Breaking New Ground
Early Australian Ethnography in Colonial Women’s Writing

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Abstract

In the nineteenth century, Aboriginal art was scarcely appreciated by white Australians as fine art. For this reason, our knowledge today of Aboriginal artworks and artefacts from that time relies almost entirely on the writings and collections of explorers, natural scientists, government surveyors, magistrates, protectors and missionaries who worked as amateur, albeit passionate, ethnographers. The records of their activities, in the form of diaries, letters, memoirs, scholarly articles and scientific texts, along with the collections that they accrued, were the basis of much of the scholarship on the early reception of Aboriginal art in Australia. Until now, this scholarship has drawn almost entirely on the views of male ethnographers. The history of nineteenth-century female ethnographers in Australia and their collecting practices was yet to be written. This thesis makes a significant inroad into this history.

Over the course of the last three decades, many feminist historians sought to revise the conventional history of colonial Australia and, in so doing, assessed the relationships between early nineteenth-century female colonists and Indigenous people. These histories tended to oscillate between interpreting the early female colonists’ accounts of Indigenous people as being either complicit with, or resistant to, the colonial project. More recently, so-called ‘post-binary’ feminist critiques complicated the moral assumptions of earlier feminist scholars. However, the focus of the latter on theory and ideologically encoded critique could obscure the relational nuances, transculturation and Indigenous agency recorded in early ethnography, especially in the writings of nineteenth-century white women, which were often more transparent, anecdotal and personal than those of their male contemporaries.

My argument is that some of these women, from standpoints that reflected their relational and emplaced domestic realms, recorded significant intimate dialogue and alternative perceptions of their embedded intercultural relations. Thereby, they complicated the usual dichotomies of much male racialising ethnography and objectifying documentation, dichotomies that some feminist scholars used in their critiques of these early women. An investigation of the documentation of their dynamics of transculturation, I argue, tends to de-essentialise colonial encounters, upsetting hard and fast ideological boundaries in the complications of social life.

Thanks largely to feminist historians, in recent times the role that white women played in the reception of Aboriginal art in the first half of the twentieth century –
ranging from Daisy Bates’ collecting practice, articles on Aboriginal art and commissioning of artists’ books and drawings, to Margaret Preston’s advocacy of Indigenous designs – is increasingly becoming an accepted part of anthropological and art histories. However, there is a general silence around the role women played in nineteenth-century ethnography, which my thesis aims to redress. It does this by beginning with a broad-ranging assessment of feminist revisionist histories and the writings of colonial women with Indigenous content, before analysing ethnographic studies by colonial women, including Charlotte Waring Barton, Louisa Atkinson, Isabella Dawson and Ethel Hassell.
Candidate’s Declaration

This thesis does not contain work that I have published, nor work under review for publication.
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Referencing Note

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I had from my infancy better opportunities of acquiring their language and learning their manners and customs than perhaps any other person in the Western District. Such very favourable circumstances having placed me in a position to assist in preserving a knowledge of the aborigines, were I to neglect doing so I should consider myself not only guilty of gross negligence, but of ingratitude to a race of nature’s nobility for which I have the greatest affection and respect.

Introduction

Interactions between white women and Indigenous people in various contact zones of Australia during the nineteenth century and early twentieth century have been, in recent decades, the subject of strong debate, to the extent that those debates might be considered a genre in feminist discourse. This thesis steps into that debate. It provides an overview of the feminist perspectives that, in the last forty years, have radically revised understandings of Australian colonial history, and pays particular attention to how those histories have assessed interactions between nineteenth-century female settlers and Indigenous people, before developing its own argument about these relations.

My argument proceeds on two fronts: feminist revisionist histories of colonial Australia, and the notion of transculturation. The latter is the key strategic manoeuvre in my argument. In *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, anthropologist Fernando Ortiz argued that the anthropological term ‘acculturation’, which was ‘used to describe the process of transition from one culture to another, and its manifold social repercussions’, failed to account for the dynamic interplays and transmutations of cultures arising from intercultural migrations and clashes that occurred in the Cuban experience. The term acculturation, he said, implied the absorption of one culture into another dominant culture, and thus belied the creative interchange that occurs with the meeting of two cultures. Ortiz proposed that the term ‘transculturation’ more accurately characterised the reciprocal and transformative nature of cultural entanglements and transmutations, since this was ‘a process in which we give something in exchange for what we receive: the two parts of the equation end up being modified. From this process springs out a new reality, which is not a patchwork of features, but a new phenomenon’. I seek to identify this new reality in the performance of cross-cultural friendships, exchanges, insights and attitudes formed from cross-cultural alliances and by identifying the outcome of settler curiosity, awareness, engagement and use of Indigenous components of place, nature and worldview in relation to these nineteenth-century settler women.

Ortiz’s idea had a huge impact on the post-colonial revisions of colonial history that have occurred since the 1990s. Mary Louise Pratt and Anne McClintock, for example, employed Ortiz’s idea of transculturation to other sites of colonialism, arguing that the colonised also influenced the coloniser’s worldview. I ask whether this also
occurred in settler women’s writings about Indigenous people and in their intercultural encounters with Indigenous people in the Australian colonial situation.\(^7\) In writing about transculturation, Ortiz proposed that a union of cultures ‘always has something of both parents but is always different from each of them’.\(^8\) While much recent scholarship remains focused on the disparity, misunderstanding, disrespect and harmful consequences for Indigenous peoples from the accoutrements, paraphernalia, dynamics and constrictions of acculturation, this thesis asks whether Ortiz’s idea of transculturation is relevant to the Australian situation and, if so, what stories does it reveal.

The ground on which these fronts converge is ethnography. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the subjugation of Indigenous people, the frontier wars and the dispersal of Indigenous populations were especially intense. These events coincided with the emergence and then the professionalisation of the discipline of anthropology, which regarded the study of Indigenous Australia as a cornerstone of its scholarship.

The influential theories of anthropology that developed in the latter part of the nineteenth century were based on ethnographic reports filed from the frontiers of empire. Early ethnographic and anthropological discourse on Indigenous people is now seen as an inseparable part of the imperial project of the nineteenth century. In recent times the relationship between anthropology and imperialism has come to be regarded as a hegemonic epistemology in which a Eurocentric worldview was imposed on Indigenous and other non-European people. An important aim of this thesis is to examine the writings and work of nineteenth-century female settlers and their ethnographic engagements with Indigenous people, so as to unpack the nature of the relationship between knowledge, power and gender in this imperial project.

Recent scholarship has undertaken to restore the contributions of women to Australian and Aboriginal history and has produced accounts of the lives and work of a number of early settler women who were interested in ethnography. While the biographies of women such as Daisy Bates\(^9\) and Olive Pink\(^10\) have expanded understandings of the role that women played in early anthropology, and feminist scholars have critiqued the ideological foundations that informed their conventions,\(^11\) I wish to ask whether there are earlier contributions to ethnographic knowledge that have not been considered. Lesser-known women such as Caroline Dexter, Elizabeth Minns, Amelie Dietrich and Mary Bundock were active collectors of Indigenous material culture in the mid- and latter nineteenth century, long before Bates began her
anthropological research in Western Australia in 1894. As such, they played a precursory role in the early reception of Aboriginal art. Bundock, along with Eliza Dunlop and Ethel Hassell, enthusiastically collated ethnographic information, which has been given scant regard, and in some cases has been totally overlooked, by historians and scholars.

I argue that a number of obstacles functioned to preclude the work of these women from mainstream histories. Foremost among these obstacles were the lack of documentation confirming or detailing the women’s endeavours, the structural marginalisation of women in nineteenth-century society, women’s exclusion from the academies and societies of natural sciences, and the conventional prescriptions of the women’s writing. Additionally, the few early male ethnographers who drew on the field work of these women little acknowledged their efforts and few took the field work seriously, and the women’s work was rarely published. While settler women’s accounts of the contact zones and their involvement in shaping public perceptions of black–white relations in remote areas may have been appreciated at a popular level, their contributions to ethnography were, until recently, overlooked or at least undervalued. Further, more recent evaluations of colonial complicity and doubts about the credibility of women’s writings inhibited an appreciation of their perspectives and unique contributions.

This thesis challenges many of these suppositions and argues that the writings of early settler women comprise a distinct and valuable body of work about colonial interactions with Indigenous people and culture. I argue that the very traits that marginalised these women revealed different perspectives, including important evidence of Indigenous agency, social nuances and transculturation that was generally lacking in the writings of their male counterparts.

**Aims**

The overall aim of this thesis is to open a space for better understanding the multiple agencies at play in women’s encounters with Indigenous people in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Australia. By considering the specific ways in which white women participated in the formation of knowledge about Indigenous people, and by focusing in particular on the agency of both parties with an eye to the dialogical aspects of their encounters, I argue that the relationship between power and knowledge in the imperial project was not as monolithic as is often presented.
I make this argument by, firstly, unpacking the moral and ideological assumptions embedded in existing feminist histories of early women’s writing that address relationships between white women and Indigenous people. In this way I aim to understand what those assumptions have obscured in these relationships, and thereby establish a new contextual background (of a discursive nature) necessary to make my argument about early women ethnographers. Secondly, I will use these outcomes to rethink the nature of intercultural relationships evident in the ethnography of Charlotte Waring Barton, Louisa Atkinson, Isabella Dawson and Ethel Hassell. While this thesis necessarily discusses the social lives of women, it is not a set of biographies. Rather, biographical information is focused on aspects that are relevant to these settler women’s intercultural experiences. My argument is concerned with the ways in which history has judged nineteenth-century intercultural encounters, not with discovering the minutiae of these women’s lives.

**Overview**

When embarking on this thesis I was interested in whether white women played a role in the initial reception of Aboriginal art, as they had figured significantly in the Aboriginal art industry of the latter twentieth century. During my initial research, I identified three primary motivations for settler women’s engagement with Indigenous people: scientific, ethical/political and artistic/commercial. It soon became apparent that this was too large a topic, so I decided to focus on scientific writings, because generally it was through their scientific endeavours that early settler women engaged with Indigenous culture more comprehensively than those women who interacted with Indigenous people out of commercial interest or because of their religious zeal. Hence this thesis investigates some of the first substantial engagements with Aboriginal culture by white women. I argue that these engagements were enmeshed in the nuances of intercultural social relations, and that these nuances trouble the (at times) heavily theorised positions of contemporary feminist critique.

In identifying the scope of women involved, I focus on a limited number of protagonists in order to illuminate some of the issues and complexities that arise. In addressing the specific nature of women’s contributions and the challenges they faced, I ask a series of questions. To what extent did their gender inhibit or facilitate their intercultural engagements? Were these early settler women’s priorities and writings different from those of their male contemporaries? Was their racism the same as their...
male contemporaries’ racism? How did their intercultural dealings inform their own identities and lives? Were they open to Indigenous worldviews and ways of relating to their environment, or were they intent on assimilating and civilising their Indigenous neighbours?

I argue that many of the women I discuss were at least somewhat persuaded by Indigenous belonging and were partly inculcated into their Indigenous hosts’ worldview.13

While my thesis focuses on the emergence of white women’s ethnographical writing and evaluates its significance, in so doing it records little-recognised evidence of nineteenth-century women reading, researching, writing on and collecting Indigenous material culture and, through these activities, contributing to and participating in the reception of Aboriginal art and culture. Recent research into the early contact history of Aboriginal art and its production is starting to appreciate the presence of long-term engagements between Indigenous artists and white women; a sustained analysis of any succession of this lineage is timely.

In contrast to the more researched and cited lineage of white men’s interactions and scholarship in relation to the reception of Aboriginal art, there is little research into the role that women played in the field; nor is there analysis of their differences and particularities. The role of men, however, has been well established and has given rise to historical accounts that trace a genealogy of involvement from explorers to missionaries, teachers, amateur ethnographers, popular writers, artists and anthropologists such as George Grey, Joseph Bradshaw, Thomas Worsnop, Walter E. Roth, R.H. Mathews, Baldwin Spencer, Friedrich W. Albrecht, A.P. Elkin, Norman Tindale, Donald Thomson, Wilbur Chaseling, Charles Mountford, Charles Barrett and R.H. Croll, J.A. (Tony) Tuckson and Stuart Scougall, Leonhard Adam, T.J. (Ted) Strehlow, Ronald Berndt, Frederick McCarthy, Vincent Megaw, Fred R. Myers, Geoffrey Bardon, Howard Morphy and Peter Sutton. In this prestigious lineage the absence of women is striking. While it is true that Daisy Bates, about whom much has been written, could legitimately be included in this list, as could Olive Pink, Ursula McConnel, Catherine Berndt, Margaret Preston and Nancy D. Munn, it would be difficult to name more than one or two nineteenth-century women in this heritage, since the documentation and research on those women are so limited.

However, as scholarly interest in writing that examines nineteenth-century intercultural relationships has increased, more material is coming to light. For example, as I submit this thesis, I notice that a new book by Barbara Dawson, In the Eye of the
Beholder: What Six Nineteenth-Century Women Tell Us About Indigenous Authority and Identity, has just been published. I have not read this book but it claims to offer ‘a fresh perspective in the debate on settler perceptions of Indigenous Australians’. Like my thesis, it purports to ‘reveal the aspects, largely overlooked in colonial narratives, of Indigenous agency, authority and individuality’.

Plan

This thesis is divided into three parts. Part One comprises four chapters that are primarily concerned with establishing a range of contexts for situating the work of the early settler women who are discussed in the case studies that constitute Part Two. Part Three is a concluding section, comprising Chapter Seven, which considers the characteristics of nineteenth-century women’s ethnography as a distinct genre, and Chapter Eight (Conclusion), which summarises why and how women overcame the patriarchial limits of the newly professionalised field of anthropology, to contribute to early colonial ethnography and, somewhat indirectly, to the reception of Aboriginal art.

Part One: Contextual Background: Revisionist History of Feminist and Critical Discourse

Chapter One reviews the literature relating to the thesis. Chapters Two, Three and Four extend this survey in a closer analysis of particular accounts of feminist recuperative histories and women-centred issues that are relevant to my subject: early white women’s engagements with Indigenous people, especially in regard to their art and culture.

My main concern is not the neglect of women in classical male histories, but the assumptions and ideological frameworks evident in feminist revisionist histories that first gave those women a presence in Australian history. Hence, the literature review in Chapter One, together with the following three chapters, forms an essential part of my argument because it establishes the ground or frame against which I set my argument, and the benchmark against which I measure not just the achievements of these colonial women but also the epistemological frames that, at times, represented them in a dim light.

Chapter One provides a brief account of some texts pertinent to the reception of Aboriginal art and a literature review of the key texts that address interactions between white women and Indigenous people in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These texts were mainly feminist revisionist histories, many of which sought to address and redress the neglected role of women in Australian history. The literature review also
considered texts about differentiated identity politics that emerged in the 1980s in light of criticism from black, working-class and lesbian feminists. Similarly, writings that addressed intercultural and whiteness studies, which became a central preoccupation of many scholars in the 1990s, are reviewed. The literature review concludes with a discussion of so-called third-wave feminist ideas that emerged in the 1990s and which shifted the orientation of first- and second-wave feminist scholarship15 ‘from merely describing the similarities and differences that distinguish the different systems of oppression according to gender, class and race – to focusing on how they are interlocked’.16 In its theoretical and methodological approach this thesis is most closely aligned with those third-wave feminists who sought to destabilise dualistic frameworks and resist essentialist notions of identity. Like those feminist scholars from the 1990s onwards, I am alert to the multiplicity and ambiguity of different subject positions and relational agencies in the context of the intersections between female settlers and Indigenous people.

Chapter Two discusses feminist accounts of the historical, social and ideological conditions that delimited nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century women’s lives in Australia. Scholars such as Beverley Kingston, Marilyn Lake and Margaret McGuire identified a number of conditions that framed and structured white settler women’s experiences of frontier Australia, including the inequitable ratio of settler women to men and the limitations imposed on them by the expectation that white women served as primary agents of civilisation. I will argue that these factors, along with other ideological constructions about gender and race, functioned as constraints that were managed and negotiated by early ethnographers such as Eliza Dunlop and Isabella Dawson. These women were but two of several nineteenth-century ethnographers who navigated their way through the gendered and racialised terrain of their era and the sexualised politics of the frontier and contact zones of Australia. While this chapter does not address the work and achievements of the white female settlers who are the subjects of this thesis, it does establish a clear picture of the ideological frameworks that constrained them and the various perspectives of feminist historians who analysed the conditions in which they lived and worked.

Chapter Three investigates and reviews feminist accounts and criticisms of writings by settler women in Australia. Critics such as Dale Spender and Patricia Clarke argued that it was necessary to acknowledge the ways in which nineteenth-century constructions of femininity influenced the writing of settler women, who were largely confined to the domestic sphere and constrained by Victorian morality. This
Introduction

confinement, they argued, influenced the writings of settler women, since their relationship to colonial practices and the discourse of empire was different from that of men. In order to give an overview of the range and types of settler women’s writings about Indigenous people, Chapter Three draws on existing accounts of several women, such as Georgiana McCrae, Minnie Brewer and Caroline Dexter, who experienced intercultural encounters or developed longer-term relations with Indigenous people. This chapter provides a general overview in feminist literary criticism of the range of settler women’s responses to Indigenous people, the constraints under which they wrote, and how these constraints delimited and shaped their writing.

Chapter Four introduces various writing genres available to women in the nineteenth century. Feminist critics traced the historical emergence of genres in women’s writing, ranging from diaries to fiction. Many of these genres favoured passive and anecdotal writing over an authoritative objective voice, and generally had a domestic, relational and moral focus, which was considered appropriate to feminine concerns. Some women ventured into the more masculine domains of journalism, foundation histories and science, but they frequently overlaid such writing with anecdotal, domestic or moral narratives in order to position their work within the limits of feminine respectability. The chapter ends with an account of how women entered the field of scientific knowledge production about Indigenous people by way of natural science, thus laying the ground for a more detailed account of several women scientific writers in Part Two.

As a revisionist history, Part One aims to outline existing accounts in order to unsettle them in Part Two. A strong discursive feature of these existing accounts was the tendency to take morally informed and ideological positions, which judged women’s actions and responses against the values or ideologies of the writer. In unsettling these moral and ideological responses, my intention is to open a space for better understanding the multiple agencies at play in the encounters between settler women and Indigenous people. By developing an understanding of the conditions of women’s writing in nineteenth-century Australia and by examining the discourses that situated those women, the necessary context is established in Part One for the individual case studies that comprise Part Two.

Part Two: Case Histories

Part Two comprises two chapters that provide four main case studies of several little-studied, and some better-known, women who wrote ethnographic studies in the
nineteenth century. Their writings, if acknowledged at all, have generally been disregarded as racist, pseudo or amateur ethnography. My aim is to rethink these accusations, not by trying to understand what really happened in the women’s lives, but by deconstructing the terms of these existing discourses.

Chapter Five demonstrates how women’s ethnographic writing emerged from the field of the natural sciences by providing a case study of Charlotte Waring Barton, author of one of the earliest known women’s scientific texts about Indigenous people, and considers the writing of her daughter, Louisa Atkinson, the first white woman whom I have been able to identify who wrote specifically about Aboriginal art. Rather than focusing solely on the prejudices of these women or on their impact on Indigenous people’s lives, this chapter seeks to reveal ways in which Indigenous people and their worldview affected and influenced these women. I argue that the nascent nationalism of their writing was partly an effect of Indigenous education, and that by including a domestic and personal dimension, along with descriptions of Indigenous women’s worlds that lay outside mainstream early male historical and scientific discourse, Waring Barton and Atkinson offered a more valuable and complex contribution than has been hitherto recognised.

Chapter Six introduces Ethel Hassell as an example of the more accomplished women ethnographers of the latter nineteenth century, and provides a test case for my argument about the transculturation that occurred between white women and Indigenous people. An examination of Hassell’s time in southwest Australia reveals the contrasts between pastoral women’s experiences and those of the more mobile male amateur anthropologists such as explorers, magistrates and surveyors. What stands out today in the writings of pastoral women such as Hassell, who were long-term residents and were confined to the domestic domain and its immediate environment, is the everyday sociability of their relationships with Indigenous people. A close analysis of Hassell’s writing reveals characteristics of a ‘relational’ ethnography that acknowledges the mediation of her field work. Hassell’s subjectivity was overt in her writings and was enmeshed in her primary social intercultural relations. I argue that over the course of the eight years between 1878 and 1886, when Hassell lived in close proximity to the Wheelman people of Jarramungup, she developed sophisticated insights into the culture of her neighbours. Over her time at Jarramungup, there emerged in her writings clear evidence of transculturation and an increasing willingness to openly acknowledge Indigenous agency.
Part Three: Concluding Evaluations

Chapter Seven provides an overview of the variety of white women who became involved in amateur ethnographic pursuits, particularly towards the latter half of the nineteenth century. In this chapter I introduce a range of significant factors in the trajectories of these women, whose intellectual and practical activities contributed to the records of Indigenous culture and which, I argue, characterise a distinct genre of ethnography: an ‘inheritance of concern’ identified with the mother–daughter duo in Chapter Five; a shared historical time zone with their Indigenous subjects and the influence and teaching by confident Indigenous mentors; a personal request from Indigenous mentors and/or a sense of responsibility or duty as the motivation for collecting and documenting Indigenous culture in order to preserve it; and a different perspective on gender relations and on Indigenous women’s cultural world and authority. I argue that white patronage was pivotal to their vocational aspirations, while class, education and children strongly delimited their work in comparison to their better-celebrated amateur male contemporaries.

