Contents

Contributors...........................................................................................................v
Introduction
Creating White Australia: new perspectives on race, whiteness
and history..........................................................................................................ix
Jane Carey & Claire McLisky

Part 1: Global framings: Australian whiteness
in an international context..................................................................................1

1  White, British, and European: historicising identity
in settler societies ..............................................................................................3
   Ann Curthoys
2  Reworking the tailings: new gold histories and the cultural
landscape .............................................................................................................25
   Benjamin Mountford & Keir Reeves
3  Trans/national history and disciplinary amnesia: historicising
White Australia at two fins de siècles..................................................................44
   Leigh Boucher

Part 2: Whiteness on Indigenous missions
and reserves ......................................................................................................65

4  Colouring (in) virtue? Evangelicalism, work and whiteness on
Maloga Mission .....................................................................................................67
   Claire McLisky
5  ‘A most lowering thing for a lady’: aspiring to respectable
whiteness on Ramahyuck Mission, 1885–1900 ..............................................85
   Joanna Cruickshank
6 Calculating colour: whiteness, anthropological research and the Cummeragunja Aboriginal Reserve, May and June 1938 ........................................................................................................ 103
Fiona Davis

Part 3: Writing and performing race: creation and disavowal .......................................................... 121

7 Theatre or corroboree, what’s in a name? Framing Indigenous Australian 19th-century commercial performance practices ........................................................................................................... 123
Maryrose Casey

8 The Wild White Man: ‘an event under description’ .............. 140
Maggie Scott

9 Perpetuating White Australia: Aboriginal self-representation, white editing and preferred stereotypes ......................... 156
Jennifer Jones

Part 4: Gender and whiteness ........................................................................................................... 173

10 A word of evidence: shared tales about infanticide and others-not-us in colonial Victoria........................................ 175
Marguerita Stephens

11 White anxieties and the articulation of race: the women’s movement and the making of White Australia, 1910s–1930s ........................................................................................................... 195
Jane Carey

12 Whiteness, maternal feminism and the working mother, 1900–1960 ........................................................................................................... 214
Shurlee Swain, Patricia Grimshaw & Ellen Warne
Contributors

Leigh Boucher is a lecturer in the Department of Modern History, Politics and International Relations at Macquarie University, Sydney. He is the co-editor (with Katherine Ellinghaus and Jane Carey) of Re-orienting whiteness (Palgrave, 2009) and is currently researching the relationship between historical writing, settler colonialism and political rights in the 19th-century British world.

Jane Carey holds a Monash Fellowship at Monash University where her current research explores the politics of population in British settler colonies. She is the co-editor (with Katherine Ellinghaus and Leigh Boucher) of Re-orienting whiteness (Palgrave, 2009) and has published articles in Gender and History and the Women’s History Review.

Maryrose Casey lectures in theatre and performance studies at Monash University. Her research focuses on the practice and cross-cultural reception of theatre by Indigenous Australian practitioners. Her publications include the multi-award winning Creating frames: contemporary Indigenous theatre (UQP 2004) and with Aileen Moreton-Robinson and Fiona Nicoll, Transnational whiteness matters (Rowman & Littlefield, 2008).

Joanna Cruickshank is a lecturer in history at Deakin University. She has published on 18th- and 19th-century religious history in Britain and Australia. Forthcoming publications include an article on the friendships of British Methodist women in the Journal of Eighteenth-Century Studies, a co-authored chapter (with Patricia Grimshaw) on Moravian missionaries in far north Queensland and a book on the 18th-century hymn writer Charles Wesley, to be published by Scarecrow Press in late 2009.
Ann Curthoys is ARC Professorial Fellow at the University of Sydney. Her most recent book is Ann Curthoys, Ann Genovese and Alexander Reilly, Rights and redemption: history, law, and Indigenous people (UNSW Press, 2008). For something completely different, see Ann Curthoys and Ann McGrath, How to write history that people want to read (UNSW Press, 2009).

Fiona Davis is a postgraduate student in the School of Historical Studies at the University of Melbourne. Her PhD thesis topic is ‘Black, white and shades of grey: the story of cultural exchange on Cummeragunja, 1900–1950’.

