a redefinition of what it means to be black (Lothian 180). The national borders thus became porous and it sparked the Aboriginal struggle for their rights, leading to a three-year period (1969-1972) of intense intellectual stimulation and exchanges, political claims and actions. They were finally heard by the Government but most importantly, they gained national and international recognition and support.

In *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy envisages the Atlantic as a place of cultural exchanges and the crucible of black modernity. It is something that "transcend[s] both the struc-

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5. At least it is commonly thought so. However, it is necessary to mention the fact that legally, Aborigines gained citizenship in 1949, thanks to the *Australian Citizenship Act* which nullified the appellation of "British subject." The *Commonwealth Electoral Act* also gave them the right to vote the same year. However, what the 1967 referendum changed was that, before, the Aborigines were not counted in the Australian population, so numerically (and symbolically) they were not recognized as Australians.

6. Denis Walker became more radical than his mother, even if she was the first one to term and define the involvement of black writers in the struggle and to provide what could be called a "manifesto," following eleven "Black Commandments." According to her, the writers must take the lead of the protest, in "advising, criticizing and scrutinizing the ideas and ideals in the interest of [Aboriginal] people," (qtd. in Mudrooroo, *Writing* 22-3) while her commandments notably advocate the uniting of the black Australians, the necessity to claim back their ancestral land, violent reactions if met with white violence and a voluntary segregation, resting on the separateness of black and white societies.

7. In New Zealand, the name Black Power was taken up by a gang whose members also tried to help their community (*whanau*) in many ways.

tures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity” (17). While “address[ing] the continuing lure of ethnic absolutisms in cultural criticism” (3), Gilroy offers a broader definition of ethnic belonging and identity, which has its roots in the “rhizomorphic, fractal structure of the transcultural, international formation [he calls] the black Atlantic,” thus detached from all “*national* entities” (4) or essentialist positioning on blackness. Far from recalling the negritude theory,⁸ it conveys instead a sense of intercultural crisscrossing. Indeed, rather than giving credit to the conventional Manichean view culturally opposing blacks and whites, he chooses to emphasize cross-cultural exchanges, thus adopting an inclusive perspective, and not an exclusive one as was often the case previously. He rejects notions of cultural integrity and purity, showing that it is much more complex than that: nationality does not equate with ethnicity. Instead, the whole question of ethnicity has to be rethought beyond the constricting frontiers of the nation state, and replaced in the Atlantic (or in the Pacific as far as our study is concerned) which Gilroy claims as a sort of new transnational perspective, on which cultural critics and historians could rest for their analyses and study of the modern world “to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective” (15). According to him, a new compound culture has emerged “from disparate sources” (15) and what was produced is another “newer black vernacular culture” (15) which is not dominantly influenced by black America anymore. Diverse cultures have mixed and merged and have managed to create a new unity, which rather than being linked to the nation state is grounded in the African diaspora and the resulting relations and exchanges. However, one may argue that Australia as described in *The Undying* cannot be considered *stricto sensu* as a nation state.

My point is to show that the paradigm of the black Atlantic, which was elaborated within a specific context, can be used as a valuable theoretical tool to approach Australian literature and in particular black literature. The perspective that this paradigm shift opens onto is all the more interesting as the Australian context has long been characterized by a marked tendency to adopt a bifocal approach, not only on a national level, as the binary opposition between a black perspective and a white perspective presupposes, but also on a more global level, putting forward the necessity to redefine blackness in the light of the country’s history. The paradigm would in particular allow for a move out of the specular and often claustrophobic approach which has long reigned supreme in Australian studies and which consisted in opposing the West and the East or blackness and whiteness. It is also possible to transpose this idea, mentioned as I said by Du Bois and Gilroy, to the Australian context: triangulation does not link Africa, America and the Caribbean anymore, but rather Europe, the Australian black population (the Aborigines) and Afro-American identity.

Literal and Cultural Crossings: The Odyssey

In his novel *The Undying*, which is part of the Masters Series (also referred to as the *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* tetralogy), Mudrooroo taps into a rich imaginary which constitutes a mine of unexplored potential. *The Undying* brings together two different

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8. As theorized in the 1930s by francophone black writers and intellectuals such as Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor, the term “négritude” was used to depict black culture as being a whole distinct from and opposed to white identity. As a response to French colonialism and racism, the black intellectuals claimed a common African inheritance and used it as a way to fight against white supremacy.