In Chapter Eight, the conclusion of my study, issues of transculturation emerge as the locus of my thesis as, I argue, the transcultural experiences of these white women enabled them to write an alternative ethnography to that which dominated the discourse of their day. In this way a good number of Australian women living on the colonial frontier challenged, in their ethnography, the patriarchal limits of the newly professionalised field of anthropology.

I argue throughout this thesis that gender was pivotal in shaping women’s experiences and writings as they performed, identified, crossed and recorded the permeable and mutable boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in colonial Australia. Each of the colonial women discussed, who was often the only white woman for miles around, over a great many years, was embedded within predominantly Indigenous company, enmeshed in everyday intercultural relating. Most were far from societal surveillance, and over years were at least partially inculcated into an Indigenous worldview. Although these women were firmly of their time and prone to the larger ideological forces of their cultures, evidence of their individual characters, and of the influence and opinions of their closest companions, is contained in their records. All of the women grappled with issues of relating across difference, within shifting power dynamics, although the settler women were far more powerfully placed in the hierarchy than were their Indigenous friends and workers. In the feminine sensibilities of personability, empathy and shared intimacy of everyday relationships within the
domestic boundaries of often vast properties, women such as Eliza Dunlop, Elizabeth Minns, Christina Smith, Mary Bundock, Isabella Dawson and Catherine (Katie) Langloh Parker offered much, both in terms of knowledge and the implicit relational agency of ethnographic research, from which we can still learn.
Endnotes

1 Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995 (1947)).

2 Ibid., p. 98.

3 Ibid., p. 102.


7 Germaine Greer made this argument in a more general sense in her essay “Whitefella Jump Up: The Shortest Way to Nationhood,” Quarterly Essay, no. 11 (2003), pp. 18–19.

8 Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, p. 103.


12 Through journalism or literature about women pioneers, early missionaries, women’s fiction, and memoirs such as Jeannie Gunn’s *We of the Never-Never*.

13 Particularly since the advent of the twentieth-century Aboriginal art industry, which is itself a phenomenon of transculturation.


15 First-wave feminism around the turn of the nineteenth century was concerned mainly with legal discrimination, gaining the vote and education for women. Second-wave feminism distinguished itself from the first wave by concentrating more broadly on inequalities between women and men, and on reproductive rights.


PART ONE

Contextual Background: Revisionist History of Feminist and Critical Discourse
Chapter One:

Literature Review

Like an archaeological excavation, this thesis begins at a distance, marking out the terrain of a specific field of Australian history before uncovering layers as it moves from the general to the more particular, closing further in on its subject with each chapter. Chapter One adopts a long-distance view of my subject, in which women’s ethnographic writing can scarcely be seen. It primarily provides a general survey of feminist revisionist histories and, where relevant, considers the related genres of post-colonial, whiteness and Indigenous studies.

Introduction

A consistent theme in the scholarship on early engagements with Aboriginal art and culture in Australia is the limited recognition of the contributions made by settler women in the nineteenth century. For example, in his 1994 book, Aboriginal Artists of the Nineteenth Century,¹ Andrew Sayers wrote about the drawings of nineteenth-century Aboriginal artists William Barak, Tommy McRae and Mickey of Ulladulla. In writing about the interactions between these artists and the British colonisers, Sayers gave considerable attention to the activities of nineteenth-century figures such as Frédéric Guillaume de Pury and Eugen von Guerard, who collected Aboriginal art and artefacts. Although Sayers did refer to Ann Bon and Theresa Walker, both of whom collected Aboriginal art and played an important role in advocating for these artists, he gave them short shrift. Sayers made passing reference to Walker and devoted only a few paragraphs to Bon, even though she had been instrumental in promoting Barak and his art, and she ensured that his work entered public collections as works of fine art rather than as anthropological curiosities.

Similarly, in her doctoral thesis of 2004, titled ‘Aboriginal Art 1802–1929: A Critical and Cultural Analysis of the Construction of a Category’,² Susan Lowish provided a critical and cultural interpretation of the construction of the category of Aboriginal art in its early reception, but concentrated on writings by the well-established lineage of professional and amateur male anthropologists, explorers, ethnologists, collectors and scientists such as Sir George Grey, Thomas Mitchell, Walter E. Roth and Baldwin Spencer.
Two important feminist texts that countered those histories overlooking the contributions of women were *First in their Field: Women and Australian Anthropology* of 1993 and ‘That Shadowy Band: The Role of Women in the Development of Australian Archaeology’, published in 2000. Both texts drew attention to the lack of recognition of women’s contributions to anthropology and archaeology and brought to light various women’s work in a history that had hitherto focused on the efforts of men such as Charles Mountford, Baldwin Spencer and Norman Tindale. In a more recent publication, *The Makers and Making of Indigenous Australian Museum Collections*, the work of two anthropologists, Ursula McConnel and Helen Wurm, was given fuller appreciation, and Catherine Berndt, whose work was frequently regarded as secondary to that of her better-known husband, Ronald Berndt, was here given greater credit, so that she stood alongside her husband, rather than in his shadow.

While it is evident that historians are now endeavouring to incorporate the work of women into their accounts, there is no comprehensive history that examines the involvement of nineteenth-century female settlers in the reception of Aboriginal art. My thesis addresses this deficiency and explores the gendered gaze and transculturation between female settlers and their Indigenous informants and collaborators. In this chapter, I review the scholarship of and around Aboriginal art and its reception over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Until the 1960s, Aboriginal art was rarely regarded as a discrete or distinct entity. Rather, it was entangled in the discursive and curatorial practices of anthropology and archaeology. But as the twentieth century progressed, more and more scholars agitated for the incorporation of Aboriginal art into the discipline of art history. Publications such as Roman Black’s *Old and New Australian Aboriginal Art* and Tony Tuckson’s ‘Art and the Western World’, both of 1964, signalled a notable shift towards an art-historical framing of Aboriginal art. Additionally, the inclusion of three new chapters by Terry Smith in the third edition of Bernard Smith’s seminal book, *Australian Painting 1788–1990*, cemented the position of Aboriginal art within the Australian art-historical canon. Here, Terry Smith devoted an entire chapter to Aboriginal painting from 1970 to 1990, in which he provided a critical overview that included Arnhem Land art, the Papunya Tula movement, new work from Turkey Creek, the poster workshops, and urban art. Further, he discussed issues of land rights, convergence and appropriation, and likened the influence of contemporary Aboriginal painting on Australian painting more broadly to the influence of ‘Neo-Expressionism [on painting] in Europe and Postmodernism in the United States’. These historians
focused in particular on Aboriginal art in a national context, an approach continued in the subsequent scholarship of Jennifer Biddle, Vivien Johnson, Marcia Langton and Peter Sutton. These authors, along with others such as Rex Battarbee in *Modern Aboriginal Art*\(^{11}\) and Ian McLean in *White Aborigines*,\(^{12}\) wrote at length about cross-cultural exchange and explored the complexities of influence and confluence in the relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal art.

Alongside these publications, a number of exhibitions were staged across Australia during the 1980s and 1990s that paralleled and gave further impetus to the changing nature of Australian art historiography. Exhibitions such as *Drawing in Australia: Drawings, Watercolours, Pastels and Collages from the 1770s to the 1980s*\(^{13}\) and *Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia*,\(^{14}\) both of 1988, *Balance 1990: Views, Visions, Influences*\(^{15}\) of 1990 and *Motif and Meaning: Aboriginal Influences in Australian Art, 1930–1970* of 1999,\(^{16}\) sought to present the connections and confluences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal art. These exhibitions challenged conventional understandings of traditional Aboriginal art and exposed the ways in which objects made by Indigenous people were conceptually situated into pre-existing and firmly established anthropological paradigms. For example, in his catalogue *Dreamings*, the curator Peter Sutton wrote about a collection of sixty-eight *toas* that had come from the Lake Eyre district in South Australia. These topological and directional markers had long been regarded as authentic artefacts, but in fact had been specifically produced for an ethnographical-collector missionary. Sutton argued that the fact that these toas had been made as commodities did not render them inauthentic, for they existed as art objects that reflected the new hybrid creations of transculturation.

More recently, scholars such as Gordon Bennett, Julie Evans, Patricia Grimshaw, Joan Kerr, Ian McLean, Howard Morphy and Terry Smith considered Australian art within larger cross-cultural forces, in order to address issues of identity, offer transnational histories of exchange and representation, and inform postcolonial critiques of Australian art. In the mid-1990s, anthropologist Eric Michaels investigated the nature of Warlpiri paintings in which traditional rock and ground painting were transposed into contemporary materials of acrylic and canvas. Michaels connected these to a global economic and cultural phenomenon that he understood in terms of strategic co-appropriation.\(^{17}\)

Arguably, transculturation in white and black Australian art began to some extent at the point of first contact. Philip Jones traced a postcolonial trajectory of Aboriginal artistic expression which, he argued, was mediated initially by anthropologists,
collectors and missionaries, then reshaped by popular culture and the tourist industry, claiming that ‘the most inventive and exciting’ Aboriginal art arose from ‘the ground that lies between Aboriginal and European society’. Howard Morphy portrayed the history of Aboriginal art as a dynamic exchange in his book *Aboriginal Art*, as did McLean in his introduction to *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art*. McLean asserted that the ‘explosion onto the artworld’ of Aboriginal art in the late twentieth century was the ‘most recent development of post-contact relations in Australia’.

From the perspective of the twenty-first century, historical analysis of the trajectory of Aboriginal art, or at least its development as an intercultural phenomenon over the last two hundred years, seems unavoidable. In recent decades, it has been argued that both a deep, repressed settler discomfort and Indigenous yearnings for a stake in the future are at issue in the complex story of Aboriginal art’s reception. Given this, it is no surprise that the history of its reception is being increasingly investigated.

Although these late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century critical developments were to be celebrated, they risked overlooking earlier intercultural moments, especially those involving white women, who were rarely – and sometimes never – addressed in the above texts. From the beginning of colonisation, Aboriginal art made a profound impression on certain individuals, leading to early important steps of recognition, collecting, advocating and exhibiting. Women artists such as Louisa Atkinson and Margaret Preston, and ethnographers and activists such as Daisy Bates, Mary Bennett and Ann Bon, played decisive roles in this early history. Settler and missionary frontier women’s perspectives and engagements with Aboriginal art and artists differed from those of their male counterparts and exposed the imperial and patriarchal strategies at play in cultural encounters between Indigenous Australians and European settlers, strategies that determined much of these early women’s careers. This first became apparent in feminist revisionist histories that sought to insert women’s voices and experiences into Australian history.

**Feminist and Postcolonial Revision and Critique**

*Australian History / Feminist Revision*

Over the last forty years, feminist revisionist histories have been particularly dynamic, evolving new methodologies to address the limits and criticisms of earlier histories. Three waves of feminist criticism can be identified, as well as counter-Indigenous
critiques that, while often seen as critical feminist histories, can also be considered within the ambit of feminist revisionist histories because of their engagement with it. This reflected the extent to which feminist historians were willing to engage with Indigenous subject matter, which in part reflected shared concerns with othering. It also reflected the growing general interest in Indigenous issues in Australian and, indeed, world-wide, scholarship that accompanied the rise of postcolonial criticism.

From the 1970s onwards, feminist revisionist historians undertook an enormous amount of primary research that showed how, in the late nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, white women played an important role in the civilising mission of empire. As with white men, framing ideologies of the colonial project – the project of science (collecting and recording) and ethics (salvation and protection) – were strong stimuli for women interested in Indigenous culture. For some, their engagement grew into a grand passion and led to important contributions to the field of anthropology and to the initial reception of Aboriginal art. These women became part of complex and controversial networks of exchange and communication across the cultural divide. Before these feminist revisionist histories, the contributions of settler women were poorly appreciated and inadequately researched.

One reason for this poor appreciation was the dearth of women’s diaries and the scarcity of official records about settler women. As Susan Hunt showed, ‘Official records relating to women’s issues were not kept and women rarely kept their own. Hence they became invisible and, in historical terms, largely inarticulate’. And, as Pamela Sharp noted, it was ‘almost certainly an attitude of mind, which led to records left by women fuelling bonfires after their birth, while those of their husbands were accorded the status of national treasures and carefully preserved for posterity’.

Australian history and the view of Australian society were predominantly male-oriented and, as Grimshaw pointed out in ‘Writing the History of Australian Women’, were largely constructed as a celebration of white male achievement. Grimshaw wrote that ‘women as a whole (unlike rabbits, sheep and horses) were not discussed, except by virtue of the social effects of their absence: the distorted sex ratio of the colonies, for example, and its effect on population increase’.

Although the neglect of women in nationalist histories was common throughout the Western world, Kay Schaffer argued that it was ‘particularly pronounced in Australian cultural studies’. She wrote:
Wherever one looks – in the *Bulletin* of the 1890s, in the stories of Henry Lawson, in the commentaries on the *Bulletin* and Henry Lawson, in the cultural studies by Palmer, Hancock, Ward and Phillips, in the writing of literary critics, historians and sociologists throughout the twentieth century – the texts are notable for the absence of reference to women.²⁸

Schaffer gave further emphasis to her point by referring to Humphrey McQueen’s text *A New Britannia?*, in which he ‘facetiously includes in his Index the item: ‘Women, ignored, page 13’.²⁹

Over the course of the 1970s, scholars such as Ann Curthoys, Grimshaw, Schaffer and Dale Spender sought to position women as the central subjects of inquiry, as active agents in the gathering of knowledge and as social agents in Australian history. Many scholars of the 1980s and the following decades undertook research in which accounts of personal interactions between settler and Indigenous women in the nineteenth century played a crucial role in the formation of a revised historiography. Spender’s *Writing a New World: Two Centuries of Australian Women Writers*³⁰ of 1988 was one of the earliest publications in which the experiences of settler women were comprehensively recorded. Spender’s book represented a methodological shift in Australian history, for here the diaries, letters and journals of nineteenth-century settler women and their accounts of their contact and encounters with Indigenous women were given voice. Annie Baxter, Elizabeth Macarthur and Georgiana McCrae, along with many other nineteenth-century women, were presented through their own first-hand accounts, which provided insights into their relationships with Indigenous women, such as Macarthur’s encounters with Euroa Colebee’s wife, Daringha, and McCrae’s relationship with the Bonurong woman Eliza.
In light of these nineteenth-century narratives, Spender argued that settler women articulated an affinity with Indigenous women that was based on shared gender oppression. Spender’s foregrounding of the voices of nineteenth-century settler women was an approach that became increasingly common in subsequent histories and could be seen in the scholarship of Grimshaw and Evans, Victoria Haskins, Ann Standish and Shannon Schedlich-Day.

While these historians did not all draw the same conclusions from the first-hand insights of their nineteenth-century female subjects, they nevertheless gave import to women’s voices and their intercultural experiences. In light of this approach, several biographies of nineteenth-century settler women were published, including that of Bates, Bennett, Elizabeth Durack, Katie Langloh Parker, Olive Pink and Preston.

**The Black Critique**

Although feminist scholars recovered new ground for white women, they were soon criticised for their own omissions and for demonstrating little consciousness of the implications of nationalism and class on race relations. Historian Susan Magarey described the shift in emphasis among feminist theorists during the 1980s:
from the diversity of the personally political to the politics of difference. In the language of some feminist theorists – looking once again towards France where post-structuralist and post-modernist theorists had already elaborated concepts of difference – questions of difference could concern difference within.41

Criticism gathered momentum, particularly criticism of white women speaking on behalf of black women and of white women’s complicity with Eurocentric patriarchy and colonialism.42

Some of the first Indigenous criticism of white feminist scholarship queried the relevance of the 1970s women’s liberation movement for Indigenous women. Pat O’Shane argued that ‘sexist attitudes did not wipe out whole tribes of our people, sexist attitudes are not slowly killing our people today – racism did, and continues to do so’.43 Subsequent criticism centred on the history of intercultural relationship dynamics between Aboriginal and white women. Indigenous academic Eve Fest44 and black academic Roberta Sykes45 condemned the exploitation and oppression of Aboriginal people by racist white women settlers in intercultural relationships. Sykes argued that ‘white women participate with white men in creating this oppression’46 and that hierarchical power dynamics dominated the relationship between black and white women. These women, and others like them, challenged white women to take account of their privilege and power in their coexistence under colonial rule.

While anthropologist and Indigenous rights activist Diane Barwick flagged the harmonious cross-cultural female friendships that flourished on mission stations,47 she was countered by Myrna Tonkinson, who argued that such friendships were rare and only occurred in ‘extraordinary institutional’ life circumstances, such as in situations of domestic servitude or in institutions such as missionary schools.48 In the early 1990s, Indigenous historians Jackie Huggins and Tom Blake claimed that, in their centring of women’s knowledge in colonial history, white feminist historians actually silenced Indigenous women and did not acknowledge the asymmetry of power relations and oppression that, they argued, was typically found between white women and their Indigenous domestic workers.49 In Janet Hancock’s assessment, the ‘putative benevolence of the pioneering settlers and their colonising mission was thus being contested on new grounds’.50 In 1991, a group letter to the editor of Women’s Studies International Forum, signed by Huggins and others, stated that ‘In many cases our women considered white women to be worse than men in their treatment of Aboriginal
women, particularly in the domestic service field’.\textsuperscript{51} Likewise, Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans, in their evaluation of gender relations from the nineteenth century through to the 1960s, an era that they regard as one of racial segregation, claimed that little evidence existed of white women’s gender affinity across racial lines with Indigenous women,\textsuperscript{52} and that neither was there much interest shown in Indigenous women’s rights until after World War II.\textsuperscript{53}

Other historians claimed that white women suffragists and activists had indeed played a crucial role during the interwar years in agitating for the rights of Aboriginal people. In her PhD thesis titled ‘Feminism in Flux: Indigenous Rights Activism and the Evolution of Feminism in New South Wales, 1930–1960’,\textsuperscript{54} Lara Hall showed that a platform of Indigenous rights was consistently on the agenda of feminists in the Aboriginal Australian Fellowship club. Alison Holland also conducted extensive research on female agitation for Aboriginal rights from the 1920s to the 1960s and found ‘a kind of highpoint in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women’s [political] collaboration in certain quarters’.\textsuperscript{55} Additionally, Pamela Sharp’s thesis found a history of cordial intercultural relationships between women and Indigenous people in the colonial period.\textsuperscript{56} She argued that it was ‘unfair to concentrate on white women who took advantage of black women to the exclusion of those who did not’, and concluded that the latter group was ‘by far the larger’.\textsuperscript{57} These women, she said, had even ‘evolved in some instances to a cross-cultural feminine form of the legendary white male “mateship of the bush”’, and that ‘even working relationships were often characterised by genuine affection on both sides’.\textsuperscript{58}

Both within and outside this critique, scholarship and research undertaken by Indigenous women was crucial to the feminist project. Between 1950 and 2004, 177 autobiographies of Indigenous people were published, 60 per cent of which had been authored by women, some in collaboration with non-Indigenous people.\textsuperscript{59} Some of these works, such as Ruby Langford Ginibi’s \textit{Don’t Take Your Love to Town},\textsuperscript{60} Jackie and Rita Huggins’ \textit{Auntie Rita},\textsuperscript{61} Sally Morgan’s \textit{My Place},\textsuperscript{62} and Margaret Tucker’s \textit{If Everyone Cared},\textsuperscript{63} to name a few, provided damning indictments of the relationships between Indigenous and white women that underscored the racism and asymmetrical power dynamics that governed cross-cultural relations. Other autobiographies too referred to the asymmetrical nature of intercultural relationships, while simultaneously recording genial encounters as well as those that were more hostile, as in Elsie Roughsey (Labumore)’s \textit{An Aboriginal Mother Tells of the Old and the New}.\textsuperscript{64} Jean
Hamilton, Joan McKenzie and Katherine McKenzie’s *Just Lovely*, and Della Walker’s *Me and You*. In many of these life story accounts, and in the more theoretical criticism referred to above, the traditional myths of white women as nurturing carers, supportive employers and innocent bystanders of the colonial project were debunked, both in Australia and elsewhere. As Aileen Moreton-Robinson would later expose, these Indigenous women’s life stories effectively refigured the subject–object relationship. Although the move towards a more respectful relationship with an Indigenous worldview had begun, black female academics called for an even more self-reflexive turn, challenging feminist scholars to look to their own reproduction and mobilisation of racism, to their own class-based position, and to their position within asymmetrical power structures.