Patricia Grimshaw is a Professorial Fellow in the School of Historical Studies at the University of Melbourne, where for several decades she taught Australian and American history and contributed to the Gender Studies Program. She has written extensively on women’s history, and engaged with the history of settler colonialism and whiteness studies. With Shurlee Swain and Ellen Warne, she is currently completing a book, ‘Balancing acts: working mothers in twentieth-century Australia’.

Jennifer Jones holds an ARC Post Doctoral Fellowship at the Australian Centre, School of Historical Studies at the University of Melbourne. Her project examines rural women’s cross-racial collaboration in the Country Women’s Association of NSW during the assimilation era. Jennifer’s first book, Black writers and white editors: episodes of collaboration and compromise in Australian publishing history, was published by Australian Scholarly Publishing in 2009.

Claire McLisky is a white Australian woman descended from colonial-era Scottish and English settlers. She grew up on Bundjalung land in northern New South Wales. In early 2009 Claire was awarded her PhD in Australian history, from the University of Melbourne, with a thesis exploring faith, power and subjectivity in the lives of Protestant
missionaries Daniel and Janet Matthews. She has recently set off for two years travelling, living, and working overseas.

Benjamin Mountford is a Rae and Edith Bennett Travelling Scholar, reading for a DPhil in Imperial History at Exeter College, Oxford. His doctoral research examines the importance of 19th-century perceptions of China in shaping an Anglo-Australian understanding of the British Empire.

Keir Reeves is a Monash Research Fellow co-housed in the Tourism Research Unit and the National Centre for Australian Studies at Monash University. Keir is the exhibition reviews editor for History Australia, and an editorial board member of Sporting Traditions, and the Heritage Council of Victoria. He is a contributing co-editor of Places of pain and shame: dealing with difficult heritage (Routledge, 2009) and Deeper leads: new approaches in Victorian goldfields history (Ballarat Heritage Services, 2007).

During her studies at the University of Melbourne, Maggie Scott was inspired by lecturers such as Tracey Banivanua-Mar and Jane Carey to pursue research into historical and contemporary Indigenous resistance to colonialism, critical race theory and alternative narratives of history. In 2008 Maggie completed a thesis encompassing some of these interests in the story of William Buckley. She currently tutors ‘Writing Angles’ and ‘Popular Culture and the Moving Image’ at RMIT and is adapting her thesis into a screenplay.

Shurlee Swain is a professor at Australian Catholic University and a Senior Fellow in the School of Historical Studies at the University of Melbourne. She has written extensively on the history of women, children and welfare, and is currently completing a book with Patricia Grimshaw and Ellen Warne, ‘Balancing acts: working mothers in twentieth-century Australia.’
Marguerita Stephens was a working gardener before returning to study history at the University of Melbourne. Her PhD on race relations in colonial Victoria, with a close focus on the Coranderrk Aboriginal Station, was awarded the Dennis-Wettenhall Prize for Research in Australian History, 2004. She holds a Research Fellowship in the School of Historical Studies, University of Melbourne and is a participant in the Manuscript Sponsorship Program at the University’s Writing Centre for Scholars and Academics.

Ellen Warne is a lecturer in history at Australian Catholic University where she teaches in a range of Australian and international history units. She has written on Christian women’s use of maternal activism to achieve political aims in 19th- and early 20th-century Australia, and is currently completing a book with Shurlee Swain and Patricia Grimshaw, ‘Balancing acts: working mothers in twentieth-century Australia.’
8

The Wild White Man: ‘an event under description’

Maggie Scott, University of Melbourne

William Buckley was one of four convicts who escaped from Sullivan’s Bay (Sorrento) in 1803, the original penal colony in the region that was later to become the colonised state of Victoria. He lived with the Wathaurong people and returned to European colonial society in 1835. It is only because William Buckley, a white man, survived his escape into so-called wild, unexplored and highly desirable terrain that so many would be inclined to tell and retell his story.