types of black people, the Aborigines and the former slave Wadawaka, whose story is gradually unveiled, albeit partially sometimes. If what is best remembered from this novel by the critics⁹ is how it revives the Gothic potential, blending it with ethnic elements, little critical attention has been paid to Wadawaka, the former black slave, who also links this novel to the tradition of slave narratives, partaking once more in the cultural triangulation aforementioned. Even though *The Undying* is not the sole Australian novel to stage different definitions of blackness, it is one of the most striking ones since it does so quite extensively, from beginning to end, which is not the case in other Australian novels dealing with the interaction between white settlers and the Aboriginal population, as for example in *A Fringe of Leaves*. As a matter of fact, Patrick White does not go into details when it comes to the relationship between the Aborigines and Jack, the escaped convict described as “a pseudo black” (280), the plot largely focusing on the white heroine. However, both novels depict the non-Australian character – both the “black” character or the “pseudo black” character – as a go-between and a link between whites and blacks. If Jack enables Ellen Roxburgh to leave the Aboriginal tribe and go back to a Western lifestyle in *A Fringe of Leaves*, Wadawaka shares the knowledge he has acquired in Europe with the Aborigines. Interestingly enough, when given the choice, Jack prefers to go back to the Aboriginal tribe rather than try and reintegrate white society, for fear of being punished. One interpretation may be that Jack feels closer to the Aborigines than to the Whites, with whom he believes there will always be a dominant/ dominated relation. His going back to the forest is not to a case of reverting to type, nor a conscious choice to disappear and to become completely assimilated into the tribe but it may already hint at a redefinition of black identity, enlarging it, going beyond the scope of nationality and geographical borders.

The novel opens on a crossing, which takes the form of an Aboriginal odyssey as the protagonist George, who is also the narrator, and his tribe, have embarked on a long journey to survive and flee colonial domination and the effects of the European settlement. Far from describing the setting in which the plot is going to unfold, this transition scene serves another purpose, which is to emphasize the importance of the sea as a place of exchange. Interestingly enough, George and his tribe, led by former slave Wadawaka, whose real name we are later told is John Summer (193), have escaped from their island on board a stolen European ship, thus indirectly referring to the slave trade from the onset of the novel. The tradition of Atlantic writing is indeed transposed to the Pacific as the novel echoes a larger imaginary of slave narratives which has been and continues to be a source of inspiration for contemporary writers, such as Fred D'Aguiar and Caryl Phillips, whose respective novels *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997) and *Crossing the River* (1993) deal with the slave trade.¹⁰ The odyssey develops into the tragic disappearance of Aboriginal people and their culture as George's friends and family are starting to die out. George's brother dies at sea and the characters resent the loss of their former peaceful life more than they look forward to their new one on the mainland. The sea consequently becomes a locus of memory, since there is no record of the exchanges, and deaths go unrecorded as the bodies are discarded and thrown overboard into the sea. A similar instance of disappearance at sea occurs when Amelia's boat runs aground; as the sole survivor, Amelia leaves the wreck to find shelter and await other victims. Ships

9. Especially by Katrin Althans in *Darkness Subverted*.

10. For further analysis of these novels, see Ward.

are thus first considered as a liminal place, either leading to another place and a new life, or leading to death. The main difference between these two rewritings however is that the first boat is reminiscent of slave narratives, while the English boat, which Amelia boarded, sails in the wake of convictism and convict stories¹¹ (such as *For the Term of His Natural Life* written by Marcus Clarke, 1874), crossing the Pacific to fulfill transportation for life for criminals – this is what happened to Wadawaka who may also have known the first kind of transportation, as a former slave. Besides, historical figures are directly mentioned in the rape scene, providing the reader with insights into Wadawaka's identity and story. Unlike slave narratives, which are usually first-person narratives, Amelia voices Wadawaka's story, after she has guessed who he is. Wadawaka's real name, "John Summer," evokes two cases of freed slaves, those of Jonathan Strong (1767) and of Somerset (1772). If his name is not a direct reference to these slaves, despite the phonetic resemblances between his name and theirs, other figures are explicitly mentioned this time: the abolitionist Granville Sharp who worked for their freedom and Chief Justice Lord Mansfield who declared, in Amelia's words, "[John Summer] a black Englishman unable to be enslaved" (189). Quite ironically, however, this revelation scene, historically based on court cases which saw the freeing of former slaves, is also a reenactment of the master-slave dialectic since Amelia calls Wadawaka her "master," after he has raped her, positioning herself as his subordinate, his slave or even his "thing." Even if she does so only to trick him, her words prompt him to voice his rejection of this hierarchy, which gives us a clue as to the fact that he is a former slave.