**Postcolonial Critique / Whiteness Studies**

Feminist theorists gradually responded to such criticisms, joining the wave of anti-colonial critique that had begun in the 1950s with Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, Aimé Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism* and Albert Memmi’s *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. These criticisms of European colonial discourse challenged imperial and nationalist ideologies and stimulated late twentieth-century postcolonial theory that progressed with growing influence from Edward Said’s seminal work, *Orientalism*. The reflexive turn demanded was germane to anthropology and explored in Johannes Fabian’s influential book, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*, and continued in James Clifford and George Marcus’s co-edited *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* and in Clifford’s *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art*. The analysis of European texts about colonial exploits (their ‘others’ and their countries) as instrumental to colonial expansion and hegemony was also a focus of Homi Bhabha, Mary Louise Pratt and Gayatri Spivak. This scholarship galvanised revision of colonialism and stimulated the period of self-criticism leading up to the new millennium.

In the 1990s, the focus of some writers shifted from ‘difference’ to the normalising or invisibility of whiteness itself. Scholars such as Richard Dyer, Ruth Frankenberg and Vron Ware pioneered whiteness studies. British academic Ware investigated ‘the power and allure of whiteness’ as a racial category and simultaneously deconstructed categories of racial, ethnic and cultural difference in history to show how
these racisms were reproduced in the present. American feminist author and activist bell hooks called for a repositioning of the white subject in order to de-centre and expose it. Whiteness studies were part of the wider international agenda to shift attention from what Toni Morrison, in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, called ‘the racial object to the racial subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers; from the serving to the served’.

This questioning of ‘the quiet yet overpowering normativity of whiteness, the process by which race and ethnicity were attributed to others while whites were tacitly positioned as an invisible norm’ was revelatory, particularly for whites who had not previously recognised the privileges of wealth and opportunity that accompanied whiteness. Such self-reflexive discourse drew on linguistic analyses of the formation of subjectivity and meaning of all conceived categories, discourse and meta-narratives and was influenced by Michel Foucault’s critique of the relationship between knowledge and power, and the ideology behind claims of the objectivity of knowledge.

Activism, responsibility and change at individual and institutional level were demanded. ‘What we are asking for’, wrote Indian literary critic and theorist Spivak, ‘is that the holders of hegemonic discourse should de-hegemonize their position and themselves learn to occupy the subject position of the other’. Spivak argued that rather than disengaging, that is, saying, ‘O.K., sorry, we are just very good white people, therefore we do not speak for the [other]’, scholars needed to be responsible and courageous, risking an evaluation of their own participation in knowledge formation and the silencing of others. American First Nations author Suzan Shown Harjo warned how pervasive and ongoing these biases could be: ‘We view each other through layers of racial, ethnic and class biases, perpetuated by the white male ruling institutions, such as the educational system that teaches in the early years and controls later research in the women of the West’.

**Critical Theory and Aboriginal History**

In the Australian context, Moreton-Robinson agitated for change in her landmark critique published in 2000, *Talkin’ up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism*. Here, Moreton-Robinson analysed what she saw as the troubled relationship between white feminist and Indigenous women in Australia and she interrogated the structural and racialising subject–object relationship in the representations of Indigenous people by white feminists. Further, Moreton-Robinson exposed their self-reflexivity; that is, the constructed identity of observer-subject, in
their imaginings of the other-object. Her challenge to feminists was that they ‘begin to question the ontological basis of how they come to, and what allows them to produce and write knowledge as deracialised subject/knowers’. 89

In light of Moreton-Robinson’s critique, Tanya Dalziell considered notions of benevolence 90 within the nineteenth-century Australian colonial framework, particularly in relation to the figure of the sympathetic white woman. This trope, which Margaret McGuire and others referred to as the ‘Goodfella Missus legend’, 91 was extensively interrogated, most frequently in terms of a binary framework that positioned the sympathetic woman as one who resisted, or was complicit with, the colonial enterprise. 92 Dalziell offered a complicated and subtle reading that went beyond a binary framework to suggest that the benevolent, well-intentioned woman might simultaneously resist and comply with colonial projects. She reiterated the work of Huggins et al. who, in 1991, had asserted that the sympathetic white women of the nineteenth century and white feminists of the twentieth century had much in common. Both were benevolent, both had good intentions, and both presumed ‘to speak for and about others’. 93

Such critique was at times immobilising for white scholars. Australian historian Victoria Haskins explained:

> As we approach the history of white women’s role in histories of colonization and other forms of racial oppression, it would seem that, for all our raging, our urge as historians, as well as historical actors, to speak out forcefully against colonization’s history has been stymied. An almost irresistible pressure to judge white women in history both collectively and individually, in terms of their complicity with or resistance to colonialist and racist oppressions and discriminations, has brought us to a stalemate. 94

This pressure risked hindering scholarship into areas of cross-cultural history from a white woman’s standpoint. As a way forward, and taking up Moreton-Robinson’s challenge, Haskins suggested: ‘By thinking about white women’s historical roles in terms of performativity, subversion and collaboration, we can, as “white women” today, think about the roles we play today in oppression, neo-colonialism, racism’. 95 Elsewhere, she wrote, ‘I strongly think this history is a white history, too. It is something that needs to be understood as part of the white experience and it needs to be something that non-Aboriginal people are accountable for’. 96
Several white Australian historians responded to black critiques by writing about interaction ‘from the position of [their] white subjectivity’, recognising agency on both sides in a history of interrelationships as a way forward to overcoming the segregation of Aboriginal history.97 Fiona Paisley, who wrote extensively in this area, argued that historical actors need ‘not to be condemned or praised, they need to be understood within the contradictory and complex parameters of historical possibility’.98 In her study of white women suffragists and activists and their agitation for Aboriginal rights during the interwar years, Paisley identified complex issues that underpinned their concerns. She found that white women’s response to the situation and position of Indigenous people differed historically from their white male counterparts’, thereby producing a ‘gendered and politicised account of the effects of cultural contact upon Aboriginal women’.99

Ironically, deconstructions of social categories such as race, class, gender and whiteness studies turned the spotlight back onto frontier intercultural engagements in settler colonies in the twenty-first century.100 Lynette Russell, a pioneer in this field in Australia, observed that ‘investigations into cross-cultural interactions’ and ‘attempts to understand the socio-cultural and spatial dimensions of boundaries have particular importance at this moment in history’.101 Multiple perspectives were engaged to dismantle narratives of white colonial history, by, for instance, Ian McNiven and others in Constructions of Colonialism: Perspectives on Eliza Fraser’s Shipwreck,102 Henry Reynolds in Why Weren’t We Told?103 and Nicholas Clements in The Black War: Fear, Sex and Resistance in Tasmania.104

Writings about transculturation by Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez et al.105 and by Pratt106 further explored these ideas, particularly as a way of understanding cultural mixing. The transculturation perspective ‘focuses on the dialogic aspect of this encounter without ignoring the mechanism of violence’107 and the hegemonic framework involved. It attempted, Rodríguez said, to ‘create spaces of transversal understanding’108 beyond the logic of identity and difference.

Writing about cross-cultural engagements today has evolved from old binaries of black versus white. As Ella Shohat and Robert Stam elaborated, ‘these conceptual binarisms foreclose nonwhite interethnic relationships and put on hold those who do not fit easily into preexisting binarisms, forced to wait their turn to speak. This “on hold” analytical method ends up producing gaps and silences’.109 The important issue, they argued, was ‘to maintain a sense of hybrid relationality and social co-implication’.110
This is consistent with the challenges of third-wave feminist discourse and the new millennium’s political climate. It is also the underlying strategy of this thesis.

**Third-Wave Discourse**

In 1991, Kimberlé Crenshaw called for an inclusive feminist discourse. In response to the view that womanhood was a unifying experience that eclipsed race, class and sexuality, and the subsequent fragmentation that occurred within feminism in regard to the politics of identity and difference, Crenshaw formulated the concept of intersectionality, a term she coined in 1989 and further developed in 1991. Crenshaw challenged feminist theory and practice on the grounds that they failed to ‘accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender’. Writing about the oppression of non-white women, Crenshaw argued that race, class and gender, along with biological, social and cultural factors, combine, interact and intersect to constitute multiple oppressions that are experienced simultaneously. She stated that ‘because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated’. Crenshaw’s concept of intersectionality illuminated the complexity of the marginalised subject’s experience and pointed to what Patricia Hill Collins termed a ‘matrix of domination’ in describing how these intersecting oppressions were organised. In *The Contours of an Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology*, Hill Collins argued that:

> while Black women’s standpoint and its accompanying epistemology stem from Black women’s consciousness of race and gender oppression, they are not simply the result of combining Afrocentric and female values: standpoints are rooted in real material conditions structured by social class.

For black feminists in particular, intersectionality was a useful tool to deconstruct intersubjective discourses and analyse identity as ‘organic, fluid, interdependent, multiple, and dynamic socially “constructed locations” within historical context’. Susan Friedman also argued the merits of what she called a relational positionality, which advanced ‘neither pluralism nor identity politics based on a single collectivity’. Instead, she advocated identity as more situational and adaptable, with permeable boundaries where the flow of power was not always unidirectional, thereby ‘resisting and dissolving the fixities of the white/other binary’.
It is now considered important, when framing scholarship, to account for one’s own subject position. My own is that of a white woman who grew up and worked on a still-active colonial frontier in a predominantly Indigenous environment. On the whole, my scholarship draws from European texts embedded in a Eurocentric discourse. Thus this thesis is subject to perspectives of ‘white’ privilege and complicity, since I am descended from agents of colonial invasion, settlement and advantage in Australia. In representing intercultural relationships from a historically hegemonic position, I am aware of the dangers of a cultural narcissism that can distort and submerge alternative and critical perspectives. To undertake an analysis or representation from an Indigenous perspective is not, however, my place, nor within my capacity, and is therefore beyond the scope of this thesis.

Nevertheless, investigating such historical points of intercultural engagement, no matter how limited one’s own background, can open a dialogical space in which a better future might be negotiated. To retreat into silence in the name of Indigenous agency – as if the sins of the past can be rolled away by simply vacating the intercultural space we currently live in – misses the nature of the task at hand. I concur with Grimshaw’s evaluation that, despite the difficulties, ‘it seems legitimate to focus on one particular human element in an intercultural encounter, and not necessarily pursue another even-handedly; that is, for a white historian to write of white people’s lives, without presuming to describe the identity formation of … indigenous peoples’.  

I would go further. Since the colonial invasion, the two cultures have become so imbricated that their lives cannot now be disentangled. While the position of privilege can be an insidious factor in such intercultural entangled relations, or what Moreton-Robinson termed ‘oppressive intersubjective relationships’, a significant portion of the writing relevant to my thesis, such as Isabella Dawson’s ethnography, Ann Bon’s letters and Sandra Holmes’ monograph on Yirawala, were at times initiated, endorsed or at least influenced by Indigenous collaborators. Pratt wrote, ‘Europe’s constructions of subordinated others [has] been shaped by those others’.  

Even when power relations are asymmetrical, it is misleading to underestimate Indigenous agency, including in the most oppressive times. Pratt is among recent researchers who ‘have reoriented their perspective on frontiers from “edges of advancement” to “zones of contact”’. This thesis argues that transculturation is a significant feature in the writings of early settler women who figure in the preliminary history of white women’s engagement with Aboriginal art and culture.
Endnotes


6 Exceptions include Charles Barrett and R.H. Croll, and Ronald Berndt.


10 Ibid., p. 495.


14 *Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia*, curated by Peter Sutton with Judith Newman. This exhibition was first shown at the Asian Society Galleries in New York in 1988. It then toured until 1990, travelling to Chicago, Los Angeles, Melbourne and Adelaide.


21 Ibid., p. 77.

22 Ibid.
Endnotes (continued)

23 With the exception of Smith’s discussion of Preston, see Patricia Grimshaw and Julie Evans, “Colonial Women on Intercultural Frontiers: Rosa Campbell Praed, Mary Bundock and Katie Langloh,” Australian Historical Studies, vol. 27, no. 106 (1996), pp. 79–95.


28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.


31 For example, see Grimshaw and Evans, “Colonial Women on Intercultural Frontiers: Rosa Campbell Praed, Mary Bundock and Katie Langloh.”


38 K. Langloh Parker, My Bush Book: K. Langloh Parker’s 1890s Story of Outback Station Life, with Background and Biography by Marcie Muir (Adelaide: Rigby, 1982).

39 Marcus, The Indomitable Miss Pink: A Life in Anthropology.

40 Margaret Preston et al., The Art of Margaret Preston (Adelaide: Art Gallery Board of South Australia, 1982); Margaret Preston, Art and Australia: Selected Writings 1920–1950: Compiled by Elizabeth Butel, 3rd edn (North Sydney: Richmond Ventures, 2003); Roger Butler et al., The Prints of Margaret Preston: A Catalogue Raisonné (Canberra: Australian National Gallery, 1987); Ian North, Humphrey McQueen and Isobel Seivl, eds, The Art of Margaret Preston (Adelaide: Art Gallery Board of South Australia, 1982; reprint, corrected).
Part One: Contextual Background

Endnotes (continued)

41 Susan Magarey, “What is Happening to Women’s History in Australia at the Beginning of the Third Millennium?,” *Women’s History Review*, vol. 16, no. 1 (February 2007).

42 For example, see Kay Saunders, “All the Women Were White? Some Thoughts on Analysing Race, Class and Gender in Australian History,” *Hecate*, vol. 17, no. 1 (May 1991), pp. 156–160.


52 For a further and insightful examination of the debate, see Lyn Riddett, “‘Finish, I can’t talk now’: Australian Aboriginal and Settler Women Construct Each Other,” in *Occasional Papers 3* (Saskatoon: Department of History, University of Saskatchewan, 1996).


56 Sharp, “A Study of Relationships Between Colonial Women and Black Australians.”

57 Ibid., p. 120.

58 Ibid.

Endnotes (continued)

60 Ruby Langford, Don’t Take Your Love To Town (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1988).
62 Sally Morgan, My Place (Fremantle, WA: Fremantle Arts Centre, 1987).
63 Margaret Tucker, If Everyone Cared (South Melbourne: Grosvenor, 1987).
67 For example, see Claudia Knapman, White Women in Fiji 1835–1930: The Ruin of Empire (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1986).
68 See Moreton-Robinson, Talkin’ up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism.
69 Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967 (1952)).
71 Albert Memmi, The Colonizer and the Colonized (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991 (1957)).
76 Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London: Routledge, 1994).
Part One: Contextual Background

Endnotes (continued)


86 Ibid.


88 Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin’ up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism*.


90 Tanya Dalziell, “‘We Should Try, While There is Yet Time, to Gather All the Information Possible of a Race Fast Dying Out’: Unsettling Sympathetic Women,” *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 17, no. 39 (2002), p. 329.


93 Dalziell, “‘We Should Try, While There is Yet Time, to Gather All the Information Possible of a Race Fast Dying Out’: Unsettling Sympathetic Women,” p. 329.


95 Ibid., p. 40.


98 Fiona Paisley, in Preface, ibid., xviii.


Endnotes (continued)


106 Pratt, “Modernity and Periphery: Towards a Global and Relational Analysis.”


108 Ibid.


110 Ibid.


114 Ibid.


116 Ibid., pp. 308–309.

117 Ibid.


119 Ibid.

120 For further discussion, see Heather Goodall, “Writing a Life with Isabel Flick: An Exploration in Cross-Cultural Collaboration,” *The Public Historian*, vol. 27, no. 4 (2005), p. 80.


123 James Dawson, *The Australian Aborigines: The Languages and Customs of Several Tribes in the Western District of Victoria, Australia* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1981 (1881)).
Endnotes (continued)

124 See for example, Ann Bon, Letter, 2 January 1903, VA 515 Central Board for the Protection of Aborigines, 1694 Correspondence Files, Unit 2, Public Record Office Victoria.


Chapter Two:

Race and Gender in the Contact Zone

Chapter Two provides an overview of issues raised by late twentieth-century feminist revisionist histories of women’s roles in nineteenth-century Australia, with a particular focus on intercultural relations between white women and Indigenous people. By feminist histories, I do not necessarily mean histories written by women or feminists, but those histories that, under the impact of feminism, paid increasing attention to the role of women. Feminist women historians played the leading role in writing these histories, but their concerns also influenced the way men wrote histories, as evident in some of the references in my overview in Chapter One.

In drawing directly on these feminist histories, my aim is to outline their discourse, rather than to test them against primary sources. The emphasis of Part One of this thesis is a second-order feminist discourse that I have developed by considering primary sources in light of late twentieth-century feminism, that is, third-wave feminist concerns. At times, I draw on primary sources – especially in the more detailed analysis in Part Two – but only in the context of this feminist revisionism of colonial histories. That is, to test what I consider to be certain limitations in its reach regarding intercultural relations between white women and Indigenous people.

Part One of this thesis does not aim to single out particular historians for attention, but rather seeks to highlight the main features of the historical discourse as it related to gender, race and intercultural relations in colonial Australia. The thesis begins in this fashion because the feminist histories of Anne Summers, Patricia Grimshaw and Kay Schaffer, for example, were among the first to substantially consider the roles of gender and race in colonial Australia. Prior to the work of these and other scholars, women were largely invisible from Australian history. Historians had imagined Australian history as a progression of the deeds and ‘masculinist mythologies’ of men, in which women played very small parts, as indeed did Indigenous people, whose only expected role was to vacate the scene.

This chapter begins with an overview of gender issues in the contact zone, but its main purpose is to establish a frame for my analysis in Part Two, where I examine the moral and ideological claims about the role of women in the colonial project, particularly as they played out in intercultural relations.
My primary approach for this overview of contact zone issues in feminist histories is a postcolonial one – itself an integral part of feminist revisionism. Frontier encounters necessarily involved cross-cultural negotiation, exchange and sharing, despite the massive cost to Indigenous sovereignty, land and livelihood. Both Mary Louise Pratt and Paul Carter demonstrated that frontiers were places of cross-cultural engagements, and while ‘usually involving conditions of coercion, racial inequality and intractable conflict’,2 these frontier spaces were zones in which relationships were established and where ‘subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other’.3 Carter explained the frontier as ‘a line continually pushed forward (or back) by heroic frontiersmen, the pioneers. Inside the line is culture; beyond it is nature’.4 The frontier was an imaginary boundary between the established and the wild, the tamed and the uncontrolled, and was to be subdued, but not crossed.5

Pratt pointed out that these places were only frontiers from a European expansionist perspective, so she renamed them ‘contact zones’,6 in order to emphasise that these were places of engagement, which could be either confronting or accommodating or, indeed, both. For Pratt, the idea of the frontier invoked the notion of incommensurability, so that those who existed at the frontier were imagined to be irrevocably incompatible. In contrast, the term contact zone conjured dynamic exchange.7 From an Indigenous perspective one could conclude there was no frontier, just invasion. Another opinion on these nineteenth-century dynamics was that of historian Ann McGrath, who argued that, at various times, Indigenous people living inside the contact zone – that is, in station camps or settlements – maintained kin outside the zone. Thus they ‘moved between and lived on both sides of the frontier preventing the destruction of their cosmos from within and without’.8

Late twentieth-century feminist revisionist histories brought to light at least four ‘conditions’ that framed white middle-class women’s experience of frontier Australia or its contact zone. These were, first, the women’s low numbers; second, the ideological role they were expected to play as the primary agents of civilisation; third, the politics of sexuality; and fourth, the overt stereotypes and binaries governing gender, race and intercultural relations. These same histories also identified the stereotypes, constraints, taboos (sexuality) and fears (miscegenation), and acceptable relations that framed intercultural relations with Indigenous peoples, largely framed by the ideology of Christianity and its discourse of saving souls, maternalism and assimilation. This, in sum, was the main structure of the discourse of feminist histories of early colonial Australia.
Colonial Brides: Gender in Colonial Australia

Early feminist historians who revised Australian history with a view to incorporating the experiences and contributions of settler women focused on the conditions in Australia and Britain that surrounded the arrival of settler women in Australia in the nineteenth century. A key concern of historians such as Anne Summers and Margaret Adamson was the imbalance between the numbers of men and women in Australia, particularly in the early decades of the nineteenth century. These historians wrote about the various immigration schemes that were developed to redress this imbalance and considered the implications of the imbalance between the sexes on the dynamics of the contact zones in Australia.

In the first half of the nineteenth century there was a population imbalance in Australia of almost two white men to every white woman. The 1833 census recorded that there were 44,644 men and 16,150 women in New South Wales and 26,188 men and 10,435 women in Van Diemen’s Land. Beyond the emerging settlements of Sydney, Newcastle, Hobart and Launceston, the imbalance was even greater; according to one report, of 1838, there were seventeen men for every woman. Assisted immigration schemes, suggested by the charismatic British diplomat, prisoner and then reformed advocate of colonisation, Edward Gibbon Wakefield, began in 1828. According to the Sunday Times, Lord Goderich, Secretary of State for the Colonies, ‘set the ball rolling with a view to bringing the proportion of women in the Colony up to that of the men, and fifty young women from an orphan school at Cork were the first batch’.