This chapter is a small part of a much larger research project in which I examined issues of historical truth versus fiction and myth, which I found to be concurrent themes in representations of William Buckley over time.1 The representations I discuss in my larger research project come from a range of different sources.2 For this chapter, I am

---


2 Representations of Buckley after the 1860s developed into fictionalised, fantastical histories. In more recent times, Indigenous perspectives of Buckley have been uncovered, as well the possibility that he has come to symbolise reconciliation with the past and with Indigenous people. For some examples see Marcus Clarke, ‘William Buckley, the “Wild White Man”’, in Old tales of a young country (Melbourne: Mason, Firth, and McCutcheon,
looking specifically at the period between 1835, when Buckley first returned from the ‘wilderness’, and the 1860s, after he died in 1856.

Although there is a wealth of primary material about Buckley, it has become apparent that because of his mythological appeal, he is not easy to pin down. During this phase, he has been moulded variously into a John the Baptist figure, an untrustworthy savage, a noble savage, and a captive or castaway. In his earliest incarnations, Buckley is spoken of in colonial journals and diaries, government documents, legal treatises, and missionary reports. Later, in the 1850s, he is also reported in newspapers, examined in colonial histories and anthropologies, and written about in fictions and life stories. I will demonstrate that these early representations of Buckley are often characterised by their contradictions and unspoken anxieties, which are particularly noticeable in the efforts of colonial players to make Buckley serve purposes he did not quite fit.

In the past 50 years, there has been relatively little historical scholarship examining William Buckley’s entry back into colonial life and his confusing role as a go-between of colonial and Indigenous cultures. The work that is available has informed my approach to examining how historical fact and fiction are entwined. An exhibition held at Geelong Gallery in 2001, *William Buckley: rediscovered*, generated a catalogue containing a collection of essays in which Buckley is discussed mostly from a literary and artistic perspective. In his useful essay ‘Jump up whitefellow: the iconography of William Buckley’, art historian Andrew Sayers looks at the changes in artistic images of Buckley over time, and

---


what they might reflect about the period from which they came. Lyn Gallacher’s 2004 ABC radio documentary on William Buckley contains historical insights from scholars Tony Birch and Tim Flannery, but mostly incorporates excerpts from professional storyteller Jan Wositzky’s one-man play about Buckley. As we can see from these main sources, analyses of Buckley’s story are more situated in the realms of fiction and artistic enterprise than in historical fact.

Nonetheless, I have also found many references to Buckley in scholarly articles about colonial history in Port Phillip/Victoria. Although all of these sources are useful in piecing together a contemporary scholarly landscape around Buckley, I found that I needed to draw upon other relevant areas of scholarship in order to ground his story within a more suitable analytic framework. Many of the early sources that I will discuss in this chapter contain fundamental contradictions when observing Buckley’s inauthentic ‘whiteness’ and inherent ‘blackness’, with all the slippery implications that abound in such descriptions. Hence, Buckley’s ‘ambivalent’ qualities call for a postcolonial analysis in order to discern how issues of power, race, and

---

land ownership imposed on Indigenous cultures by Europeans functioned.

Over the past 20 years, postcolonial scholars like Homi Bhaba and Robert Young have explored ideas of colonial ambivalence (and about race in particular), seeking to illustrate the instability of the commonly held, normative, empirical colonial narratives. Postcolonial theories provide perspectives which point to the possibilities of resistance to colonialism, the instabilities of colonial power, and the profound problems of colonial nationhood and identity. On ambivalence, Robert Young observes that:

In occupying two places at once … the depersonalised, dislocated colonial subject can become an incalculable object, quite literally, difficult to place. The demand of [colonial] authority cannot unify its message nor simply identify its subjects.

The more contemporary field of whiteness studies offers useful scholarship with which to tackle Buckley’s problematic appearance as a white/black man. These approaches have assisted me in thinking about the politics of whiteness in representations of Buckley, as well as the way

---


8 Young, 148.

whiteness is constructed in the social world around him. Lynette Russell and Margery Fee, for example, draw upon Homi Bhaba’s postcolonial theories to articulate a need to ‘think through problems of essentialising binaries and rigid identities’ in the highly politicised spheres of ‘Aboriginality’ and ‘Whiteness’. Also relevant to Buckley’s problematised position is Sara Ahmed’s discussion of the ‘Politics of Good Feeling’, a hypothesis about how racialised subjects are seen as getting in the way of public happiness because their politicised presence reminds us of the injustices of the social world.