However, the boat is also a way of connecting places. Indeed, according to Gilroy, ships are "mobile elements that [stand] for the shifting spaces in between the fixed places that they connect" (16). They prove to be microcosms hovering between other places, making the transition between the islands and the mainland, as is the case with the first crossing of the Aboriginal tribe. However, Australia itself may be perceived as a "shifting space" here: described by the Aborigines as a "strange" land that they reach in order to escape from the threat of white settlers, it is also an island and potentially a promised land for the white settlers from England. On the one hand, at the very beginning of the novel, George explains the causes of their deliberate exile from their "island home" (5), saying that they had to sail "westwards, ever westwards" (2) to escape from their persecutors, among which Fada, the missionary. However, due to bad weather, they set anchor on the shores of Australia, "a strange land" to them, far from the "promised land" (18) they had hoped for. On the other hand, the British soldiers are said to be a thousand miles away from civilization, and we understand that Captain Torrens, was himself exiled in a way "to the ends of the earth" (88) and sent to Australia as a way of punishing him for his cruelty. For the Aborigines, this crossing from their "island home" to a "strange land" leads to an ontological questioning hinted at in the episode of the "vertigo of the spirit" (17) which George experiences. As the passage from an "is-land" to such a vast "land" suggests, the Australian territory annihilates any sense of belonging and of being, which is to some extent what the soldiers and the first settlers also feel, as if they had been forgotten by the Crown. This disconnect from the motherland is suggested in the episode when the Aborigines get rid of their didgeridoos, throwing them into the sea after the death of their music master. The didgeridoos

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11. Which were a token of a privileged narrative of the Australian Gothic.

work as objective correlatives, laying emphasis on the general loss of Aboriginal culture and traditions.

Despite the lack of material traces of the cross-cultural encounters which happened at sea, the novel shows that the different Aboriginal cultures are not isolated but are part of a larger continuum in the sense that the smaller units are all linked together. There is a sort of common ground which allows them to communicate. For instance, Jangamuttuk's and Waai's tribes finally succeed in reaching a mutual understanding, their languages being related somehow, even if they are not quite the same. Interestingly enough, the conventional Western idea that they could understand each other via body language is discarded in the narration itself, since Jangamuttuk's first attempt at communicating with Waai's tribe through gestures is later on ridiculed by the natives. Both tribes consider the other as having "strange [or quaint] ways and dialect" (27), which do not however prevent them from eventually accepting and understanding each other. They will thus be able to perform and even create ceremonies of their own, sharing their knowledge, both taking part in that creative process and using their cultural differences to create something new. The creation of these ceremonies, linking the two cultures, which seem to be variations on the same cultural form rather than entirely separate, recalls Glissant's theory of Creole which he describes as "variable" in his *Caribbean Discourse*, "organically linked to the worldwide experience of Relation. It is literally the result of links between different cultures rather than something that preexists these links. It is not a language of essence, it is a language of the Related" (241). This definition goes against any essentialist perception of language, but also by extension of culture, and here of black identity. Identity, far from being static and absolute is prone to changing and evolving. This juxtaposition of different visions of a same cultural substratum also recalls to some extent the cultural similarities perceived between the Aboriginal members of the tribe and Wadawaka, the African man. The protagonists, Jangamuttuk, his wife Ludjee and later on her son George, can all transform into their totem animal (a Goanna, a Manta Ray and a Dingo, which are all Australian animals), while Wadawaka turns into an African animal, the Leopard. Thus, while assessing a geographical divide thanks to this reference to their countries of origin, a link is also established between their cultures, which apparently share this ability to metamorphose into totemic animals. In some ways the European protagonists also share this predisposition, since the vampire, Amelia, transforms into a bat, while Captain Torrens turns out to be a werebear, going berserk when there is a full moon. However, the difference between these two occurrences of the same characteristic may lie in the fact that the European perspective on metamorphosis comes from artistic and more precisely from the literary canon, as the novel feeds off a rich Gothic intertext, in particular through references to Stoker's *Dracula*.¹² The indigenous transformations on the other hand seem intuitively and culturally driven (as opposed to artistically produced),¹³ and may be seen as elements defining these communities as such, sharing various attributes, amongst which that of changing forms. Far from assessing a divide between cultures and between different definitions of black identity, the crossings function as real aesthetics on which the novel relies.

12. For further analysis of the Gothic trend in *The Undying*, see Françoise Kral's article on the postcolonial Gothic. Indeed, far from being a mere subversion of the Gothic, the text becomes a discourse in its own right, or rather a counter-discourse which revives the subversive potential of the European Gothic.