The New South Wales government’s policy of assisted immigration followed suit to address the imbalance between the sexes. This became known as the ‘bounty system’, which encouraged the emigration of workers, and single women of marriageable age were given financial incentives to leave England for Australia. Between 1836 and 1846, 55,063 people emigrated under assisted schemes. Anne Summers wrote about one of Australia’s greatest social engineers, the philanthropist Caroline Chisholm (Figure 2.1) who, as well as helping 14,000 vulnerable single women at her Female Immigrants’ Home and employment agency in Sydney between 1841 and 1844, developed her own immigration scheme called the Family Colonisation Loan Society.
This society encouraged migration and the reform of migration and helped emigrants from Britain with loans and information about Australian conditions. Feminist historian Margaret McGuire pointed to Chisholm’s little-known private letter to Earl Grey, Secretary for the Colonies, in which Chisholm described the ‘frightful’ disparity between the numbers of European men and women to be:

a crying and national evil from which flows misery and crime, I dare not dwell upon, and to this unnatural anomaly of the human race in that Colony, may be traced in a great degree the gradual but certain extermination of those unfortunate tribes the Aborigines of New Holland.

Unusually well respected for a Catholic woman, Chisholm was critical of the Wakefield scheme and advised committees of enquiry into immigration in 1843, 1844 and 1845. At around the same time, on the other side of the continent at the Swan River Colony (later Western Australia), there was consternation that the small settlement had failed to flourish in the first two decades since its 1829 establishment. Western Australia had refused women convicts and again there was a serious disproportion between the sexes: two men to every woman. This was tackled in two ways: first, by accepting freed convicts from the east to meet the labour shortage, and second, by sending single women from England in what became known as the ‘Bride Ships’. For forty years,
between 1849 and 1889, women were brought out as servant girls to a colony overpopulated with men. It was hoped that these women would become wives for the men and exert ‘a moral and socialising influence on the colony as a whole’. Summers reported Chisholm promoting that ‘even wild colonial Australia would be elevated if men could be rescued from their “enforced bachelorism: Give them helpmates and you make murmuring, discontented servants, loyal and happy subjects of the State”’.24

As early as 1804, the *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* was proclaiming that ‘the natural strength of a country must consist first in its population is a maxim that requires no embellishment’. The call to ‘populate or perish’ would become a reitered theme in Australian history. Elizabeth West noted that white women were seen as ‘necessary for efficient colonization in order to reproduce the white supremists’. Lord Alfred Tennyson’s words, ‘God made the woman for the man and for the good and increase of the world’, were seen to be an appropriate objective for the colony.

In her seminal publication *Damned Whores and God’s Police*, Summers argued that wholesome white brides were required for rough pioneers to whitewash a penal and black heritage. In this scheme, white women were cast as either moral or immoral, Madonna or whore. Summers revealed that many female immigrants had ‘fallen from grace’ prior to their departure for the colonies, thus the attraction to Britain of the female immigration schemes, since they served as a means of dealing with that country’s wayward women. Other women fell from grace after their arrival in Australia.

But Indigenous women were the elephant in the room. Historian Richard Broome referred to Australian male pioneers as ‘sexplorers who sought the joys of black velvet’—a colloquial term for sexual liaisons with Indigenous women. McGrath argued that Aboriginal women were crucial, citing the assertion made by Queensland’s Chief Protector of Aborigines, J.W. Bleakley, that ‘Aboriginal women were the real pioneers, reasoning that without them the white man could not have carried on, especially in areas where there were no white women’. ‘Black velvet’ may have satisfied the sexual fever of the male colonisers but it only made the need for white women more urgent as forces of civilisation.

Thus, as well as painting this general background role of women in colonialism, feminist historians emphasised that in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the call for pioneer brides changed pitch from the desperate need for any white women to couple with, to an emphasis on their civilising potential for an unruly colony. According
to Summers, women could thus ‘police … the morals of their husbands and, indirectly, the entire colony’. 

While white men were conquering the frontier, they still needed domesticated wives to transform them into civilised settlers and the presence of white women was seen as a way of preventing liaisons with Aboriginal women and thus curtailing the birth of ‘half-caste’ children. Indigenous women’s views were little sought in the early historical discourse and it was Aboriginal women scholars such as Moreton-Robinson who reminded us that ‘Indigenous women’s experiences are grounded in a different history from that which is celebrated and known in white domains’.

The views of Gilbert White, a liberal and idealistic Queensland missionary working at the turn of the twentieth century, illustrated the prevailing sexism and tendency to hold women to account. He decried that one of the ‘greatest perils facing Australia’ was ‘race suicide’ and, for this, ‘women are more to blame … than men’. 

Anne O’Brian described how White blamed women for remaining in established settlements while their husbands worked in remote areas; by being away from their husbands women did not play their part in populating the ‘empty north’ with whites. Other missionaries were not so critical. Ethel Shaw told of her husband, Joseph Shaw, travelling up the Darling River in 1867 and finding ‘no white women on the sheep stations, conditions being too rough’. In contrast, White declared, ‘is it any wonder … if the continual absence of the wife from her husband and her refusal to share in the hardships of his life leads to misunderstandings and infidelity?’

This sentiment of white women helping to grow a civilised nation from a penal colony and wild contact zones was still evident well into the twentieth century in the further outlying contact zones of the new nation. In 1934 the Advertiser carried an article that read:

The future of the north and centre of Australia, it has been said many times, lies with white women. It is only when they are prepared to brave isolation and possible danger and establish homes there that the country will be truly settled. The presence of a white woman in a district, experienced men say, has a better influence on the men there than all the sermons in the world. Anthropologists and scientists have said that it is only when white women are prepared to live in ‘the centre’ that the half-caste problem will be solved.

The same sentiment resonated until at least the 1940s, as evident in the words of the journalist and popular writer Ernestine Hill:
The dominant need is for the great national stimulus of home life, a blessing it has never known. In a word, its crying necessity is more white women, who will share the lives of their own white men so patiently plodding on through the years, and rear children who understand and love the country for its own sake.38

White women were seen as a solution to, and their shortage was blamed for, the ‘blight’ of intercultural liaisons and the unthinkable fear of miscegenation. There was prevailing concern that ‘if the British population did not increase fast enough to fill the empty spaces of the empire other [races] would’.39 Even as late as the 1940s, white women who ignored this colonial civic and sexual duty were regarded as irresponsible. As Hill put it in 1940, ‘if there is any blame for Australia’s present half-caste problem, it lies at the self-contained flat door of the white woman of the overcrowded cities, for men are only human’.40

Women’s anxieties about the growing number of ‘half-castes’ were exacerbated by the paucity of white women in the contact zones. By the end of the nineteenth century, rural Queensland had the highest ratio of white men to white women of all the Australian colonies, with 171 men for every 100 women.41 Historians such as Marilyn Lake argued that such conditions reinforced pressures around ‘the imposition of purity’42 and white women’s reproductive role, not only to produce workers but also as a means to ensure that their white husbands’ acquired possessions of land and property were ‘passed on to those who should properly inherit them’,43 that is, white progeny and pedigree. As ‘bearers of whiteness’ and signifiers of patriarchal refinement and the finery of civilisation, white women carried the capacity to curtail what Richard Dyer identified as ‘a comfortable pattern of homosociality and native prostitution’.44

Such condemnation was harsh in light of the threat of disease, early mortality and isolation that white women faced in remote, particularly tropical, contact zones. According to the feminist scholar Anne McClintock, colonial women were also subject to the:

marital laws, property laws, land laws and intractable violence of male decree [that] bounded them to gendered patterns of disadvantage and frustration. The vast, fissured architecture of imperialism was gendered throughout by the fact that it was white men who made and enforced laws and policies in their own interests.45
White women were called to be martyrs to the cause. As the early author Hill said, ‘these women … are holding the North for us, which without them must slip back, ever and again to a haunted homeless loneliness’. These maternal, ‘unselfish’ Madonnas were needed to found a new European society in the settler-colony that was acutely aware of its sordid heritage of convicts and prostitution. Lake and West, among other feminist historians, agreed, and argued that white women’s role was to raise, modernise and civilise the growing white and intercultural population.

The poet George Essex Evans’ idealistic tribute to such women in *The Women of the West*, published in 1906, illustrated societal pressures and expectations of the time:

They left the vine-wreathed cottage and the mansion on the hill,
The houses in the busy streets where life is never still,
The pleasures of the city, and the friends they cherished best:
For love they faced the wilderness – The Women of the West.

[...]
The red sun robs their beauty and, in weariness and pain,
The slow years steal the nameless grace that never comes again;
And there are hours men cannot soothe, and words men cannot say –
The nearest woman’s face may be a hundred miles away.

[...]
The holiness of sacrifice, the dignity of love.

[...]
The hearts that made the Nation were the Women of the West.

In the nineteenth century, middle-class white women who joined their husbands in ‘the wilderness’ were well aware of their ‘higher’ duties and expectations. In a commentary of 1840, Mary Hale attested to the positioning of women as moral guides:

Duties imperative in their demands, and most important in their influences, call for the time and attention of woman. Yes! High and holy are her responsibilities. She sits not with our legislators to frame laws for a great and growing republic. But in the secrecy of the domestic circle she establishes the *principles*, upon which future statesmen shall base their measure. She may not enter the sanctuary of God, to speak, with uncovered head, the mysteries of divinity; but she is emphatically a *home* preacher, teaching, where her office is rightly appreciated by herself, both by precept and example, the great truths of Christian revelation. Her place is not with the
judge upon his bench, but justice finds in a true woman its most uncompromising adherence. 49

The fact that this new, principled society was being established on the dispossession of Indigenous people did trouble some, but feminist historian Angela Woollacott asserted that both white men and women justified – to themselves and to the rest of the world – their position as usurpers by reference to ‘the degraded status of Aborigines’ through ‘popular representations’. 50 As the century wore on, they attributed their actions especially to convenient theories and ‘self-evident’ truths of ‘natural progress’ and ‘the survival of the fittest’. Settler women were aware of the denigrating discourse and oppositional positioning of their Indigenous counterparts that was prevalent in the media of the day, particularly in the Bulletin but also in the Sydney Herald: ‘We say … Protect the white settler, his wife, and children, in remote places, from the filthy, brutal cannibals of New Holland’ and, further, that Indigenous people were:

addicted to the most unnatural crimes, infanticides, blood-thirsty, and treacherous in the extreme … are we to have the natives of New Holland (admitted to be in the very lowest scale of human degradation), are we to have them magnified into martyrs, at the expense of the settlers? No. 51

At times women contributed to this discourse, including in the South Australian Register. 52 As Don Watson put it, ‘A white woman enshrined the highest virtues of civilization, the Aborigines … the deepest vices of humanity’. 53 Susan Hunt pointed out the double subjection of Indigenous women, who were ‘valued sexually as women and economically as labour, yet abused as a colonised and subject people, Aboriginal women were victims of both racism and sexism’. 54 Of course, Indigenous women were the legitimate and predominant ‘Women of the West’ and tributes were penned for them, but their citation was not for mixed company or respectable ears, and often their identities were disguised by pseudonyms and euphemisms such as ‘spinifex fairies’. 55

Settler women were not completely innocent. Take, for example, the following passage in Sarah Conigrave’s reminiscences of her interactions with the local Ngarrendjeri on Hindmarsh Island in South Australia during the 1850s:

Some of the women made up excellent servants, and we became very attached to them – at least, I did. We had a washerwoman who was really a
fine character, and nice looking too, which could not be said of all of them ...

A lady settler once said in my hearing, ‘Give them a tail and you have a monkey complete.’ However, Charlotte [the washerwoman] was very nice, and one day I expressed a wish to learn her language which she offered to teach. I thought I was getting on well until the tribe was leaving ... when necessarily, my studies ceased, as my teacher went too. I do not think my people missed much, because my jabbering in blacks [sic] language, would not have edified them at all. 56

Scholar Shannon Schedlich-Day argued that Conigrave’s comments were doubled-edged, appearing accepting of Indigenous women but reiterating disparaging comments that she did not condemn. Moreover, Schedlich-Day concluded that Conigrave ‘is the civilising force, working to convert the Aboriginals and to lessen the violence of the frontier; but conversely sanctioning racist attitudes and extreme violence against them’. 57

Respectable public commentary was not much better. The popular anthropologist Baldwin Spencer wrote: ‘In the first place it is essential to remember that there is no such thing as a virgin amongst the women of the native tribes from one end of Australia to the other’. 58

The demarcations of propriety and difference were stark. In Australian Pioneer Women, Eve Pownall reported, ‘The first white women who wrote of early Australia are inclined to draw aside their petticoats and express a feeling of revulsion towards the aboriginal women’. 59 John Strehlow agreed:

Again and again in the nineteenth century, we find the white women did not care for the native populations, while the men fitted in effortlessly … Some have even argued that white racism was an invention of white women … the fact remains that on balance the white women did not like the natives. 60

An incident from Jessie Litchfield’s early life in the Northern Territory seemed to corroborate this negative judgement and introduced the interaction of white women with early anthropology in an uncomfortable light. 61 Litchfield (1883–1956) began her ‘wanderings’ in the Territory in 1908, at a time when the European population there was under 1,000 and the Aboriginal population was estimated to be between 20,000 and 50,000. Fewer than a dozen of the approximately 300 whites 62 living outside Darwin were women. 63 In her discussion of Litchfield’s Territory memoirs, Katherine
Ellinghaus noted that Litchfield spoke openly of ‘personally paying recently bereaved [Aboriginal] families a bag of flour in exchange for the body of their relative, which was then sold to a southern museum’. 64

The so-called feminine and civilising moral influence did not necessarily extend to Indigenous others. Scholar Judith Murray-Prior argued that, in the New England region of New South Wales, ‘the social environment and role of the women settlers bred ignorance and fear regarding the Aborigines. This in turn increased overall fear and tension in Aborigine–settler relations and hindered inter-racial harmony and understanding’. 65

Dangerous Liaisons: Gender and Race in Colonial Australia

The practice of Indigenous men temporarily gifting their wives to isolated white men for sexual intercourse, in order to cement relationships and at times in exchange for various goods or services, was quickly exploited. These attempts to instigate kinship and reciprocal ties, which, according to Maykutenner (Matson-Green), were intended ‘to accommodate the invaders … to ensure that the land … would still be available’ and even to ‘protect the women and children because they would still be within Pallawah society and have all the protection which that implied’,66 were abused. This initial, culturally sanctified, hospitality of sharing Indigenous womenfolk with colonists, combined with the shortage of white women in the contact zones, created a promiscuous and sexualised field. The recent work of Nicholas Clements emphasised that the ‘staggering’ shortage of white women was the main and the immediate catalyst for the sexual exploitation of Indigenous women and that this sexual abuse triggered the Black War in Tasmania and interracial conflict across Australia.67

The worlds of the civilised, pure ‘Madonnas’ and the wild, Indigenous ‘gins’ could not have seemed further apart. McClintock pointed out that Indigenous women had to ‘negotiate not only the imbalance of the relations with their own men but also the baroque and violent array of hierarchical rules and restrictions that structured their new relations with imperial men and women’.68

In a public meeting held in 1890 in Adelaide, German missionary Wilhelm Schwarz revealed that ‘on almost every station [in Central Australia] a number of [Indigenous] women were kept for shameful purposes’.69 Nine years later, in 1899, a pastoralist giving evidence to the South Australian Royal Commission on Renmark and Murray River Settlements referred to stations ‘where every hand on the place had a gin,
Part One: Contextual Background

even down to boys of 15 years of age’.70 Ten years later, Carl Strehlow, also in Central
Australia, complained, ‘it should be made clear to the whites that being citizens of a
well-ordered state they are not at liberty to keep a harem’.71 In the nineteenth-century
remote contact zones, the lure of ‘black velvet’ was a very real ‘fringe benefit’. In his
novel Capricornia, Xavier Herbert wrote at length about sexual relations between
Indigenous women and white men for whom the availability of ‘black velvet’ served as
an inducement and sometimes as a necessary requirement for men to work on remote
stations.72

Away from the disapproving eyes of high society, this sexual behaviour was often
accompanied by violence and enslavement, as the following 1830 testimony from a
Tasmanian Aboriginal woman declared: ‘[Bul.rer testified that] Munro and others
rushed them at their fires and took six, that she was a little girl and could just crawl; said
she had been with him ever since. Said the white men tie them and then they flog them
‘very much, plenty much blood, plenty cry’.73

Immorality was reportedly widespread in the contact zones and blamed on the
lack of white women, lawlessness and convict lineage. The diaries of Emily Creaghe,
who in 1883 spent six months accompanying her husband on an expedition across the
Gulf of Carpentaria, confirmed similar atrocities. The infamously noted ‘40 pairs of
black ears nailed around the walls’74 of Frank Harm’s Lawn Hill Station,75 along with
other diary entries, evidenced violence suffered by Indigenous people. Creaghe’s diary
entry for 20 February read, ‘They brought a new black with them. She cannot speak a
word of English. Mr Shadforth put a rope around her neck and dragged her along on
foot, he was riding. This seems to be the usual method’.76 On the following day, the
diary continued, ‘the new gin whom they call Bella is chained up to a tree a few yards
from the house. She is not to be loosed until they think she is tamed’.77 Historian Peter
Forrest claimed that ‘White men found sexual gratification with black women on terms
entirely dictated by the men. It amounted to sexual enjoyment on demand and without
responsibility. It was a social environment entirely dominated by white men’.78

McGrath revealed a more complicated picture, reporting that Indigenous people
‘sometimes attempted to control the exchanges and obtain goods over the longer term,
through incorporating certain white men into their kinship network’.79 Indigenous
women, McGrath said, ‘learnt how to manipulate the system … and did not allow the
man to completely dominate her if she could help it’.80 Further, referencing Diane Bell’s
scholarship, McGrath wrote that Indigenous women ‘enjoyed the love making and the
payments they received. Women exercised their own initiative, secured goods, admiration and pleasure for themselves’.81

Among the early feminist writers, Miriam Dixson considered the role that white women’s sexual jealousy played in contact zones. In *The Real Matilda* she wrote that:

sexual jealousy goes some way towards explaining the cold indifference most of our own respectable women displayed towards the manifest and desperate situation of convict women, and a long way towards explaining the positive hostility they often showed towards Aboriginal women.82

In a similar vein, Herbert’s narrator in *Capricornia* described the moment when the character Heather ‘learned to her horror that the men of Capricornia said that once a man went combo he could never again look with pleasure on a white woman unless he blacked her face’.83 A few lines later the narrator told that ‘while white women might forgive a man any amount of ordinary philandering they are blindly intolerant of weakness for Black Velvet’.84 McGrath’s later scholarship suggested that settler women were ‘shocked’ and ‘threatened’ by Indigenous women’s more open sexuality, for ‘any white woman who openly admitted to enjoying sex was typecast as a whore’.85 Indeed, she argued, Indigenous women ‘most probably had more sexual experience than the white woman’ and ‘took pride and a competitive delight in their ability to excite and satisfy men’.86 Northern Territory historian Lyn Riddett contended that ‘a powerful reason for separation and hostility lay in the very purpose settler society ascribed to white women’s presence … white men seemed almost to prefer black women’.87 Moreton-Robinson further argued that white women’s fear of Indigenous women’s sexuality was connected to their status, that is, power and subject position.88

Whatever the sexual politics, white men’s sexual appetites had devastating effects. In his 2012 essay ‘The Brutal Truth: What Happened in the Gulf Country’, Tony Roberts gave a concise verdict on violence perpetrated against Indigenous people: ‘Men were shot in cold blood so their wives could be raped. Women were abducted and held prisoner for years or shot for sport. Girls as young as seven were raped by men with syphilis’.89

Reclassifying Indigenous people as ‘savages’ or ‘animals’ and the women as promiscuous ‘filthy whores’ was requisite to their murder and abuse. As Schedlich-Day asserted in her study of the social memory of pioneer women, such abhorrent behaviour was one of the conditions that white ‘angels of the bush’90 (a nineteenth-century term
equivalent to the mid-Victorian phrase ‘angels of the house’) were thought to magically counter by their presence alone. As bearers of sacred motherhood of the Victorian psyche, it was considered that they would redeem the ‘Australian scourge’. According to Forrest, ‘White women on the cattle stations would mean that white men would have to behave as did white men in the civilised districts which the pioneers hoped they had left behind’.

Cultural critic Marianna Torgovnick identified the long Western tradition of reading ‘blacks … as signs for debased sexuality, particularly of prostitution’ and their association with sex, ‘horrors’, violence, disease and death ‘as widespread in the modern period’. In the nineteenth century, Indigenous people were often considered sexually deviant, and traditional etiquette and ceremonial custom were widely misunderstood and harshly judged. According to Assistant Protector James Dredge (1796–1846), the Taungurong people of Victoria partook in ‘sins of the most obscene and revolting description’. Indigenous women both seduced and repulsed their white colonisers.