Australian postcolonial scholarship on ‘Wild Whites’ is also helpful. Buckley was sometimes represented as a captive of the Wathaurong, rather than as their guest or as a refugee of colonisation. Kate Darian-Smith’s work on captivity narratives has therefore proved extremely useful as a starting point in my analysis of Buckley’s colonial ambivalence. Further, Kay Schaffer examines the links between captivity narratives and the idea of nation in her work, and Susan Martin has gone on to identify the significantly different historical contexts between American and Australian captivity narratives, pointing out that many people who lived with Australian Indigenous groups for long periods were never captives, but castaways or escapees from colonies seeking assistance for survival.

---

13 The captivity narrative is first seen in North America as renditions of the captivities of white men and women by Indians. Hundreds were recorded between the late-17th to the mid-19th centuries, with hundreds more fictionalised versions generated from the ‘real’ accounts. See Kay Schaffer, ‘Captivity narratives and the idea of “Nation”’, in Captured lives,
We are fascinated by the wild white man, but cannot place him within a stabilising framework characteristic of empirical history. I hope to convey Buckley’s ambiguity by discussing how he is a figure who never appears as one image, but as Chris Healy puts it, as a figure that ‘does not stand at the centre of a stable narrative but is rather a multiple figure, an “event under description”’.  

Buckley’s appearance at a camp at Beangala/Indented Head in July 1835 is a repeated representation, and it is this image which has become one of the main ‘events’ of his life. The first person to record Buckley’s ‘return’ was William Todd, an Irish ex-convict and servant to John Batman, who had been given the task of recording a journal at the camp. In early June 1835, after an 11-day land evaluation at Port Phillip, Batman decided it was right for settlement and made a ‘treaty’ with ‘chiefs’ for the land. He left his employees Todd, two other European servants, and five Indigenous men from Sydney at Indented Head to keep up friendly relations with the locals and to assemble a hut and garden. They remained there for approximately two months before John Helder Wedge’s arrival in early August and it is clear from the journal that—for

---


14 Healy, *From the ruins of colonialism*, 131.
the three white servants at least—there was an atmosphere of both communal living with, and dread of, the Indigenous people. Todd reports his fears of growing numbers of people at the camp and his constant wish that they would leave. The Europeans jealously restricted their food ‘rations’ to these strangers, but ironically they also agreed to look after all their children at camp while the men, women and ‘Sydney Blacks’ went to procure food, which would then be bought back to camp and shared with the Europeans in the evenings.

In the diary entry of 6 July 1835, we get a great sense of excitement and relief from Todd when a ‘White man came walking up to the Native huts … clad the same as the Natives’. This written appropriation of Buckley narrates an event in which whiteness is recognised, marvelled at and swiftly re-inscribed as European:

Being a long time with the Natives he has nearly forgot the English language—but the Native Language he can speak fluently. We then brought him to our tent, Clothed him with the best we had—and made him share the same as we.

The speed with which Buckley was snapped up and appropriated in Todd’s narrative is very telling. It seems fitting that the three white servants, who never felt entirely comfortable at Indented Head, would latch onto this ‘Wild White Man’ and suckle some sense of stability and authority from his potential to mediate between the Indigenous people and themselves. Despite this, they also swiftly attempted to erase his appearance of ‘savagery’ by clothing and shaving him, and giving him bread.

This journal entry is similar to the written appropriation of Barbara Thompson, a shipwreck castaway on the Cape York Peninsula who was

---

17 Todd, 31. It is very strange that, given Buckley had no English, Todd was able to reiterate so much of his story in this one diary entry on his first day at the camp. Chronological inference seems precarious under such circumstances. For Todd’s entries during Buckley’s month at the camp before John Helder Wedge’s arrival, see pages 31–36.