13. It is part and parcel of the Indian culture in North America, amongst others.

A Poetics of Crossings

One of the most striking features of this novel is the unconventional association of Aboriginal beliefs and culture with European and Gothic literary figures in the form of vampires and werebears (creatures derived from Norse mythology). The Gothic trend is best exemplified by the rewriting of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the vampire who has inspired the character of Amelia's master, the man who transformed her in the first place. The traditional attributes of the vampire in European literature are present in Mudrooroo's rewriting of the vampire figure: Amelia travels to Australia with a coffin in which there is some soil from her country of origin. She avoids daylight, craves human blood and can be defeated thanks to a silver weapon. She is also reminiscent of the female characters of the English Gothic tradition as she is a slender, young, fair-haired woman, whose paleness is usually synonymous with beauty – Ann Radcliffe's Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* being the archetypal example. These Gothic elements blend in with other elements characteristic of the fantastic trend and which rely mostly on the characters' transformations into animals. We may actually think that Mudrooroo attempted to do what he advocated in "White Forms, Aboriginal Content," that is to say to rediscover "the various facets of Aboriginal life, community and culture" (28) instead of merely copying and relying on white Australian literature and novels. However, the fact that these two cultures are closely knitted together in a novel, a written European medium, once more refers to Glissant's comments on Relation and also to what Todorov mentioned in his *Poetics*, that is to say "The literary work does not have a form and a content but a structure of significations whose *relations* must be apprehended" (41, my italics). Similarly, the narration oscillates between the detective story, when Amelia is hunted down by the Aboriginal characters, and the oral tradition of African story-telling, for example when George comments on the story he is in the process of telling, in the incipit, since the narration recalls oral forms such as story-telling as several meta-narrative expressions referring to the story-telling are used in the opening passage. One may even see in George's story elements reminiscent of Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.¹⁴ Indeed, some elements stand out, such as the description of the ghost ship "hung with shrouds which rattled in the breeze like dead men's bones," (*The Undying* 3)¹⁵ the references to George as having become an "eternal wanderer" (5) or even to the "ice-cold gale," "fog and mist" (6) accompanied by "sea monsters" (7). Oral elements prevail in both works since George begs the addressee to listen to him (and quite tellingly not *read* which would explicitly refer to the writing process, which is clearly not the focus here), saying "I want your *ears* so that I can *tell* you of those days [...]" (4, my italics). This orality could paradoxically be attributed to two seemingly antagonistic drives: first, the wish to recognize, get inspiration from, and subvert the British and European literary canon through the numerous direct references to the *Rime*, and secondly, the emphasis put on the process of story-telling and orality, which is conventionally described as an Indigenous or black attribute, while writing has come to be associated with a "white

14. Another reference could also be considered here, that to "the last of his tribe" laments, as qualified by Terry Goldie in *Fear and Temptation* (158), staging Indigenous people who are the only remainders of their extinct tribe, or agonizing individuals left behind to die. For example, one could think of "The Last of his Tribe" by Australian Henry Kendall (1869), or even of another poem from the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), "The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman."

15. However, this description can also be interpreted as a reference to the slave ships, on board which slaves commonly died from deprivation and diseases even before getting to the term of their voyage.

activity,” as explained by Walter Ong in his *Orality and Literacy* (1982). Ong however, does not establish a causal link between race and orality, but seeks to understand the historical racial polarization of literacy and orality.

Translating Knowledge: Epistemological Crossings

As the novel suggests, many indigenous beliefs rest on a conception of time as cyclical as opposed to linear.¹⁶ However, the representation of non-Western cultures, whether they be indigenous or eastern as discussed by Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978) rests on a certain agenda which consists in conveying the impression that these cultures are set in stone and are outside history, that they live in some kind of atemporal stasis, which also usually goes with a complete lack of progress and change. Said's analysis provides an interesting entry point into a discussion of *The Undying* and in particular the passages which refer to the use (or the refusal to use) white technology and objects, notably weapons. Two characters express radically different views on this matter: Jangamuttuk advocates the sole use of traditional spears, questioning the efficiency of other kinds of weapons, and on the other hand, Wadawaka is in favour of using guns only. George, who is eager to learn from both sides, learns to use both types of weapons, while Wadawaka acts as an agent of transmission and initiation of white culture. Wadawaka also shares with the Aborigines other useful techniques related to navigation and the conservation of food on board, preventing goods from deteriorating while at sea, and he also teaches George how to steer the boat. Symbolically, Wadawaka is the sole depository of such knowledge because of his own story and interaction with Europeans. In his *Black Atlantic*, Gilroy debunks the commonly shared ideas of integrity and purity of cultures, notably questioning the relationship between nationality and ethnicity. Here, if George is the recipient in which these two cultural trends blend, Wadawaka is the black character who stands in between these two worlds, as he has been accepted into the Aboriginal community and has allowed them to become acquainted with techniques to which they did not have access.