Thomas Bradshaw summed up this inconsistency in a letter to the amateur anthropologist R.H. Mathews in 1905: ‘A particularity of the Australian is his repugnance, abhorrence, disgust and hatred of the nigger, excepting when he wants a sleeping partner’. Earlier, in 1900, Dr Shorter from Mount Garnet, Queensland, had warned that ‘the natives are reeking with syphilis & c. Disease amongst the blacks is undoubtedly a source of danger to the whites’. More sympathetically, J.Z. Felde, Travelling Inspector of Aborigines, reported in the following year: ‘I have seen many camps of half-caste women suffering from loathsome venereal [diseases], and in one of them nine women of all ages, every one with sores all over their bodies, dying a miserable and slow death’.

The numbers were horrifying. On 16 June 1881, the Advertiser reported that ‘959 sick and infirm natives from the Lake Eyre district, even to the very young children’, were infected. Jane Bardsley (1877–1943), a colonial wife in the Gulf of Carpentaria from 1896 to 1901, described her distress at the decimation of a tribe:

Disease among the blacks is getting worse and worse. The poor wretches are not allowed near the homestead and their camps have been shifted much further away … [the men] are dying as fast as the gins for now we have about two hundred left from a camp of five hundred warriors who hunted with straight backs and keen eyes only three and a half years ago, when I
first made friends with them. They now drag one foot after the other, almost too ill to hunt at all. You have no idea how pitiable they are.101

Either the 200 Indigenous people left were soon reduced to none or the few who survived retreated, as Bardsley recorded them as gone.

If liaisons between white men and black women were common, the reverse was not the case. Liaisons between white women and black men were either forced or considered deviant. Due to the small numbers of white women in the early days of the settlement, and their symbolic resonance, white women were either worshipped or condemned. White women’s conventions were strictly delineated and transgressions were magnified as propaganda.

William Shelley (1774–1815), missionary and trader, and Superintendent and Principal Instructor of the first Native Institution at Parramatta, was very sympathetic to Indigenous people, but realistic as well.102 He commented humanely and perceptively on the behaviour of Indigenous men who had been sent to England to spend time in a civilised society. Shelley noted that upon their return they:

relapsed into their former habits and society. They were generally despised, especially by European females: thus all attachment to their new society was precluded; they learned neither mechanical arts, nor manual labour ... long contracted habits recurred with greater force on this account ... No European woman would marry a native ... The same may be said of Native Women received for a time among Europeans. A solitary individual ... educated from infancy, even well, among Europeans, would in general, when they grew up, be rejected by the other sex of Europeans, and must go into the bush for companions.103

White women also could be maligned. In 1836, Eliza Fraser became the ‘first white woman to encounter Aborigines in the wild… and to tell her (less than sympathetic) tale’.104 When Captain James Fraser’s ship was wrecked on reefs north of Great Sandy Island off the coast of Queensland (later named Fraser Island after him), his wife, Eliza, was ‘captured’ (see Figure 2.2) and held by the local people for three months before she was ‘rescued’.
Of the eighteen people on board, Eliza Fraser was one of only eight survivors. The event caused an international media sensation when reported in the *London Times* and the *London Courier* on 2 July 1837. These accounts fuelled fear and confirmed terrifying speculations of the brutality of ‘savages’, turning the incident into a national myth. Fraser’s character became a scapegoat in defining boundaries of civilisation and barbarity, something other than ‘an angel of the bush’. Kay Schaffer’s extensive scholarship pointed out that almost all the commentators on the event were colonial white men, ‘who characterised Eliza Fraser negatively in class-based and gendered terms of difference. They represent her as a bad mother, a bossy and dominating lady, a seductress and betrayer of men … She becomes a “conduit” of both the white race and empire’. Indeed, white women as conduits of white race and empire were a recurring theme, whether for racial purity, civility or honour. Several years after the Fraser saga, on 28 December 1840, the *Sydney Herald* published a letter from the Scottish pastoralist Angus McMillan, in which he reported that the Kurnai people in Gippsland were holding a white woman captive. McMillan wrote, ‘the unfortunate female … was a European – a captive of these ruthless savages’. While evidence of the captivity was
Insubstantial, this saga gripped the popular imagination for over a decade and the idea was sufficiently provocative to have settlers demanding government action. The ‘idea that a female of European birth is detained in durance vile by these ruthless savages’ horrified both the writer and readers of the *Port Phillip Herald* in 1841. In 1845, the Melbourne-based ‘Homo’ wrote in the *Argus* of the captive woman:

Unhappiest of the fairer kind; who knows the misery of the mind
Exposed to insults worse than death
Compell’d to breathe the poë’s nous breath
Of a rank scented black;
To yield to his abhorr’d embrace,
To kiss his staring, ugly face,
And listen to his clack.110

In October 1846, the *Port Phillip Herald* described the allegedly captive woman as ‘the unhappy and ‘ill-starred European [woman] who now drags on a miserable existence – the slave of savage lust and barbarous violence’.111 The inflamed ‘gentlemen’ of Melbourne gathered for a public meeting in 1846 and began a subscription for a rescue expedition.112 Both private and government expeditions were mounted to search for and rescue the captive woman. Watson described the incident: ‘The blacks had stolen one of their women. Nothing could have been so well calculated to bring out the warrior in a man. Civilised squatters became crusaders, and unoffending Aborigines their heathen prey’.113 The government expedition of Victoria’s police force, along with nine native trackers, left trails of handkerchiefs marked with English and Gaelic scripts of reassurance and instruction that read:

WHITE WOMAN! There are fourteen armed men, partly White and partly Black, in search of you. Be cautious; and rush to them when you see them near you. Be particularly on the look out every dawn of morning, for it is then that the party are in hopes of rescuing you. The white settlement is towards the setting sun.114

The rescue expedition also took items ‘esteemed by the blacks’, presumably to barter for the woman or to exchange for information on her whereabouts.115 Watson wrote about the irony of the tragic wild goose chase that brought much bloodshed and many contradictory stories, but no success.116 McMillan’s alleged captive white woman undoubtedly spurred an indignant and horrific retribution, which lasted for almost a
Rumours continued to rage for several years and the search for the white woman went on. Some alleged that she was no more than the figurehead from the ship *Britannia* that was returned by the Kurnai as the only white woman they had in their company.¹¹⁷

Scholar Murray-Prior alleged that, in New South Wales,

> the safest and surest way to ensure the women’s safety, as well as the squatter’s own, was to force the Aborigines to move elsewhere, or to kill them outright. Whilst the danger from Aboriginal attack remained these courses appear to have been followed and accepted by men and women as the most practical actions.¹¹⁸

A letter representing the views of settlers, printed in the *Sydney Herald* in 1838, urged the authorities to ‘protect the White settler, his wife and children, in remote places, from the filthy, brutal cannibals of New Holland’.¹¹⁹ Murderous intent could feign safeguarding white women who lived on the outskirts of the advancing settlements, and exacerbate or legitimise frontier violence against ‘savagery’.

Amicable partnerships between white women and Indigenous men were scarce and rarely recorded. Of greatest notoriety was the case of Jimmy Governor (1875–1901)¹²⁰ and his wife Ethel Page (1882–1945) at the end of the nineteenth century¹²¹ (see Figure 2.3 and Figure 2.4).
In 2004 scholar Tracy Spencer asserted that white women married to Indigenous men were considered to be ‘deviant, depraved or low class’ and suffered vilification from white men and women alike. Further, in the Western patriarchal hierarchy of races, ‘[a] white woman partnered by a black man was inconceivable within this grid of ideology … such relationships were considered a perversion’. Governor’s teenage white wife, Ethel Page, was an example of one such maligned white woman. Soon after their marriage in 1898, the sixteen-year-old Page was ‘severely verbally abused’ in public, spurring the young couple to move in 1900 to a more isolated station for work. Page again suffered taunts from the women of the Mawbey Station in New South Wales, with comments such as ‘any white woman who married a blackfellow was not fit to live, and ought to be dead’.

These insults extended to Governor. Helena Kerz, the schoolteacher at the Provisional School at West Breelong, who would later be murdered by Governor, said to him, ‘pooh, you black rubbish, you want shooting for marrying a white woman’. This comment was allegedly the catalyst for a spree of retribution by Governor and his two accomplices. They spent fourteen weeks before capture, killing people whom they considered had harmed them, and robbing others. Governor was sentenced to death in 1900. Consequently, Page was portrayed in newspapers as ‘uneducated, unattractive and immoral’, a disgrace to her sex and race. These judgements had implications for
women venturing into cross-cultural relationships, as they could rouse a general proprietary scrutiny of their conduct and friendships.

Commenting on the events, Katherine Biber maintained, ‘The white woman was either the sacrifice who enabled the white man’s fantasy to be realised, or else she was the trap into which the black man fell, nevertheless enabling the white man to profit from the black man’s capture’.128

A more benign but no less sensationalised case was that of Rebecca Forbes (née Castledine), an English immigrant who in 1914 married Jack Widgey Forbes, an Indigenous man from Billidapa country in northern New South Wales.129 Reported as ‘the only authentic case of a white woman’ to live among Aboriginal people,130 their marriage was widely publicised by Ernestine Hill in her 1940 novel *The Great Australian Loneliness*.131 Hill published an earlier account of her encounter with this couple in an article in *The Sunday Guardian Sun* in 1932, titled ‘The Strange Case of Mrs Widgey’.132 Another newspaper article, ‘White Woman Lives as a Lubra in Native Camp’, reported that Forbes ‘refuses to return to civilisation. She is believed to be the only white woman to have gone completely native’.133 While the Adnyamathanha Indigenous community accepted this rare interracial marriage, it was abhorred in white society.134

According to scholar Marguerita Stephens, ‘nothing challenged the conceits of race and undermined the solidity of its categories’ more than the presence of mixed-race children who came from such unions, nor instigated such disavowals concerning the role of Europeans in their often violent conception.135 Further, she added, ‘Their presence undermined notions of the civil empire, stimulating anxieties about racial contamination and degeneration that provoked government regulation, with its arsenal of surveillance techniques and ethnological production’.136

Needless to say, white female amateur ethnographists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were implicated. For them, getting too close to Indigenous ‘others’ brought risks of being ostracised from polite society, as it called into question their feminine virtue and moral rectitude. They were also conscripted into the defence, regulation and exploitation of racial boundaries.

Notably, and with few exceptions,137 all of the early accounts of cross-cultural relationships mentioned above shed little or no light on the personalities and identities of the Indigenous participants, who were construed mostly as voiceless aberrations to ideal partnerships. One effect, at least, of the pioneering ‘relational’ ethnography of early female ethnographists was that their work stood out for addressing and
Chapter Two: Race and Gender in the Contact Zone

dismantling the blanketing prejudices: silence, anonymity, polarity and homogeneity.\textsuperscript{138} Against these strict codes of white femininity and racial transgression, settler women required necessity, bravery, naivety or innocence to venture into the intercultural zones.

It could be conjectured that, on the whole, women settlers concurred with the common representation of Indigenous people as savages. There was, however, for middle-class Christian ladies, an alternative perception of ‘native’ abjectness that provided them with the means to administer Christian and maternal guidance, along with public displays of charity. For these Christian ladies, as indeed for many settlers, Indigenous people were commonly referred to and thought of as children.\textsuperscript{139} Indeed, one of the few references in Chisholm’s writing to Indigenous people concluded that the ‘unfortunate tribes … the original holders of the soil, demand the speedy and parental interference of a humane government’.\textsuperscript{140} Women with their nurturing sensibilities were perceived as good agents and well suited to implement the Christian ethic to tend to the downtrodden, to ‘convert the heathen’ and ‘civilise the natives’, especially the children.

Feminist historian Margaret Jolly discussed the maternal role of colonial women who considered Indigenous women to be subordinated by, and in need of liberation from, their brutal husbands and their culture.\textsuperscript{141} Aboriginal Protector Edward Stone Parker, who had trained as a minister, conveyed the urgency of this maternal calling in 1841. He spoke of ‘the necessity and importance of having these children concentrated and at once brought under Christian instruction. Every moment lost in this manner is a postponement of the hope of their ultimate civilisation’.\textsuperscript{142} This maternalistic principle was a core stereotype in colonial constructs of the role of white women in cross-cultural relationships and was interrogated by Moreton-Robinson and others for the assumed privileges of these dynamics, whereby Indigenous people became ‘subjects to be taught … white women and men assumed the role of the knowing subject’.\textsuperscript{143} Some settler women were less than enthusiastic. Lydia, the wife of New South Wales clergyman Rev. James Günther, was disgusted by the Indigenous people’s ‘vile wretched habits and moral degradation’.\textsuperscript{144} Yet Christina Smith, arriving in Melbourne in 1839 from Scotland, saw the opportunity to convert the local Indigenous population to Christianity as a calling. On seeing the Indigenous inhabitants of Melbourne, she wrote, ‘my heart yearned towards them in a great desire to raise them to a better life. I pray the Lord may use me as a means of reclaiming some of them’.\textsuperscript{145} Smith went on to spend more than thirty-five years as a lay missionary to Indigenous people in remote regions of Victoria, where she conducted controversial ethnographical research.\textsuperscript{146} Scholars such as Mary-Ann Jebb and Anna Haebich\textsuperscript{147} argued that women such as Smith
nonetheless offered an alternative narrative of female experience that added to the masculinist histories.

The power of evangelism in its passion for securing or saving souls and spreading ‘the truth of the Gospel’ saw no boundary in race, only opportunity for confirmation of God’s love for the poor, the outcast and the despised, and assimilation of his ‘dark children’. The celebrity of Florence Nightingale in the late nineteenth century affirmed this stereotype, and she took a personal interest in the plight of Indigenous Australians after visiting the Benedictine mission of New Norcia in Western Australia in 1860, where the Murara-Murara (Victoria Plains people) gathered.148 Susan Thorne further argued that the moral guidance and caring philosophy of missions gendered it a feminine field, irrespective of the sex of the missionaries.149 This was especially true ‘in the eyes of influential Victorian writers such as Dickens, Carlyle, Elliot and Brontë’.150

The practice of raising or rescuing Indigenous children from savagery with the hope of transforming them into model citizens was considered the domain of middle-class white women and missionaries. But although removing children was a condoned, albeit controversial, practice in its time, few other practices have drawn the abuse, subjugation and patronisation of Indigenous people into sharper relief. It was in contexts such as these that white women were exposed as complicit agents in the colonial project. American historian Margaret Jacobs, in her critique of ‘maternal colonialism’, argued that ‘while Maternalist ideologies and politics potentially empowered white middle-class Protestant women, they served to further colonial aims by eroding indigenous women’s authority within their own societies’.151 Likewise, Jolly explained that Christian white women also ‘introduced new notions of male domination – based on the domestication of women and their marginalization within the new public domains of church and state’.152 Even more undermining was the denigration and devaluing of Indigenous resources of kinship and cultural knowledge by an unquestioned assumption of the material and moral advantages of placing and raising Indigenous children in white families.

While the research of Jacobs, Jolly and others contributed greatly to understandings of intercultural engagements and power dynamics, it was all too easy to reach simplistic binary conclusions from some revisionist scholarship, of the guilt of white women as perpetrators of colonisation and the innocence and powerlessness of their Indigenous victims. This tendency towards reductive oppositional readings was in counterpoint to earlier portrayals of sympathetic white women, but both readings simplified the complexity of the contexts of the era and its subjects.
In relation to such complexities, Alison Longworth’s study on women missionary encounters in southwest Australia argued that despite the differences between the Nyungar people and white women missionaries, their poverty and marginalisation, ‘when combined with their compassion and Christian commitment, created solidarity with some Nyungar communities that reduced the barriers of culture and gender’. While Longworth’s case studies involved early twentieth-century women, some of the insights gained probably applied to nineteenth-century experiences. Longworth drew attention to the ambiguity of intercultural power dynamics when she quoted Denzil Humphries, saying of the missionary women’s efforts: ‘we loved them in exchange and almost sort of accommodated them in doing things what they wanted to do’. Further, in relation to Mary Jones, a missionary living at Brookton, north of Perth in Western Australia in the 1940s, Longworth reported:

Yarran also recalled occasions when Jones would pitch her tent with the Nyungars, and the children used to ask about her ‘Was she a Nyungar or was she a wadjallah?’ To Kathy Yarran ‘she was one of us.’ It was difficult to find a critical word spoken or written about Mary Jones and her work at Brookton.

In the nineteenth century, simplistic damning of white women’s complicity with the colonial project in their roles as teachers must also be investigated; for example, at times the endeavour to assimilate Indigenous children was used to refute prevailing colonial prejudices. In 1858, a schoolmistress in Albany published a report on her school, in which she stated that she had educated Indigenous children along with white students. Mrs Camfield contended that:

their faults are not greater than those of children of European descent, and … they are quite as capable of comprehending the truths of the gospel as any white child is … all the elder girls will answer questions on [the scriptures] with as much intelligence as the generality of children in Sunday-schools, and they quickly find any passage referred to.

In this instance, Mrs Camfield not only resisted but rejected the colonial belief in the inferior cognitive capacity of Indigenous people. This example complicated a simplistic oppositional positioning of maternal settler women. Mrs Camfield illustrated the capacity for multivalent positioning and ambivalent readings, in that she both complied with and resisted colonial thought.
While education and nurturing were thought to be benign and sanctified intercultural activities well suited to white women, such women’s involvement and interest in ethnology were viewed with more suspicion. Indeed, Jacobs argued that the role of white women in the removal of Indigenous children, or implementing policies for them, ‘represented a significant means by which white women sought to gain public legitimacy and authority, often at the expense of indigenous women’s rights’. On the whole, little thought was spared for the predicament of Indigenous parents, nor for the powerless children taken from them. Ironically, it was often the more humanitarian and well-meaning Europeans who affirmed the removal and education of Indigenous children.

Surveyor Phillip Chauncy’s words shed light on the motivations and beliefs of some:

My own humble opinion is that the adults, whose habits are confirmed, are beyond the hope of reclamation; but that the children, if taken young enough, are quite as capable of receiving and of profiting by instruction as the children of untaught parents among the white race.

Chauncy spoke from experience. He and his wife had taken in a six-year-old ‘native boy’ named Wengal, raising and educating him for six-and-a-half years. In this case, the child was not ‘taken’ from his parents but given into the Chauncys’ care by Wengal’s father in 1839, after the boy’s mother had died. Chauncy was obviously very fond of Wengal and admired his intelligence:

He was a very handsome child, quick and intelligent and soon learned to speak English fluently … at ten years old he could read and spell well and had a fair knowledge of geography … While living with us he evinced many good qualities; he was frank, brave, and generally attentive to the duties imposed upon him, and was much attached to his mistress.

In the nineteenth century, theories of evolution and agricultural and social breeding were popular, and undertakings to improve social and even racial characteristics were also under consideration. A common indictment of Indigenous people was the suspicion that, despite a sophisticated environment and education, hereditary ‘primitive’ characteristics would prevail and the ‘native’ would eventually succumb to the ‘call of the wild’ and revert to type. As D. McAllister wrote in 1878, ‘in
spite of being watched and cared for, the native instincts predominate, and they will frequently – perhaps always – if left to themselves, relapse into the degraded and savage habits of their forefathers'. This supposition became at times a self-fulfilling prophecy, as many Indigenous children who were displaced from their families, then abandoned by their guardians, were not fully accepted into either world and experienced frustration and anger, despairing at the impossibility of living a respected and fulfilling life in white society. Their predicament could result in a rejection of their ‘civilised’ persona or role, in a search for acceptance and relationships with their own people, or in excessive use of alcohol, such as in the case of Mathinna, discussed below.

I describe two cases, those of Mathinna in Tasmania in the early nineteenth century and Bonson in the Northern Territory in the early twentieth century, to highlight the controversial nature of white maternalism in Australian intercultural relations. These examples also demonstrated how the social nuances of relating could complicate previous perspectives of historiography.

Feminist Germaine Greer argued that relationships between Indigenous people with white women were:

probably even more important than those with men in working a leaven of Aboriginality into Australian society. Black gins smoothed the birthing pillow of the white woman, and nursed both mother and child. Aboriginal women worked alongside the missus from dawn till dusk, and were intimately involved with the socialisation of her children. Greer also argued that these relationships were ‘no more durable or egalitarian’ than those between men, citing the easy abandonment of Mathinna by Lady Franklin.

Some settlers regarded the case of the Flinders Island girl Mathinna, who was adopted by the colonial aristocracy in 1840, as evidence of the inherent degeneracy of Indigenous people. Haebich told the story of Mathinna, the daughter of the Port Davey leader, Towgerer, and his wife, Wongerneep. The couple had already experienced the heartache of Mathinna’s older sister, referred to as ‘Robinson’s Duke’, being taken from them by George Augustus Robinson, Chief Protector of Aborigines, in a bid to force the family to move from Van Diemen’s Land to Flinders Island. Although Towgerer and Wongerneep complied with Robinson’s wishes, their first daughter was then sent from Flinders Island to St John’s orphanage in Hobart in 1833 and died within a few years. This action by Robinson contradicted the opinion he had written in his diary that Aboriginal families should not be split up by force, because ‘they afterward
pine away and die’. Historian Anna Haebich has found that Robinson himself was keen to have two Indigenous children as servants for his own household.