18 Ibid.
cared for by an Indigenous community for five years. The 1849 journals of the surveying crew who recorded her appearance reflect similar tropes to Todd’s diary entries; the edifying recognition of her whiteness and a swift move to wash, clothe and feed her with proper food. Furthermore, there is an effort to disconnect her from the people who had cared for her. Although the Rattlesnake crew all acknowledged that Thompson was well cared for after the shipwreck, the contemporary narratives of the event were framed in the language of her ‘escape’ from her life in ‘captivity’ with black men, and her ‘liberation’ by white men back into the folds of European society.\textsuperscript{19}

In 1837—two years after Buckley returned to settler society—missionary George Langhorne took a short dictation from him which strongly suggests that Buckley was not a captive:

> Although opportunities offered, and I sometimes thought of going to the Europeans I had heard were at Western Port I never could make up my mind to leave the party to whom I had become attached. When therefore I heard of the arrival of Mr. Batman and his party it was some time before I would go down as I never supposed I should be comfortable amongst my own countrymen again.\textsuperscript{20}

As we will see, constructions of Buckley as a captive serve to reinstall him to a superior civilisation. His contemporaries utilised his ‘civilised’ whiteness, as well as his ‘authentic’ Indigenous links to the land.

Whilst Todd and his contemporaries were moved by a need to soothe personal anxieties and fears of coexisting with local inhabitants who may or may not be welcoming, some of the more prominent men of the early

\textsuperscript{19} Darian-Smith, “‘Rescuing’ Barbara Thompson’, 99–114. A colonial fascination with Buckley’s potential sexual escapades is also evident in the sources, and it is worth comparing with Darian-Smith’s observations that the construction of captive females always pertained to the titillation of sexual contact between the white woman and the black man.

colonial period in Melbourne actively appropriated Buckley in order to assist their dubious processes of simultaneous possession and dispossession. The Port Phillip Association was made up of ‘noteworthy’ and influential men from Van Diemen’s Land, who planned to colonise Port Phillip against the NSW government’s will, hoping the region would be within the jurisdiction of Governor Arthur in Van Diemen’s Land, who was a supporter of the Association.\(^\text{21}\) One of the members, John Batman, was later to be lionised as a true hero of Port Phillip’s colonisation epitomised by his natural bush skills and his supposed ease with the Indigenous people he encountered.\(^\text{22}\) However, in his past Batman had an ominous career in Van Diemen’s Land as a headhunter when Governor Arthur declared martial law on resistant Indigenous people fighting to keep their lands.\(^\text{23}\) The so-called unavoidable violence he committed in the Black Wars was perhaps what caused Batman to attempt the more peaceful approach of ‘buying’ land from the Kulin peoples in exchange for European material goods. Although Batman’s subsequent treaty was likely made in earnest by both parties, it is clear that it was very unlikely to have been recognised by contemporary Indigenous groups as the capitalist wholesale of ancestral country.\(^\text{24}\)

It is within the landscape of Batman’s precarious entrepreneurial mission that Buckley’s image became connected in some way to the operations of power of men from the Association. Both Batman and surveyor John Helder Wedge quickly set about committing Buckley to text, describing his physical presence, his story, his knowledge of the land

\(^{21}\) James Bonwick, *The discovery and settlement of Port Phillip: being a history of the country now called Victoria up to the arrival of Mr Superintendent LaTrobe in October, 1839*, ed. Hugh Anderson (Melbourne: Red Rooster Press, 1999), 30–1.

\(^{22}\) Ibid. 31–32. James Bonwick is responsible for the early championing of Batman as hero in the 1850s. See also Bonwick’s *John Batman, the founder of Victoria* (Melbourne: Samuel Mullen, 1867).

\(^{23}\) Billot, *John Batman*, 47.

\(^{24}\) Batman, ‘The greatest landowner in the world’, 52–8.
and peoples, as well as petitioning for his pardon in writing. This led to a series of political manoeuvrings and skirmishes in which he was utilised as a wager for anticipated wealth and land ownerships in the schemes of Association men and presented to the ‘authorities’ as both a godsend and as a potential threat, depending on what each player wanted.

John Fawkner is an example of someone who propagated the myth of Buckley as a savage. The son of a convict, Fawkner had travelled as a child with Buckley on the Calcutta to Sullivan’s Bay in 1803. By mid-1836, he was a prominent and ruthless player in the political organisation of the town that would become Melbourne, acquiring considerable land, along with business, social, and political status.