However, Wadawaka does not only purvey technological knowledge and help. He is also the one who knows how to get rid of the vampire. Indeed, if George's mother, Ludjee was the first one to refer to Amelia as a “bloodsucker,” Wadawaka also deciphers all the signs, which will allow them to successfully fight against her and defeat her, using first a silver spear to hurt the werebear (aka Captain Torrens) and then sexually taming wild Amelia. Wadawaka thus offers a complex blend of shamanism and encyclopedic or scientific knowledge, recalling the Enlightenment, strongly opposing “Renfiel,”¹⁷ Amelia's servant, who only focuses on personal interests, advancement and recognition and proclaims himself the spiritual leader of his tribe. Renfiel's ambition is in fact en-

16. Linear time is conventionally associated with what is also called “historical time.” The notion of progress prevails in so far as irreversibility is the chief temporal law at work. Time may be decomposed into a succession of events, never looking back and always going forward. This is undeniably to be contrasted with cyclical time, which is depicted as reversible, repetitive and simultaneous. If the notions of progress and of linear time are conveniently applied to Western industrialized and modern societies, those of cyclical time and reversibility are used to describe societies regarded as traditional and primitive. For instance, this dichotomy is extensively developed and explained by Lévi-Strauss in his *Structural Anthropology* (1972).

17. Amelia's choice of the name recalls indeed that of Dracula's servant, serving thus once more to highlight the literary crossings at work. However, the slight change between “Renfield” and “Renfiel” is interesting insofar as it is clearly driven by Amelia's wish to indigenize the name, so as to enable the Aborigine to pronounce it: “Now, what will I call you? Yes, Renfield. Can you pronounce that in your rude language? ‘Renfiel’. Then so be it...” (93).

gendered by resentment after being considered an outcast within his tribe. He seems to keep his artful magic from the other members of his tribe, not caring to share it since it would pose a threat to his own power. On the contrary, the common knowledge shared by the Aborigines and Wadawaka, thanks to the circulation of the same knowledge, seems to create another group, to expand it rather, to include the black African man, while George acts as a go-between. Sharing rites and knowledge leads to the redefinition of black identity since it becomes not only trans-tribal (between Jangamuttuk's and Waai's tribes) but also transnational (between the Aborigines and the black African man). In the end, Wadawaka is the agent of the re-ordering of that chaotic world since, with George's help, he has succeeded in "forging a new means to build alliances above and beyond petty issues like language, religion, skin colour, and to a lesser extent gender" (Gilroy 28) on which black survival depends. Their association works more for the common good and their common survival, than as a cultural condition: it is not a mere characteristic or attribute of a specific group of people anymore but rather a weapon or a way of acting upon the world. As a consequence, one can be reminded of Barthes's definition in his *Mythologies* of a political discourse, aiming at actively changing reality, as opposed to what he calls a "mythical discourse" (144-5), only preserving an object as an idealized image, which to some extent could be then attributed to the cultural aspect. It is not only a cultural association anymore, it has become political and has created links between communities and highlighted a continuum between seemingly different groups of people.

By way of a conclusion, Gilroy was strongly opposed to considering black identity as coterminous with a specific national identity. The borders of the state were not to be equated with cultural or ethnic boundaries. To some extent, *The Undying* follows in the tradition that Gilroy started since most of the characters have a sort of double consciousness. Doubleness and ambivalence prevail here but far from being attributes of separateness, they are rather consolidating links, focusing on shared traits, resting on relation and improving exchanges. Similarly, the uprootedness which characterizes most of the protagonists, due to either voluntary or involuntary exiles, far from insisting on a clear separation between two places, rather links them, thanks to the trope of the boat. We are not only dealing here with cultural crossings but with cross-cultural ones. Black and white identities also define each other, in a mutual reflection, which is not one-sided as Du Bois wrote in *The Souls of Black Folks*. It is possible for whites to see their identity reflected in the eyes of black people as well, as the way they are perceived by Blacks contributes to the construction of their white identity. Not only are "different" black cultures related and forming something which could be called a "supra-black-culture" but black and white cultures should also be studied in the light of one another. Indeed, they share a common history and, in this sense, they should not be considered as separate units, but are forever linked and blended together. If this vision is now commonly shared by historians, the same could be said of literature. As has been demonstrated in this article, European and Indigenous artistic drives nurture each other, giving thus a unique impulse to the narration, which may at first be considered unsettling but finally shows its fruitfulness.

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