Mathinna was born in 1835, two years after her family was relocated to Flinders Island, and was known by the name Mary. When she was five years old, the Governor of Tasmania, explorer and naturalist Sir John Franklin, and his wife, Lady Jane Franklin, visited the island and ‘took a fancy to Mary, and decided to adopt her’. Mary was not the first Indigenous child the Franklins had taken on at Government House. They decided to call her by her Indigenous name, Mathinna, meaning ‘pretty gully’ or ‘beautiful valley’, possibly to heighten the exotic significance of their charge. They modelled and paraded Mathinna, with her pet possum draped around her neck, when riding in the governor’s carriage. For three years Mathinna was educated along with the Franklins’ own daughter, Eleanor, under the shared tutelage of a governess. Mathinna was well dressed, attended lessons, had her own bedroom, danced for guests, and rode with the governor in his carriage. She even had her portrait painted by the respected colonial artist Thomas Bock (Figure 2.5).

Carmel Bird, however, pointed to the telling significance of Eleanor mentioning Mathinna only twice in her diary. The asymmetrical relations of Mathinna’s subordination were plainly evident. On one occasion, Eleanor wrote, ‘the last
Aborigines were caught about a fortnight ago, and sent to Flinders Island, so that our little native girl is the only one remaining here. She is improving I think, though it will be a long time before she becomes quite civilised’.172

Once interpreted as a charitable gesture of intimate inclusion by the Franklins, bringing Mathinna into their own home was later seen to be of dubious merit. In 1869, the Tasmanian newspaper the Mercury reported on Mathinna’s plight:

Poor Mathinna was transferred, sobbing and broken hearted, from the tender care of one who had always proved far more than a mother to her, and the luxury and grandeur of Government House, to a cold stretcher in the dormitory of the Queen’s Asylum. And now her sorrows and her death began … All those fawners about Government House who used to say kind things, and pretend to be proud to take her hand in the ball-room, because it pleased Lady Franklin, had all disappeared.173

In 1852, at the age of seventeen, Mathinna was trading sex for alcohol and she drowned in a puddle while intoxicated.174 Richard Flanagan, who wrote a prize-winning book on Mathinna, described her later predicament as ‘a very odd position’. He surmised that Mathinna seemed to be ‘disliked by white society but to have a certain contempt for black society and she exists in a strange nether world between them both’.175

The role of gender here was significant. White women were considered the most suitable to instruct and train Indigenous children in domesticity, grooming and etiquette – the marks of civilisation. Savages were dismissed as dirty and civilised; whites were clean. Jacobs demonstrated in an article on ‘maternal colonialism’ and Indigenous history that white women performed a crucial intermediary role in the colonial enterprise, and suggested that many of these women exploited intimate connections forged from living closely with Indigenous people as missionaries or anthropologists.176 Upholding the virtues of white motherhood went hand in hand with portraying Indigenous people as a ‘child race’ and undermined the role of Indigenous motherhood and Indigenous cultural values.

Scholar Marguerita Stephens was incisive in her argument that, in the nineteenth century, the rhetoric of philanthropy ‘not only camouflaged but enabled acts of terror by presenting them as exceptional and necessary suspensions of civility’177 and legitimised oppressive governance over Indigenous people. This could be the case not only institutionally but also in private domestic cases. Historian Anna Haebich revealed that
in the town of Winton in 1907, Mrs Norah Walsh, the wife of a policeman, was found guilty of assaulting a seven-year-old Indigenous girl she claimed to have adopted. Haebich noted that:

> [the girl’s] body, hands and face were covered with scars and bruises, cuts and sores from being repeatedly hit by a cane, slapped and beaten. Mrs Walsh was accused of burning the girl’s hand on the stove, beating her and then tying her hands behind her back and locking her in the wash house and making her pick up stones in the yard for hours on end for no apparent purpose.178

In the colony these realities were repressed, glossed over and romanticised in a search for national identity. Rumours and ethnographic reports, including those by Daisy Bates, played their role in stimulating philanthropic crusades to ‘rescue’ innocent children.

> Tales of infanticide relocated the cause of Aboriginal decline from an effect of colonisation to an effect of Aboriginal savagery and by the end of the 1850s carried along the groundswell of opinion that held Aboriginal people to be both inhumane and barely human.179

The Northern Territory Indigenous woman Dolly Bonson’s experience of this crusade in the twentieth century highlighted the moral issues involved in quasi-adoption or servitude to settler women, assimilation, evangelism and national identity. This case was a key example of the enmeshing of colonial exploitation and a burgeoning national identity and demonstrated that the celebrated trope of the progressive, benevolent woman pioneer was more complex than was often recognised. Nuances of social relating can both shed light on, and further complicate, essentialist readings.

In 1902, Aeneas Gunn was appointed manager of Elsey Station in the Northern Territory. His wife, Jeannie (Figure 2.6), soon joined him, much to the consternation of the all-male employees.180 In 1905 Jeannie wrote a bestseller, *The Little Black Princess of the Never-Never*,181 based on stories of her Indigenous ‘child-servant’.182 One chapter of the book was titled ‘Goodfellow Missus’, a contentious term in unsettling the trope of the sympathetic white woman. The phrase ‘Goodfellow Missus’ was apparently coined by Gunn’s young charge, Bett-Bett, who appreciated Gunn’s ignoring some of the stricter boundaries between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people that were expected in turn-of-the-century white propriety. In the ‘Goodfellow Missus’ chapter, Gunn wrote:
‘you see, I was what white people would call a “bad mistress;” but the blacks called me “goodfellow Missus,” and would do anything I wanted without a murmur’.¹⁸³ The book was a series of anecdotal stories around incidents and exchanges between Gunn and Bett-Bett, and recounted Bett-Bett’s charming antics, which had obviously so endeared her to Gunn. The pseudonym or nickname of Bett-Bett that Gunn used in her writings veiled the real identity of Bett-Bett, whose European name was Dolly – Dolly Bonson when married (Figure 2.7). Bonson was also featured in Gunn’s 1908 novel, *We of the Never-Never*, which reached sales of 320,000 by 1945 and had sold over a million copies by 1990.¹⁸⁴

Figure 2.6
Bonson later revealed that at the age of seven or eight she had been sent to the Elsey homestead as a maidservant, through an arrangement between her Indigenous Aunt Djoodi and her European father, Lewis Cummings.\textsuperscript{185} When Jeannie Gunn reluctantly left the Territory on 16 March 1903 after the sudden death of her husband from malarial dysentery, ‘Dolly was distraught’.\textsuperscript{186} This distressing event, however, precipitated Bonson getting to know her father, not a common outcome in the lives of many Indigenous children with white fathers. According to Bonson’s biographer, Alan Holman, ‘They became great friends though the relationship was legally and culturally prohibited’.\textsuperscript{187} Her travelling father apparently ‘reluctantly’ gave her up to the Katherine region’s Sheriff and Protector of Aborigines,\textsuperscript{188} Mr Little, who took Bonson to Darwin to live in a boarding house.

Bonson was subsequently fostered out to six different homes by the age of seventeen and was again to suffer abandonment by her white foster parents, Mr and Mrs Ward, to whom she had become close. The Wards took Bonson to Adelaide in her teenage years for a reunion with Jeannie Gunn, but the Wards were soon transferred to another posting, leaving Bonson behind in Darwin, where she endured abusive foster parenting.\textsuperscript{189}

Unknown to Bonson, her identity was revealed in an article published in the \textit{Argus} in 1952.\textsuperscript{190} The author of the article, Geoffrey Hutton, reported that Gunn had donated her own copies of \textit{We of the Never-Never} and \textit{The Little Black Princess} to a library in
Melbourne. He noted that *We of the Never-Never* was autographed by the people on whom the main characters were based and that Gunn had given a short account of their real life trajectories and deaths. Gunn had written in the back of the book that there were only ‘three of us left’, referring to Jack McCloud (the pseudonym for John MacLennon), Ernest Goss and presumably Gunn herself. After a summary of the book’s white characters, Hutton referred to the Chinese character, Ah Cheon, who had kept in touch with Gunn for many years, even after he had returned to China. Finally, presumably in order of race, or perhaps to save the best for last, Hutton introduced Bonson. Contrary to Bonson’s actual early life history, Hutton reported the ‘cheerful story’ that, ‘at 16 Bett-Bett entered Darwin Hospital as a wardsmaid’ and had married.

Mrs Dolly Bonson is no longer a little black princess; she is a respected grandmother and a son of hers served in the last war with the Australian forces. But to generations of Australians – white and black – I suppose she will live as Bett-Bett, the eternally youthful princess of the Never-Never.

From today’s perspective, the telling slippages of Gunn’s writing – that there were only ‘three of us left’ and the racial order of presentation in Hutton’s report – undermine the warm regard in which Hutton, Gunn and her readers supposedly held the literary character Bett-Bett and the real person Dolly Bonson.

Hutton’s *Argus* article reported that the books Gunn donated to the Melbourne library ‘had gathered half a century’s memories of the cruel empty North’ [my italics]. ‘Emptied’ would have been a more appropriate adjective, much closer to the truth. One of the characters whom Gunn had listed in the back of the book was the ‘Sanguine Scot’, John MacLennon, the character she called Jack McCloud. Francesca Merlan revealed that MacLennon was ‘remembered by them [Indigenous people] as “Miglinin” … one of Mr Gunn’s stockmen and was well-known’, and that he was allegedly the principal organiser of sorties ‘to exterminate the “wild blacks”’ in the Elsey area. In his recollections of the same region a few decades earlier, Arthur C. Ashwin described similar punitive excursions:

Whilst having dinner a big mob of niggers showed up about a quarter of a mile south on a range of hills. Three of the hard cases went away north and were taking a circuitous route endeavouring to work round behind the natives to give them a lesson … Be kind to the wild native if you want trouble. He mistakes kindness for fear all over Australia.
Part One: Contextual Background

Gunn’s books were described as ‘sensitive’ in 1952 and again in 2007, indicating just how much insensitive material was common at the time. Gunn’s ‘sympathy and admiration’ for what she perceived as the ‘good qualities’ of Indigenous people potentially made Australians and readers abroad more positively disposed towards Aboriginal people, before her books’ removal from the Australian school curriculum because of their ‘racism’ and their subsequent loss of status as a national treasure.

In a critique of the trope of benevolence and paternalism, Jackie Huggins asserted that ‘white women’s activities have to be seen as part of the colonisation and oppression of black women’. Gunn was complicit in colonisation as a member of the colonising population, accruing privileges based on its dominating position. Some passages in her writing make for offensive reading. Nonetheless, it is fruitful to consider more nuanced conclusions. Katherine Ellinghaus provided a more complex reading of Gunn’s relationship with Indigenous people. Along with her condescension and paternalism, Gunn possessed genuine warmth and a degree of empathy with Indigenous people that was rare in the nineteenth century. There were actions behind her more conciliatory words. She donated money to various Indigenous causes and also publicly revealed that ‘white men killed the black fellow’ and criticised the hypocrisy of colonials’ injustice to Indigenous people. Ellinghaus quoted a passage from Gunn’s early edition of *We of the Never-Never* (1905) that was erased from later editions, presumably at the behest of her publishers, which indicated an attitude towards Indigenous people contrary to prevailing views:

> A black fellow kills cattle because he is hungry and must be fed with food, having been trained in a school that for generations has acknowledged ‘catch who catch can’ among its commandments; and until the long arm of the law interfered, white men killed the black fellow, because they were hungry with a hunger that must be fed with gold, having been trained in a school that for generations has acknowledged ‘Thou shalt not kill’ among its commandments; and yet men speak of the ‘superiority’ of the white race, and, speaking, forget to ask who of us would go hungry if the situation were reversed, but condemn the black fellow as a vile thief, piously quoting – now it suits them – from those same commandments, that men ‘must not steal,’ in the same breath referring to the white man’s crime (when it finds them out) as ‘getting into trouble over some shooting affair with blacks.’ Truly we British-born have reason to brag of our ‘inborn sense of justice’.
While many middle-class white women were active and willing agents of the colonisation and oppression of Indigenous Australians, Gunn’s words represented the minority who were outspoken in their criticism of the treatment of Indigenous people in the nineteenth century.

In 1969 Bonson ‘came out’ as Bett-Bett when she converted to the Seventh Day Adventist Church. Bonson took it upon herself to defend Gunn’s reputation and in a late interview remarked that she would always be extremely grateful for everything Gunn had done for her. Haskins reported that Bonson, rather than identifying as a victim, had ‘become solid senior citizen Mrs Dolly Bonson, former ambulance driver, practising Anglican, mother of five with white-collar grandchildren’. Bonson’s story of her early abuse, vocation and Christian faith was again put in print, this time as a short biography to be ‘used for Christian outreach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities throughout Australia’. The publication was written by the Reverend Alan Holman with the help and endorsement of Bonson’s youngest daughter, Florence, six years after Bonson’s death. Holman’s biography was titled The Girl Who Talked to the Stars, and was republished three times, the 2009 edition having a print run of 100,000 copies.

The longstanding relationship between Bonson and Gunn proved supportive and enduring. Though seldom reunited, they corresponded for fifty years; one New Year’s telegram from Bonson to Gunn in 1937 read: ‘All well: wishing you happy new year, with my love’. The 1982 film of We of the Never-Never, heavily criticised for its racism and patronising portrayal of their relationship, was thoroughly enjoyed by Bonson. Their relationship also permeated through the generations, with Bonson’s children visiting Gunn, and Bonson visiting Gunn’s niece and nephew in later years.

The stories of Mathinna and Bonson illustrate an ideology of the times. White women should adopt an obligatory protective and motherly stance; they should also ‘dispense civilised values to the native population’ and ‘raise them up from their own ignorance and degradation’. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such ideas surrounding intercultural relationships were plain. The inequities and legacy of genocide and colonisation overshadowed all cross-cultural relations. Child removal, as many historians have demonstrated, was integral to invasion and colonisation and further, Haebich argued, ‘possession of the children indicated ownership of the future’. Haskins asserted, ‘on a superficial level the idea [removing Indigenous children] was one of assimilation but in reality they were strategies of containment and control, not of inclusion’. The language and project of philanthropy were used to
legitimise the displacement and indeed extermination of Indigenous ‘others’. White women were not an innocent party.216

Chapter Two has highlighted the racial tensions, sexual desires, Christian zeal, hostilities and atrocities that underpinned an oppositional moral spectrum in Australian contact zones, particularly in its remote areas. The contact zone was conceived as a site of potential savagery, power play, danger, adventure, redemption and uncontrolled sexuality. White women’s presence and conduct in this zone were problematic. It was even feared that unmarried women, when far from civilised environments, risked succumbing to their true, irrational and unrestrained nature. But for the men of the contact zones, the greater anxiety was, in historian Forrest’s view, ‘the fear that all white male pioneers in the outback at the time had, that the coming of white women would end forever the ways of life which were the reasons for so many men staying in the Territory’.217 Jeannie Gunn was one of many women who experienced real animosity from white men over the intrusion of white women.218

Independent women who dared to enjoy the freedoms of the outback, and particularly those who fraternised with the ‘natives’, were commonly perceived as unconventional, unrespectable women, who constituted a certain threat to the empire. Women were thus subjected to moral surveillance and stereotyping in a frontier society, where a strict moral order dictated fixed roles and places for both white women and Aboriginal people.219 This surely contributed to many white women publicising their adherence to respectability by, for instance, overtly keeping strict racial boundaries and distance from Indigenous people even when lonely and isolated, or, like Daisy Bates, adopting conspicuous signs of femininity, such as her prim and proper feminine attire.

Women who worked as scientists in the contact zones walked a precarious line along these social boundaries. Many worked behind the scenes for men or, if independent, often found their work ignored or ridiculed by men, and themselves cast as Victorian stereotypes – of Madonna, witch, madwoman or whore – as if this would further diminish their contribution.220 Only recently has some of their work been retrieved and the originality of their writing recognised, primarily by feminist historians.221 Hand in glove with this recognition were aspersions of the complicity of the disciplines in which the women were embarking. Ethnology and anthropology have been understood as complicit with colonial power in manufacturing ‘truths’ that rationalised ‘resuscitative and curative interventions of colonial governance’,222 providing a scientific warrant for Indigenous subjugation.
In surveying feminist discourse around race and gender in relation to white women in the contact zones of colonial Australia, this chapter has highlighted some recurring binaries by drawing attention to both oppositional and more elaborate revisions. While Dale Spender and Pamela Sharp judged white women’s affiliations across cultures as more empathetic than those of their male counterparts, others like Elizabeth West considered that white women were racist and uncaring, perpetuating patriarchal oppression and, like their men, ‘whitening out’ Indigenous people from their recollections. More recent feminist historians and theorists illuminated the complexity of white women’s roles and intercultural engagements in colonial times, as demonstrated in this chapter. The so-called ‘difference impasse,’ the discourse’s problematic binary dimensions of ‘us’ and ‘them’, victimisers and victims, employed at different times for moralising, theorising or politicising, has been shaken, complicated and now arguably superseded. At times such discourse still overshadowed the nuanced personal and social transcultural relations that Indigenous people developed with white women, and it is the undertaking of this thesis to bring some of these to light.

I contend that such polemics likewise glossed over an important aspect of the preliminary history of nineteenth-century women’s ethnography, and that there remain areas for fruitful analysis by re-examining some of its ground. But even if this was a shortcoming of some of these feminist histories, without their lucid uncovering of the patriarchal imperial power circulating in the Australian colonies, we would not be able to measure the extent of intercultural interactions or the contributions of these early women ethnographers and the forces with which they had to contend – which they often did in a subversive, rather than confrontational, manner. Thus, Chapters Two, Three and Four are designed not only as a frame for the Part Two case studies, but also as the means of establishing norms against which early women’s ethnography can be measured.
Endnotes


3. Ibid., p. 7.


6. Sometimes it is more appropriate to use the word ‘frontier’ in Paul Carter’s sense of a moving outer edge of the spread of civilisation, pushing into unclaimed areas, gathering more land and resources as it goes. According to Lynette Russell, the frontier was more clearly defined, whereas contact zones were places of possible merger: Russell, *Colonial Frontiers: Indigenous–European Encounters in Settler Societies*.


13. Different sources cite conflicting dates for the inception of assisted immigration into Australia, but they generally fall between 1828 and 1832.


15. Single women received £8 to emigrate and a later system paid £15 upon arrival.

16. These numbers emigrated under assistance schemes that cost an average of £18/3/0 per head.


Endnotes (continued)


30 McGrath, Born in the Cattle: Aborigines in Cattle Country, p. 49.

31 Summers, Damned Whores and God’s Police: The Colonization of Women in Australia, p. 308. Summers acquired this metaphor directly from Chisholm’s exhortations for young respectable middle-class women to emigrate to Australia and become ‘God’s police’. Ibid., p. 11.


33 Moreton-Robinson, Talkin’ up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism, p. 3.


36 O’Brien, “Missionary Masculinities, the Homoerotic Gaze and the Politics of Race: Gilbert White in Northern Australia 1885–1915,” p. 80. White was referring to the way many wives stayed in the southern or larger towns and cities to raise their children in a more supportive and safer environment, while their men went off to work in remote regions, for example droving or managing remote stations.

37 “Should Bushmen Marry?,” Advertiser, 4 July 1934, p. 5.


Endnotes (continued)


43 Dyer, White, p. 27.

44 Ibid., p. 186.

45 McClintock, Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality and the Colonial Contest, p. 6.

46 Hill, The Great Australian Loneliness, p. 133.


52 For example, Lulu Benstead defended the scandalous murderer William Willshire, in T. Benstead, “Mr William Willshire: To the Editor,” South Australian Register, 25 June 1891, p. 3.: ‘and I ask is it reasonable to expect a man … [to] live with these miserable dirty cunning creatures without becoming deteriorated to an extent’.


55 For example, McGrath quoted the use of terms ‘spinifex fairies’ or ‘pandanus fairies’ in ballads. McGrath, Born in the Cattle: Aborigines in Cattle Country, p. 80. Henry Kendall’s poem Black Lizzie was altogether disparaging: ‘Your people – take them as a whole – – / Are careless on the score of grace; And hence you needn’t comb your poll / Or decorate your unctuous face’, and he used the terms ‘daughter of hell’ and ‘fiend’ in his poem Lilith. See Henry Kendall, Songs from the Mountains, Elibron Classic (Sydney: William Maddock, 1880).