Fawkner mentions Buckley a few times in his journal of 1835; he appears mostly in passing as a mild presence in the general building of the township, as well as the beneficiary of a yearly wage for his interpretive and policing services. But in his Reminiscences of 1862, Fawkner becomes more malignant. Referring to an incident that he had briefly mentioned in his 1830s journal in one line (‘The Blacks we learnt intended to murder us for our goods’), Fawkner explains that this isolated sentence actually denoted a plot to massacre the whites. The small settlement was supposedly saved by a young Indigenous man, Derrimut, who warned Fawkner via Buckley’s translations: ‘The half savage Buckley

---

25 It must be noted here that Buckley lied about his convict status to Todd and the others left at Indented Head by Batman. He initially gave them the impression that he was in fact a castaway (although this might have been wishful thinking on their part). Nonetheless, whilst Buckley’s appearance at the camp may have been motivated by contemporary Indigenous reasons unknowable to us, he might also have been terrified of being convicted again. See Todd’s diary for the details of his lies and how the ‘truth’ emerged. Todd, 31 and 35.

26 John Pascoe Fawkner, Melbourne’s missing chronicle: being the journal of preparations for departure to and proceedings at Port Phillip by John Pascoe Fawkner, ed. C.P. Billot (Melbourne: Quartet Books, 1982), 7, 10, 12, 83, 84 and 91.

27 John Pascoe Fawkner, Reminiscences, 1869, MS 8528, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne. I have quoted from excerpts of this document in Billot’s The life and times of John Pascoe Fawkner.
declared that if he had his will he would spear Derrimut for giving the information.’28 Despite Buckley’s peaceful presence in his 1830s journal, in hindsight Fawkner describes him a worthless, violent mediator who wasn’t to be trusted. This contradictory view of Buckley came at a time when Fawkner probably felt the need to re-assert his position in the history of Port Phillip. It is also possible that he resented Buckley’s affiliation with the association. Aligned with the association, Buckley was at times framed as an Indigenous white man with connections to the land, essentially allied with the Europeans. According to Fawkner and governors in other states who didn’t know him, he was a savage white man, as untrustworthy as the natives, who must be carefully watched. These became prevailing tropes for Buckley.

As we move further from the fledgling settlement of 1835, Buckley’s story begins to be used to represent authoritative histories of the Indigenous people of Victoria. Thus his image was utilised in the ensuing catalogues of misconceived knowledge used to describe, confine and mark the so-called decline of the Indigenous population. In 1856 historian James Bonwick describes his efforts to attract the attention of a tight-lipped William Buckley: ‘Not being divested of curiosity, we often endeavoured to gain from some one of his acquaintances a little narrative of that savage life, but utterly failed in doing so,’ Bonwick wrote.29 Bonwick was clearly covetous of journalist John Morgan’s 1852 collaboration with William Buckley, which produced the adventure

28 Fawkner, Reminiscences, Wednesday 28 October 1835, cited in Billot, The life and times of John Pascoe Fawkner, 115. Derrimut is himself a troubled hybrid figure in a hard place. His role as both assistant and resistor of colonial pressures is explored in Clark, 107–32. This article discusses the possible Indigenous reasons for a massacre and the effect it would have had upon development of the early settlement. Lyn Gallacher’s radio documentary about William Buckley points out the contentious possibility that a massacre did take place, except the other way round with Fawkner and his assistants meting out the massacre of Kulin people.

chronicle *The life and adventures of William Buckley, thirty-two years a wanderer amongst the Aborigines of the then unexplored country round Port Phillip, now the Province of Victoria.*

When Buckley died in early 1856, Bonwick was very quick to follow up with his version of the ‘Blacks as they were than as they are’, and the informant he could never procure. This work contributed to his canon on Port Phillip history and reasserted his authority as the foremost historical expert of the region. Bonwick concedes half-heartedly that Morgan's largely apocryphal *Life and adventures* was probably the most accurate source pertaining to the main details and events of Buckley’s life, utilising large slabs from the text to support his own more ‘authentic’ and truthful history. Unlike Morgan, he prefers not to attribute any intelligence whatsoever to Buckley, calling upon distinguished contemporary players of the early Port Phillip landscape to confirm that Buckley was so ‘dull and reserved, that it was impossible to get any

---


31 The details of Buckley’s death were printed in the following papers: *Argus*, 2 February 1855; *Argus*, 7 March 1856, 7; *Cornwall Chronicle*, 2 February 1856, 3.