Endnotes (continued)


62 Although several more hundred people were classified as Chinese.


68 McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality and the Colonial Contest*, p. 6.


75 Lawn Hill Station, in the Gulf Country, was managed by the head stockman, Jack Watson.

76 Ibid., diary entry for 20 February 1883.

77 Ibid., diary entry for 21 February 1883.


80 Ibid., p. 82.

81 Ibid., p. 74.


83 Herbert, *Capricornia*, p. 47.

84 Ibid.


86 Ibid., p. 74.
Endnotes (continued)

87 Riddett, “‘Watch the White Women Fade’: Aboriginal and White Women in the Northern Territory, 1870–1940,” p. 85.


91 “In the narrowest sense the angel was the one near to God the pious one who kept the family on the Christian path. In secular terms the angel provided the home environment that promoted her husband’s and children’s well-being in the world; she also provided a haven from its worst pressures through her sound household management and sweetness of temperament”. For further discussion of the stereotype, see introduction and conclusion to Jeanne Peterson, “No Angels in the House: The Victorian Myth and the Paget Women,” American Historical Review, vol. 89, no. 3 (1984).


93 Forrest, They of the Never Never, p. 9.


95 Ibid., p. 160.


105 See ibid. and John Sinclair, Eliza Fraser’s Troubled Times (London: Dean and Munday, 1986). (Published by the Fraser Island Defenders Organisation to mark the sesquicentenary of the rescue of Eliza Fraser and the death of her husband, after whom Fraser Island is named.)

106 Schaffer, In the Wake of First Contact: The Eliza Fraser Stories, pp. 14–15.
Endnotes (continued)

107 Angus McMillan was known for his controversial discovery of Gippsland in Victoria. He was also alleged to have been involved in at least four massacres of the Kurnai people. Peter Dean Gardner, *Our Founding Murdering Father: Angus McMillan and the Kurnai Tribe of Gippsland* (Ensay, Vic.: P.D. Gardner, 1987), p. 39.

108 The report was in an early letter [from McMillan] to the *Sydney Herald*, which in turn received some publicity in the Port Phillip District, and caught the imagination of the European population. Ibid., pp. 40, 42.


113 Ibid., p. 163.

114 Ibid., p. 173.

115 Ibid.

116 Ibid.


119 Jimmy Governor’s mother was half-Irish.

119 Ethel later remarried and had nine children.


121 Ibid., p. 63.


124 After their marriage the couple travelled around New South Wales, then lived together in the Adnyamathanha community in the west of the state. They had two sons. When Jack died in 1930, Rebecca chose to remain living in the Adnyamathanha community for the next thirty years. See Victoria Haskins and John Maynard, “Sex, Race and Power: Aboriginal Men and White Women in Australian History,” *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 36, no. 126 (2005).
Part One: Contextual Background

Endnotes (continued)

130 See “Married to a ‘Splendid’ Aborigine,” *Mirror*, 11 March 1933.

131 Hill, *The Great Australian Loneliness*.


133 Spencer, “Woman Lives as a Lurba in Native Camp: Representations of ‘Shared Space’,” p. 61. This is also on record in an unidentified newspaper cutting pasted into the 1938–39 field journal of anthropologist Norman Tindale.

134 Spencer wrote in ibid., pp. 70, 72., that ‘Rebecca’s family, however, represent her as deeply embedded in a loving and beloved family and community … Interviewees did not think it was odd for a white woman to be living in the community; she fitted in, married the right way, and was just always there, they said’.


136 Ibid.


138 Historian Lynette Russell identified three interconnected themes running through the typical texts that arose from such contact encounters: ‘The silence and anonymity of the Aborigines, the polarity of the representations of Aboriginal people (pernicious savages or poor, afflicted creatures), and a homogeneous Australian Aboriginal culture. See Chapter 4 in McNiven, Russell and Schaffer, *Constructions of Colonialism: Perspectives on Eliza Fraser’s Shipwreck*.

139 See, for example, ‘To rank the Australian as a moron and a gorilla man is to do him a very grave injustice [sic] … The worst that might be said of him is that he is a child of his environment, but a normal child, not a backward one’. (Hill, *The Great Australian Loneliness*, p. 171.) D. Macallister said, in 1878, ‘from the crudeness of their opinions, the singular simplicity of their customs and their general childishness, they were exceedingly low in the social scale – as low as any race of savages known to us – about as low, in fact, as it was possible for man, as man, to descend’. (Reynolds, *Aborigines and Settlers: Problems in Australian History*, p. 122.)


144 Lydia Günther, quoted in Mitchell, “Corrupt Desires and the Wages of Sin: Indigenous People, Missionaries and Male Sexuality.”
Endnotes (continued)


154 Denzil Humphries, quoted in ibid., p. 324.

155 Ibid., p. 292.


160 Ibid., p. 275.


163 Ibid.
Part One: Contextual Background

Endnotes (continued)


167 These children were Mary Ann Thompson and her brother Thomas, grandchildren of Indigenous leader Mannarlargenna. See Haebich, Broken Circles: Fragmenting Indigenous Families, 1800–2000, p. 115.

168 Flanagan and Lehman, “Interview with Richard Flanagan by Greg Lehman.”

169 Robinson had previously sent them a boy named Time-menedic or Adolphus, who worked in the Government House stables, was apprenticed to a seaman and was not heard of after he left on a ship for England. See Haebich, Broken Circles: Fragmenting Indigenous Families, 1800–2000, p. 116.

170 “Old Boomer”, “Something of the Past,” Mercury, 7 June 1869, p. 3.

171 Ibid.


173 “Old Boomer”, “Something of the Past,” p. 3.


175 Flanagan and Lehman, “Interview with Richard Flanagan by Greg Lehman.”


178 Tragically, the girl was not returned to her family but sent to an industrial school. Haebich, Broken Circles: Fragmenting Indigenous Families, 1800–2000, p. 311.


182 Dalziell, “‘We Should Try, While There is Yet Time, to Gather All the Information Possible of a Race Fast Dying Out’: Unsettling Sympathetic Women.”


Endnotes (continued)

186 Ibid.
187 Ibid.
188 The title ‘Protector of Aborigines’ often gave a false impression of the duties of those who held such positions. For instance, J.A.G. Little supervised the execution of Moolooloorun on 17 January 1895 at Crescent Lagoon. Moolooloorun had been convicted of spearing white men and cattle and the execution was to be carried out publicly as a salutary lesson to other Aboriginal people. Townsend wrote, ‘As a demonstration of white man’s justice the spectacle was probably counter productive because even before the execution it became common knowledge that an Aborigine from Queensland who was passing through with overlanders was in fact responsible for the crimes of which Moolooloorun had been convicted. See Forrest, They of the Never Never.

189 Bonson courageously made an official complaint to the authorities after being ‘forced to work as a barmaid … propositioned on many occasions at the encouragement of her foster-parents … and Dolly – confused, beaten and abused – was able to find new accommodation’. Holman, “The Return of the Princess.”

190 Geoffrey Hutton, “The Little Lady Had a Literary Treasure and Has Given it to All,” Argus, 6 June 1952, p. 3 S.

191 Holman, “The Return of the Princess.”

192 Hutton, “The Little Lady Had a Literary Treasure and Has Given it to All.”


194 Ibid.

195 Ashwin, quoted in ibid., p. 78.

196 And again in 2007 Alan Holman described ‘Mrs Gunn’s two bestselling books – possibly the first sensitive descriptions of life in the outback’. Holman, “The Return of the Princess.”

197 Merlan, ‘‘Making People Quiet’ in the Pastoral North: Reminiscences of Elsey Station,” p. 71.

198 We of the Never-Never was translated into German in 1927.


200 For example, ‘she was just a little nigger girl or “lubra”’, and “All blackfellows have thick, ugly scars up and down and across their bodies and limbs, but Google Eye had more than most men’. Jeannie Gunn, The Little Black Princess: A True Tale of Life in the Never-Never Land (London: Alexander Moring, 1905), pp. 1, 22.

201 Ellinghaus, “Racism in the Never-Never: Disparate Readings of Jeannie Gunn.”

202 De Vries referred to ‘various Indigenous causes’ in her chapter on Jeannie Gunn, but did not give details. She was, however, specific in criticising ‘the white man’ for taking the country from ‘the black fellow’ and with it, the right to travel for pleasure and food. See Susanna de Vries, The Complete Book of Heroic Australian Women: Twenty-one Pioneering Women Whose Stories Changed History (Pymble, NSW: Harper Collins, 2010).

203 Jeannie Gunn, We of the Never-Never (London: Hutchinson, n.d. (1908)), p. 8. This copy of the 141st edition, autographed by Jeannie Gunn on 29 March 1937, is in Special Collections, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne.
Endnotes (continued)

204 Holman, quoted from the transcript of Dolly Bonson’s recorded interview, held ‘several years before her death’, which is now held in the Northern Territory Archives, Darwin (NTR S226). See Holman, “The Return of the Princess.”

205 Bonson’s and Gunn’s defence of each other was mutual. In 1955 Gunn publicly defended Bonson against rumours that ‘Bett-Bett’ had been abandoned to a destitute life; see Gunn, “‘Little Black Princess’ says ‘All Well’: Life Story of Famous Piccaninny.” and de Vries, The Complete Book of Heroic Australian Women: Twenty-one Pioneering Women Whose Stories Changed History, p. 213.


207 Holman, “The Return of the Princess.”


209 Gunn, “‘Little Black Princess’ says ‘All Well’: Life Story of Famous Piccaninny.”

210 For example, see Thomas G. Donovan and T. Lorraine Brody, Media Ethics, An Aboriginal Film and the Australian Film Commission (New York: Writers Club Press, 2002), pp. 51–52.


217 Forrest, They of the Never Never, p. 6.


219 Marcus, The Indomitable Miss Pink: A Life in Anthropology, p. 16.

220 For example, Bates was both portrayed as a Florence Nightingale figure and later vilified as a witch. See Ted Strehlow’s 1968 accusation of her as ‘a crabbed and singularly self-centred old lady with a closed Victorian mind’ in his foreword to Winifred M. Hilliard, The People In Between: The Pitjantjatjara People of Ernabella (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1968). Pink suffered similar accusations: George Farwell portrayed her as a voyeuristic spinster who had been ‘fatally clubbed’ while ‘investigating their copulation on a night of full moon’. See Marcus, The Indomitable Miss Pink: A Life in Anthropology, p. 15.

221 For example, Julie Marcus’ biography of Olive Pink: Marcus, The Indomitable Miss Pink: A Life in Anthropology.; Isabel White’s work on Bates: White, The Native Tribes of Western Australia / Daisy Bates., as well as Anne O’Gorman’s work on Ursula McConnel and Isabel McBryde’s work on Mary Bundock in Marcus, First in their Field: Women and Australian Anthropology.
Endnotes (continued)


223 Spender, Writing a New World: Two Centuries of Australian Women Writers; Sharp, “A Study of Relationships Between Colonial Women and Black Australians.”

224 West, “White Women in Colonial Australia.”

225 See Haggis, “The Social Memory of a Colonial Frontier.”


Chapter Three:

Settler Women’s Writing About Indigenous People

Because of the way that discourses of femininity circulated within the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women travel writers were unable to adopt the imperialist voice with the ease with which male writers did … Women’s travel writing is problematic because, although it was widely read at the time of its publication, many of the texts present a slightly different view of colonialism to males.¹

In Chapter Two, I discussed an aspect of feminist discourse developed in the late twentieth century, concerning the sexual politics of difference and conflict in colonial contact zones – in particular, the pressures of sexual and intercultural demarcation, and the social mores of the colonial project, to which white women were subjected. Chapter Three examines the ways in which this feminist discourse understood the key conditions and ideological forces that shaped the writing of early settler women with respect to their writing about Indigenous people. Recent scholarship has brought to light fascinating research on nineteenth-century Indigenous writers, and on Indigenous engagements with European-style texts and their own writing systems. However, this thesis is concerned with settler women’s writing about Indigenous peoples.² Such representations of ‘other’, as Attwood has reiterated, ‘were inseparable from the colonists’ exercise of power and were paralleled by other forms of knowledge which also empowered the colonisers – the naming and mapping of the continent’.³

Late twentieth-century postcolonial criticism, which significantly influenced feminist discourse, understood such textual representations as expressions of imperialism’s expansionist ideology, but also as a ‘fantasy of dominance’⁴ and superiority. Such imperialist representations, said Pratt, naturalised the ‘expansion of the knowledge edifice of natural history and the expansion of the capitalist world system’ by displacing previously established knowledges and lifeways.⁵ Feminist critics asked how gender was implicated in such imperialism. Focusing on feminist discussions of five settler women’s writings, this chapter critically examines how feminist critics understood the role of gender within the discourse of imperialism.
Gendered Spheres

Late twentieth-century feminist discourse focused its attention on analysing how
gendered spheres, power dynamics and tropes of femininity, racial hierarchy and the
contested social position of the new colonial woman shaped women’s roles and
perceptions. In so doing, it drew attention to the constructed nature of identity and
fabrications of otherness. Eger et al. argued that ‘the language of public and private
spheres has been a central organising trope for women’s historiography and for feminist
theory’.6 This was particularly apparent in examinations of white women’s encounters
with Indigenous people. The general frame of this feminist discourse either
acknowledged a gradual easing of the traditional binary of public and domestic
gendered spheres or questioned its epistemological value,7 but accepted that continuous
pregnancies kept the majority of women tied to the hearth and cradle, and that an
ideological imperative of motherhood remained firmly in place.8

Even though Judith Godden pointed out that this same ideology provided certain
spheres of invisibility on the colonial frontier, where women could find some sanctuary,
the notion of a dominant ideology of separate gender roles and spheres in the late
Victorian era was foundational to feminist histories.9 These gendered divisions of
Victorian England, it was argued, were transposed intact to the colonies, where women
were associated ‘with the home, consumption, and reproduction’, and men ‘with work,
production and the accumulation of money’.10 The first settler women to write about
Indigenous people and culture were subject to, and constrained by, this ideology.

Amanda Vickery argued that British didactic writings of the early to mid-
nineteenth century, such as sermons, advice books and articles for women, constructed a
‘crippling ideology of virtuous femininity’,11 later identified as the cult of true
womanhood,12 corresponding to the ‘shrinkage of political, professional and business
opportunities for women’.13 This writing made its way to the colonies and was
reproduced in colonial newspapers and other literature. In 1846, for example, the front
page of a Sydney newspaper advised readers of the characteristics and qualities of a
desirable wife: ‘Four things are required in a wife – virtue in her heart, modesty in her
face, gentleness on her lips and industry in her hands. The wife the best praised is she
who is not spoken of. Silence and blushing are the eloquence of a woman. Modesty is
woman’s courage’.14 Such attitudes continued into the early twentieth century, as was
clear in the words of F.R. Douglas, whose 1907 article was printed in six newspapers
across New South Wales:15
a wife’s first duty, in all cases, is towards her husband, and no other duty, however important, should be allowed to come between her and its fulfilment. ‘To love, honour and obey’ was not meant to be slipped off like a knotless thread, upon the advent of children … The true wife … puts her husband first. And the true wife is always the best mother … [producing] loving contented unselfish children.16

The deduction of feminist scholars that in the nineteenth century a woman’s fate hinged, on the whole, upon the character, status and fortune of her husband, and that she had scarce independent agency in the public sphere, is difficult to refute. Until well into the twentieth century, the law prescribed a wife’s subordination, as borne out by the following report of a divorce hearing in 1900. The *Maitland Daily Mercury* recounted Justice Simpson’s judgement: ‘the husband was the head of the house and the wife was bound to live in her husband’s home … The wife was not justified in refusing to go where her husband wanted her to go … She must remain with him, however poor the home might be’.17 Effectively, as Helen Thompson argued, women were denied the opportunity for a public life in the workforce. As she put it, ‘paid employment de-classed the middle-class woman’18 and jeopardised her husband’s status and self-respect.

Such views also supported Pam Hourani’s contention that ‘the lives of all women serviced the social, economic and political aspirations of the (male) ruling class’.19 In *The Real Matilda* Miriam Dixson claimed that there was an ethos of unconscious contempt for women in the colonies, who were ‘rated as the doormats of the western world’,20 a proposition supported by the records. According to Marilyn Lake, who quoted from archival material, some colonial men spoke of a wife’s value according to ‘their degree of usefulness with other animals’.21 Similarly, the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1889 measured the value of a wife as ‘a possession … just “a little dearer than a horse”’.22 Lucy Frost quoted a letter written in 1849 by the settler Penelope Selby:

courtships are always very short in this country, seen one week and married the next. Another peculiarity of this country is that men, gentle and simple, are rather fond of beating their wives – a gentleman residing in Belfast killed his the other day. He had not been married six months.23

Geraldine Robertson demonstrated that such constraints continued into the twentieth century.24 Margaret Maynard pointed out that they were experienced by and
‘affected all classes of colonial women’.25 Even elite women’s roles were ‘so restricted’, Maynard asserted, that their ‘clothing and etiquette were likely to have been among the few means they had of exerting social or political influence’.26

In this thesis, my focus is not so much on the historical detail of this scholarship but on the ways feminist critics used this analysis to examine, theorise and judge white women’s writing in colonial times. Feminist historians maintained that women’s writing became a powerful means for them to affirm their sense of self, adjust to their new environment and overcome the patriarchal restrictions of their day. Clark and Spender asserted:

> When as a sex you were not permitted to attend school or university, when you were not permitted a public role or allowed entry to any of the established professions, when the only work available to you was limited to the menial, the sexual or the domestic – and when there was little chance that you could go out and about because it was either improper or unaffordable … [women were] effectively cut off from each other and the collective experience of women … the entrance to the world beyond their own private enclosure, was through books.27

Women’s writing inevitably opened onto public spheres that were at odds with the gender constructions of the Victorian age. Robert Dixon might have put it too strongly, but to some extent at least, settler women’s writing emerged from a tradition of letters, diaries and memoirs that ‘crosses or indeed negates the ideological boundary between public and private life’.28

While feminist historians shared a critical awareness of the role of gender, class and race in their examinations of nineteenth-century women’s writing, they drew mixed conclusions. Shannon Schedlich-Day emphasised that writing itself involved both privilege and bias.29 Even if women received an education, its purpose was more to shape them into ideal wives and mothers than to encourage their own intellectual pursuits. Likewise, their lessons took a predominantly feminine cast; ‘polite accomplishments’ on the whole were limited to languages, religious instruction, needlework, piano playing, drawing and painting.

Moreover, privilege was no guarantee that literacy was valued. Amelia Reade, born in 1822 to a wealthy Van Diemen’s Land farming family of free settlers, noted in her diary: ‘My Grandparents were decidedly of the old school. Writing was abhorrent to them, and reading, for girls especially, was quite unnecessary’.30 Amelia consequently
resorted to hiding her books in ‘a box used as a seat in the summerhouse’. Further to this, some settler women and their children were discouraged from reading, with Dyhouse pointing out that in the nineteenth century there were medical injunctions for women against mental exertion such as reading and writing. Clarke and Spender stated that it ‘was not uncommon to find respected medical practitioners declaring that women’s brains would burst and their uteruses atrophy if they were exposed to the risks of writing and reading’.

In Britain, which had one of the highest literacy rates for women, just fifty-five per cent of women, compared to seventy per cent of men, could read by 1850. Generally, only a minority of middle-class and genteel settler families of sufficient means could facilitate their daughters’ literacy and education. Schedlich-Day observed that the cost of time, paper and post was prohibitive to all but the most powerful families, producing a strong race and class bias in early settler women’s writing. Even so, Clarke and Spender found a surprisingly high level of literacy across class barriers and argued that ‘it is precisely because women were denied education, occupation and mobility that reading and writing became such important attributes in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century women’s lives’.

Despite these constraints, some feminist historians were wary about heroicising their subjects. They have been alert to the role of race, and the feeling of displacement such women felt in being so far from home. Leaving the legitimacy and haven of British high society for the little-known and untamed outer rim of empire was, at the time, seen as more fitting for brave male adventurers in pursuit of independence and fortune. Emigrant women, their writings revealed, experienced a degree of culture shock when they followed their husbands to the colonies. Having left their family and familiarity behind, they held tight their English values.

For many, it took time to adjust to the new and vast environment and its ‘many privations and shortages’, as Alexandra Hasluck pointed out in her study of Georgiana Molloy (1805–1843). Quoting from a letter by Molloy, detailing her initial response to Flinders Bay in Western Australia, Hasluck referred to the intimidation that Molloy felt at ‘the unbounded limits of thickly clothed dark green forests where nothing can be described to feast the imagination and when you can only say there must be some tribes of Natives in those woods and they are the most degraded of humanity’. ‘How would you’, wrote Molloy, ‘like to be three years in a place without a female of your own rank to speak to or to be with you whatever happened?’
Frost quoted M.A. Oliver, a governess based at Neuarpurr in far western Victoria, lamenting in 1871 that ‘the bush life is a perfect exile’. 41 Similarly, Rebekah Crow cited Jane Bardsley (1877–1943), who followed her husband in 1896 to Midlothian Station, near Normanton on the Gulf of Carpentaria in Queensland, exclaiming, ‘I fancy I can see wild eyes glaring at me from all directions and their white teeth ready to eat me up … I am frightened for fear of what I may have to go through in the future’. 42 Spender shared another complaint in the words of diarist Annie Baxter (1816–1905): ‘A bush life! Oh! ’tis the most rustic thing you can possibly imagine – almost approaching barbarism’ 43

The barbarism of early Australia was not simply to be found in crude conditions and wild eyes haunting the shadows, but also in its criminal stock, a combination of which was fertile material for the discourses of race, gender and class that flourished in nineteenth-century Australia. Angela Woollacott pointed out that suspect pedigree and standards in the colonies contributed to a perception of colonial women’s ‘subordinate position within the Empire’. 44 The fate and depredations of colonial women convicts were widely publicised, and provided much grist for early nineteenth-century conjecture about ‘race’ and breeding. The women convicts’ reported lack of sexual and social decorum made the racial bulwark of civility less impenetrable and probably amplified fears of miscegenation.