32 The preface to Bonwick’s *William Buckley: the wild white man*, reveals a view that Indigenous people were degraded and dying out. His use of Buckley seems intended as the vehicle by which to preserve an authoritative narrative as to ‘how they really were’.

33 Buckley was born in 1780 and grew up in Macclesfield, near Cheshire, England. He was brought up by his grandparents and as a young man was apprenticed as a bricklayer. He joined the military and fought in the Netherlands in wars against Napoleon; then, back in England, was found in possession of stolen goods and transported with a sentence of 14 years to the British colonies in Australia. After escaping in 1803, Buckley was eventually accepted into Wathaurong society, the custodians of the coastal and inland regions ranging from what is now known as Werribee, west through to the Otway Ranges and north as far as Ballarat. After 1835, he then presumably lived between Wathaurong, other Kulin societies, and settlers in and around the nascent establishment of Melbourne. He left for Hobart in 1837, where he lived and worked as a storeman, then as a guard at a women’s prison. He remarried in 1840 and was put on a pension in 1850. Morgan, ‘The life and adventures of William Buckley’.
connected or reliable information from him.\textsuperscript{34} Despite this, Buckley is also a ‘wonderful character’ whose very presence in his writing supports Bonwick’s authoritative constructions of the ‘Port Phillip Blacks’.\textsuperscript{35} Thus William Buckley exists in Bonwick’s texts as a figure of profound ambivalence. After all, Bonwick’s primary aim is not to provide a detailed portrait of Buckley, but to fill the majority of his chapters with his specialist knowledge about the ‘primitive days of Port Phillip, and the savage state of the Aborigines’.\textsuperscript{36}

This aim is reiterated in the second edition of his history in 1863, when he faithfully tells the truth of Buckley’s story, legitimising it ‘in the very language of the authorities, at the risk of seeming somewhat dry in detail’.\textsuperscript{37} Once again, the opening chapter on Buckley stands in for the remaining 26 chapters discussing the ‘Blacks of Victoria’ from ‘Physical Appearance’ to ‘Infanticide and Cannibalism’ and, finally, their ‘Decline’. In addition, he reveals a scathing disdain for a man who did not impart Christianity or civilisation to the Indigenous people with whom he stayed for so many years.\textsuperscript{38} Yet, in a fit of further ambivalence, he reveals his own desires when he gives himself licence to transpose a romantic and entirely imagined longing for Victoria’s ‘primitive’ state, mediated via the figure of Buckley:

\begin{quote}
Fain would we picture the home life of this ‘man of the woods.’ Fancy draws him in an alcove retreat, on the flowery banks of a murmuring stream,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{34} Bonwick, \textit{William Buckley: the wild white man}, 7. Bonwick’s charge of stupidity is contradicted by Wesleyan missionary Reverend Joseph Orton. Although Orton was also motivated by a ‘civilising’ (religious) mission, in 1836 he found Buckley to be a man of ‘thought and shrewdness’, but without leadership qualities. Cited in Barrett, 22–6.

\textsuperscript{35} Bonwick, \textit{William Buckley: the wild white man}, 7.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid. preface.


\textsuperscript{38} Ibid. 2.
Bonwick’s main competition was Tasmanian editor John Morgan, who constructs his version of the ‘truth’ about Buckley in a fictive history. In his preface to Life and adventures, Morgan notes that as a weathered newspaper writer, he was aware that ‘all his labours will be scattered to the winds, as old gossip’, and that he must therefore engage in a succinct and straightforward writing style. In this manner, he cobbles together his own authentic version. Written in the first person from Buckley’s perspective, it is nonetheless difficult to gauge what the extent of Buckley’s involvement was; or, indeed, why he chose Morgan as a confidante.

One possibility, openly declared in the preface, is their mutual need for finances. Morgan guarantees the authentic nature of their venture by declaring the existence of a trusteeship from which both would receive equal shares of the financial rewards. Morgan is thus seen to carefully avoid the fate of Daniel Defoe, who was accused of living off the great profits of his fictional history of Robinson Crusoe, which was widely believed to have been pilfered from the diary of a ‘real’ castaway, Alexander Selkirk. Morgan thus plays on this public desire for the literary genre that writer/historian Tony Birch ironically describes as ‘My time amongst the savages’. Further, Birch warns that we should be sceptical about the historical value, and especially the Indigenous ethnographic value, of such narratives, which tended to produce highly embellished tales, were after a strong commercial outcome, and attracted

---

39 Ibid. 3.
41 Ibid. 1–7. It is very difficult (if not impossible) to ascertain sales of Morgan’s book in order to gauge how popular it was at the time of printing. Morgan’s narrative was reprinted by a Melbourne paper upon Buckley’s death (Argus, 7 March 1856, and its following instalment, 27 March 1856) indicates that the narrative probably received a wide readership a few years after it was first printed.
42 Ibid. 5.
a populist readership with a desire for risqué and melodramatic material. Nevertheless, Morgan relied on the attraction of the ‘true story’ of a ‘real life’ castaway to ensure the saleable authenticity of his text.

This manufacture of Buckley in the mould of the Robinson Crusoe genre is interesting because it depends on the belief Bonwick held so dear: that the role of a castaway in foreign lands was to stay true to European ideals of religion and civilised life, thus proving the eternal strength of such principles, even in isolation. Says Bonwick: ‘How he might have signalised himself in the councils of the tribe, and astonished their savage minds with the prowess of civilisation!’ Yet, as writer Barry Hill points out, Morgan had to strain to fit his version of Buckley in to this Crusoe mould. There was one major difference between these two figures, says Hill: Buckley was not alone. Unlike Crusoe, Buckley’s Other was not a solitary, convenient and pliable Man Friday. He lived within many societies of Others. Says Hill:

There was no space, literally or metaphorically, for an individual to be ‘alone’. Wherever he went … the meanings of the country kept him company: he may not have known all the meanings but [the] social fact was everywhere.

---

43 Birch’s comment is in reply to Tim Flannery’s assertion that Morgan’s narrative is from a ‘real’ Indigenous perspective. For more details, see Gallacher.

44 This style, made popular by Daniel Defoe’s *The life and strange surprising adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719), emerged in the 1700s and was a strong mixture of ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’ which proved palatable to wide, colonial audiences interested in the private lives of colonial ‘adventurers’ in new worlds. For more about the appeal of ‘fictive history’ and its influence on the distinctions between history and fiction, see Jill Lepore, ‘Just the facts, ma’am’, *New Yorker*, 24 March 2008, 79–83. Barry Hill says the prevailing appeal of the Crusoe story model (utilised for Buckley over 100 years after it was released) is as ‘founding myth of modern and romantic individualism’. See Barry Hill, ‘Buckley, our imagination, hope’, in *William Buckley: rediscovered*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Geelong Gallery (Geelong, Mornington Peninsula: Geelong Gallery and Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery, 2001), 8.

45 Bonwick, *The wild white man and the blacks of Victoria*, 3.

46 Hill, 10.
In this sense, Buckley was a threat. He knew too much about the real lives, country, cultures and humanity of the inhabitants of this highly sought-after land, and was in danger of articulating what many settlers didn’t want to hear. If so, when Morgan and Bonwick took up the story of an ‘illiterate’ man, they were sure to make it more palatable to European audiences by reiterating the captive theme and by utilising Buckley to substantiate their own constructions of Indigenous life. Representations of Buckley have thus come to illustrate the depths of colonial anxieties and desires, which were projected onto the Indigenous Other. They lent authority to the labelling, categorisation and naming of Indigenous peoples and culture from a white colonial perspective. These were the roots of misconceptions, ignorance and prejudices about Indigenous peoples which still exist today.