Sexual relations between Indigenous men and white women were unspeakably threatening, no matter how crude the white women, while white men were free to perpetrate their sexual desires on Indigenous women with little censure. Yet Woollacott held Australian women to account in seeking ‘to elide the inferiority inherent in their colonial identity by emphasizing their whiteness and their economic and cultural privileging’, 45 and while they themselves were doubly subordinate to the metropolis and to men, 46 nevertheless were prone to indulge in a ‘racial’ hierarchy in which Aboriginal women shored up their standing.

According to Margaret Maynard, exclusive balls, dinner parties, stylish dressing and travel conspicuously distinguished the ruling elite from the ‘generally homogeneous clothed’ working majority, at a time when ‘convict dressing was unregulated and many inhabitants still lived practically naked’. 47 Maynard painted a dismal picture of the constraints on white colonial women, especially the elite, who at least had opportunities to write. Middle-class and elite women, she said, were preoccupied with signs relating to status, class and refinement in order to bolster their British allegiance, and this was reflected in their writing. ‘Whiteness as much as blackness’, 49 Woollacott reiterated, was
a cultural construct. But whiteness, moreover, was ‘formed as a racial identity centred on privilege, supremacy, authority and normativity’. Thus their signifiers were important to aspiring women who, according to Maynard, ‘eagerly followed every ephemeral detail of English fashions and mannerisms, but by the 1830s this was alleged to be at the expense of both finesse and more cerebral and cultural pursuits’. Colonial women ‘were deemed to fail in their efforts to match the standards of femininity displayed by their British counterparts’ – an opinion that Maynard did not contest.

If, however, feminist historians were well aware of the extent to which emigrant women reproduced the values of the home country, they were alert also to differences. They were not the first observers of such differences, for this was a common concern of colonial observers. As early as the 1820s, Peter Cunningham pointed to the ambivalent status of the white Australian woman: ‘our colonial climatised females mincing it past these undraperied [Indigenous] beaux, or talking with them carelessly face to face, as if unconscious of their nudity; – while the modest new-comers will giggle, blush, cover their eyes with their fingers and hurry confusedly by’.

The implications of ‘the emergence of a new colonial type’, said Tanya Dalziell, were troubling and more complex for settler women’s identity than for men’s. In particular, colonial women’s uncertain British identity heightened the significance of their writing about Indigenous others; such writing aroused feelings of disquiet around their subject positioning and intercultural relations. Dalziell argued that ‘specific concerns regarding race, gender, sexuality, class and colonisation in settler Australia are played out around the Australian Girl’, a feature in popular literature of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Australia.

Schedlich-Day also argued that, in the colonies, Victorian notions of womanhood were disrupted by partial concessions to the demand for courage and hard work on a harsh frontier, but that it was an expansion of, not a contrast to, the ideal woman. Her study of Australian women pioneers acknowledged that the image of a colonial girl was cast as more ‘self-reliant, and less interested in issues of class and status than her counterpart from the Mother country. She could ride a horse and hold her own in a conversation or debate … [and] matures into the dependable, reliable Australian woman’. Clarke and Spender and Dorothy Jones observed the role that writing in journals and letters played in emigrant women’s reconstruction of themselves, helping them adjust to and comprehend their new country and its blurring of previous class boundaries.
Jones quoted governess Miss Barlow in a letter she wrote from Janesville, Victoria, in 1863: ‘I am getting quite a Colonial woman, and fear I should not easily fit into English ideas again – [I] can scrub a floor with anyone and bake my own bread and many other things an English Governess and School mistress would be horrified at’. Bird suggested that the deprivations of bush life were balanced somewhat by ‘the opportunity for middle-class women at least to do, rather than merely be’. Feminist scholars contended that middle-class settler women were able to assert their identity as active agents in their roles as domestic trainers of Indigenous house help and by extending a ‘civilising’ influence, not only for white men but also for Indigenous people. Thus, as Jane Haggis argued about colonial missionary women in India, women’s work in the colonies could be constructed as a saviour discourse, in which white women liberate the agency-less Indigenous women, who are degraded in their own culture.

Consequently, feminist historians acknowledged not just the ambivalence of colonial women’s writing but also its range, from writers such as Barlow or Henning, who did not adjust as easily, to Georgiana McCrae, who seemed to thrive in the colony.
Agnes Henty, a lonely pastoralist wife, was another immigrant who never fully adjusted: ‘Blessed is the life of an Englishwoman and not an Australian’, she wrote from Warrayurne Station near Hamilton in Victoria. Bird pointed out that Henty’s sense of isolation was class-based; although she lived with numerous servants and children she frequently complained of being ‘alone all day’. Spender, however, argued that it was such gender oppression and the confinement of the domestic sphere of child rearing that provided early Australian women writers with recognition and alliance across cultural difference. She wrote, ‘there is no parallel in men’s writing with that of white women who document their affinity with black women as they assist each other in labour, or when they are sometimes obliged to “share” the same master’.

Barbara Dawson observed that many of the pastoral women on inland properties in fact ‘turned to Aborigines for companionship … recording their impressions of their strong, compassionate, helpful and fun-loving Black sisters’. McCrae, an early Victorian artist, was perhaps one such woman and the first of the authors examined in this chapter. Living in similar conditions to Henty, McCrae wrote about similar issues quite differently and her writing included significant Indigenous content.

Settler women’s observations and anecdotes of colonial life served to both interpret and articulate their own and Indigenous people’s identities for public reception, even if only by letters read by a small family group back in England. Aileen Moreton-Robinson argued that white Australia (and, I would add, British readers) came to ‘know’ Indigenous women through the early gaze of white explorers, state officials and anthropologists. In such texts, she said, ‘Indigenous women are objects who lack agency’ and in addition, quoting Gillian Cowlishaw, such writing was a process in which they were ‘defined, delineated and controlled’.

While there was contestation of the assumed superiority of early white women writing about Indigenous people, several feminist scholars claimed that this was a neglected field and little referenced. Meg Vivers argued convincingly that ‘evidence’ of intercultural contact contained in settler women’s writing ‘appears to have been largely overlooked’ in the historical canon, but offered ‘alternative readings that contest aspects of the dominant discourse and subsequent generalisations’. Likewise, Dawson asserted that it was a unique and neglected resource, opening ‘the door to a rich source for historical investigation’.

The following brief accounts of five white authors provide a better sense of the range and complexity of settler women’s responses to Indigenous people, and the social contexts in which they were writing. In this way I aim to contextualise the field from
which my more detailed studies in later chapters arise. The five authors used as examples of settler women’s writing with Indigenous content are Georgiana McCrae, Marie Emily Susannah (Minnie) Brewer, Eliza Hamilton Dunlop, Caroline Harper Dexter and Eliza Davies. Their locations and the language groups with whom they worked are indicated in Figure 3.2.

Georgiana McCrae (1804–1890)

Feminist scholars were interested in Georgiana McCrae’s writing for more than its Indigenous content. A highly educated woman leading an energetic and adventurous life, she conformed to few stereotypes, escaping many (though not all) of the constraints that feminist historians generally believed structured women’s lives in the Australian colonies. Woollacott’s concept of the colonial woman’s hybrid identity, that is, partly a British lady and partly an Australian, was applicable to McCrae75 (Figure 3.3).

Georgiana was born in London in March 1804. Her father, the Duke of Gordon, of Gordon Castle (Figure 3.4) in Scotland, provided her with a privileged education, including various languages, music, dancing, deportment and art.76 She had ambitions to be a portrait artist and was trained by some of the best painters in London, winning medals for works exhibited at the Royal Society of Arts.77 Upon marrying Andrew Murison McCrae in 1830,78 she gave up her commissioned work, lamenting later that ‘in those “stuck up” days it was considered *infra dig* for a wife of a “gentleman” to exhibit her talents for pecuniary recompense!’79
Chapter Three: Settler Women’s Writing About Indigenous People

Figure 3.2
Locations and Language Groups for Georgiana McCrae and Caroline Harper Dexter (Victoria), Marie Emily Susannah Brewer and Eliza Hamilton Dunlop (New South Wales) and Eliza Davies (South Australia).
In 1841, Georgiana McCrae and her four sons followed her husband to Melbourne, where he established a law practice. Three years later the family moved to Arthur’s Seat, a 12,800 acre squatter’s run for sheep and cattle, 48 miles southeast of Port Phillip on the Mornington Peninsula. Although the area was isolated, there was already one established family with sheep runs, the Hobsons, who, with their ‘extended families, together with their connections, were deeply engaged with the Bonurong’, the local Indigenous people.

McCrae’s standing and capabilities in class and education allowed her some flexibility within gendered norms. For example, she was left to maintain the running of the station while her husband was away in Melbourne on legal business, though she was forbidden to use her painting talent to make a living as a professional artist. Spender concluded that ‘despite her status as a “lady” it was an enormously hard life that she led’ and that, as with many other women, the theme of ‘the problems and perils of marriage’ were present in her writing.
In her day McCrae was greatly respected as a pioneering Australian lady and, said Norman Cowper, especially admired for ‘her skill in managing the Aboriginals at Arthur’s Seat’. Marie Hansen Fels wrote that it was the Bonurong-speaking man, Edward Hobson, and his mother’s partner, George Smith, who ‘set the tone of the peaceful interactions on the Mornington Peninsula’. McCrae’s intercultural relationships, nevertheless, were remarkable for their intimacy and compassion.

By the time of her journal-writing at Arthur’s Seat, much of the ‘dispersal’ of the Kulin nations of peoples, including the Bonurong (one of five related language groups) of Port Phillip and the Western Port coast, had taken place, achieved through violence and disease. By 1839, four years after the settlement of Melbourne and six years before the McCraes moved to Arthur’s Seat, only eighty-three Bonurong remained, from a population estimated to have been between 250 and 500 prior to 1800. McCrae’s eldest son, George, recorded in an unpublished recollection:

Our wander friends the ‘blacks’ used to spend certain seasons of the year with us … when they arrived in force, say between one and two hundred strong, they would set up their ‘mia mias’ … (close to the house and huts). Some … became fairly domesticated during their stay. The women washing and mending and scrubbing for us, the boys riding errands and the men shooting for the pot or fishing and joining in our hunting and boating expeditions.
Sixteen years after the McCraes left Arthur’s Seat (see Figure 3.5) in 1851, there were no Bonurong remaining in the region.90

Georgiana McCrae’s journal entries included records of her interactions with her Bonurong neighbours. Both she and her eldest son, George, used the term ‘our friends’ in their accounts,91 and attempted to learn and record a basic vocabulary of the Bonurong language from their teachers, Eliza and Ben-Benjie. Eliza at times worked at the homestead with McCrae on domestic tasks and taught the children songs in her language.92 Ben-Benjie, ‘the premier huntsman and fisherman of his tribe’,93 accompanied the boys on hunting and boating expeditions and taught them to spear fish and track and hunt kangaroos. He would also leave his precious artefacts and weapons with George for safekeeping.94 On occasions, Georgiana would accompany Ben-Benjie spear fishing or picking wild raspberries. Likewise, Ben-Benjie and other Bonurong neighbours, would gather around at times when she played the piano.95

Figure 3.5
Georgiana McCrae, Arthur’s Seat, 1849.

Several anecdotes in McCrae’s writing conveyed good standing between her family and various Bonurong individuals. It seemed Georgiana McCrae did not hesitate to extend refuge to a fugitive Bonurong woman named Myrnong. When disturbed by a noise one night upon entering her room in the dark, Georgiana turned to discern Myrnong in her possum rug, hiding by the fireplace: ‘her finger to her lip – enjoin silence and her eyes beseeching pity! … Mooney kill – Mooney no find me’.96 Rather than express alarm or chastisement, McCrae harboured Myrnong while her lover hid in the garden. Nor did McCrae give her away when Myrnong’s husband searched for her the next day. Recording such incidents testified to a shared and entangled intercultural space. At the bottom of this journal entry, McCrae wrote a poem expressing sympathy
for the fugitive lovers, acknowledging the loss of innocence, whatever one’s colour, when Venus ‘sheds her influences soft / o’er all Eve’s daughters’.97 Spender argued that McCrae was writing this journal for herself rather than for others, using it to ‘sustain her reality, to realise her identity – and to stay sane’.98

Passages in McCrae’s journal also record intercultural involvement in socially significant markers of life events, including the following entry of June 1843: ‘our familiar Aborigines spent the day here. Betty, or “Yellambourrime” … exchanged names with Lucinda [McCrae’s eldest daughter, Georgiana Lucia]. This is a native compliment to be received with good grace’.99 Pamela Sharp described this incident as a gracious incorporation into Indigenous kinship systems.100 McCrae also wrote sadly of the death of Johnnie,101 an ‘ally and Hunting [sic] companion to our boys – and his death has cast quite a shade of sorrow over them all’.102 McCrae’s son, George, was asked to help dig the grave and Georgiana to contribute binding from her hat.103 George carried Johnnie on his shoulders to the grave.104 Funerary rites are of great significance to Indigenous people and such gestures imply more than superficial exchange. McCrae recorded that among items buried with the corpse was ‘the last bottle of medicine I had sent him’.105

McCrae was also notable for executing sensitive portraits of Eliza (Figure 3.6) and Ben-Benjie, titled Portrait of Eliza and Ben-Benjie, Bunurong Tribe, c. 1851.106 Unlike most early nineteenth-century portraits, which were labelled with anonymous terms such as ‘the blacks’ or ‘the natives’, and typecast or at times caricatured Indigenous people, McCrae’s portraits,107 as with her recording of Indigenous names, were individualised and intimate. Eliza and Ben-Benjie’s apparent agreement to having their images permanently recorded was of some significance, denoting a certain amount of trust and familiarity on both parts. Both portraits were realistic and empathetic. In Portrait of Eliza, McCrae depicted a loveliness of features. Eliza looks confidently and warmly out to the viewer as though with reciprocal affection rather than oppositional othering, endorsing Fiona Paisley’s argument that ‘the “racial” frontier in settler colonial societies was sometimes a place where class allegiances and constraints were worn thin or worn down altogether’.108

McCrae’s portraits of Ben-Benjie and Eliza stood out from the more derogatory settler views that prevailed at the time, and suggested that McCrae was taking her cue from lived experience as much as from the ideology in which she had been raised. As Pratt argued, ‘While the imperial centre tends to understand itself as determining the
periphery … it habitually blinds itself to the ways in which the periphery determines the metropolis’.109

Figure 3.6
Georgiana McCrae, Portrait of Eliza, c. 1845.

McCrae’s experiences seem to be an example of Pratt’s contention that within imperialism’s rigid hierarchy of authority was a ‘contact-zone’ that, despite its ‘radically asymmetrical relations of power’, had numerous ‘interactive, improvisational dimensions’.110 However, feminist scholars were wary of drawing such conclusions, and indeed doubly suspicious of such seemingly congenial engagements.111 Dalziell, for example, critiqued the trope of the sympathetic white woman: ‘might such sympathetic intentions obscure the contexts that permit settler women to extend and represent such common feeling with Aboriginal women and men?’112 In general, some critics were not convinced by Pratt and, as if confirming colonialism’s power, spoke of the ‘structural impossibility’ of such relations, ‘given the extreme inequitable power relations and sexual rivalry between women on the frontiers of white settlements’.113

Firstly, in McCrae’s case we have no written record of what the Bonurong truly thought of these intruders on their territory, although we do know that one of the tribe’s last leaders, Derrimut, living in Port Phillip, told a magistrate:
‘... Derimut [sic] soon die,’ and then he pointed with a plaintive manner, which they can affect, to the Bank of Victoria, he said, ‘You see, Mr Hull, Bank of Victoria, all this mine, all along here Derimut’s once; no matter now, me soon tumble down’. I said, ‘Have you no children?’ and he flew into a passion immediately, ‘Why me have lubra? Why me have picanninny? You have all this place, no good have children, no good have lubra, me tumble down and die very soon now’.114

Secondly, it is important to bear in mind the politics of self-definition in personal settler narratives, particularly memoirs.115 Writers were conscious of their readers’ expectations and, as the benevolence of refined women was an important Christian ideal, it could also have had some bearing on the way these incidents were recorded. McCrae, for example, edited her original versions into a set of exercise books, before her grandson, Hugh Gordon McCrae, further edited them. Thérèse Weber argued that Hugh Gordon McCrae’s cutting and rewriting of his grandmother’s journal were so extensive and manipulative that it could no longer be regarded as her writing. Weber, however, did not detail the inaccuracies regarding McCrae’s relations with Indigenous people.116

Mary Emily Susannah [Minnie] Brewer (1853–1934)

Minnie Brewer (née Hunter) (Figure 3.7),117 began writing her memoirs for her adopted son, John Cantrill,118 when she was in her sixties, and continued writing over a period of fourteen years (1915–1929). They provide a rare glimpse of the intercultural pastoral frontier in a family narrative, which began before Brewer was born. She wrote that in the early 1840s, when her father, James Hunter, an immigrant Scottish horse breeder, was about twenty years old, he ‘captured’ a young Indigenous boy ‘named’ Tommy Brown:

a wild tribe of blacks were after the boy, trying to spear him and kill him, as he had wandered from his own tribe. My father ran him down, caught him, took him on his horse and rode away with him and soon got good friends. My father was afraid to take him back to the wild bush country as the boy was only about 12 years old ... Tommy after that, was never out of my father’s sight if he could help it.119
Part One: Contextual Background

Brewer did not display the more usual, ingrained, self-conscious cultural bias with which some other writers ‘whiten out’, as Jane Haggis termed it, their history.120 Her relationships with Indigenous people reverberated significantly throughout the first fifty years of her life. Tommy Brown featured as an early Indigenous presence, accompanying Brewer’s newly wed parents in 1850 on a long overland journey from Port Phillip to South Australia and, later, becoming Brewer’s riding companion. At one stage, Brewer wrote that when everyone in the district went down with ‘ophthalmic’, an eye inflammation, ‘Tommy brought a doctor from goodness knows where’.121

Figure 3.7

Feminist historians were interested in the contrast that Brewer’s memoirs provided to McCrae’s paternalistic sense of humanity. What made them exceptional, argued Victoria Haskins and Schedlich-Day, was that they were written neither by a genteel pioneer wife, such as McCrae, Dunlop or Dexter, nor by the daughter of a successful squatter, such as Parker, Bundock or Dawson, but from the:

precarious position of innumerable voiceless and forgotten women in Australia’s colonial past not attached by marriage or blood ties, but a dependent outsider, who contributed to the functioning of the household in return for her food, lodgings, and the protection it offered to unattached young females of the time.122
Despite positioning her family as the ‘better class squatters’, Brewer was nonetheless more precariously situated than McCrae, as she did not have an early marriage to bestow status, nor were her father’s fortunes secured. In Brewer’s childhood, her family ran one of a large number of stations in the district of Naracoorte on the South Australia – Victoria border, ‘mostly owned by Scotchmen of different classes who came out in the forties’. The family moved between various stations in South Australia and Victoria, in a culture that exploited Indigenous people for their labour and knowledge. These people were useful to the settlers in their pastoral endeavours:

there was [sic] large mobs of blacks on many of the stations and the black boys were very useful and good rough riders, and some of the lubras good at house work and washing. I used to love going with them kangaroo hunting. There were quantities of kangaroos of all sizes everywhere, also swamps full of wild fowl every few miles you traveled.

Both Indigenous people and settlers viewed this period of co-existence on stations – those years after the initial intercultural conflict and before state removals – as relatively workable, despite the domination of settler interests. According to Ann McGrath’s study of Indigenous people and the cattle industry in the Northern Territory, much about life on the pastoral camps and stations in this interim period ‘allowed for a high degree of autonomy and cultural continuity’. Indigenous people, she said, ‘had to teach station whites many things. Aborigines worked the stations; they managed the land in new ways, through following old principles’. Further, she argued that in the north, ‘at no stage did Aborigines concede European ownership of their land, and managers were well aware of the existence of tribal territory on their leases’. Julie Evans quoted Heather Goodall’s study of New South Wales at a similar interim co-existence phase, emphasising that Indigenous people:

could travel frequently over their country, maintain traditional ceremonial and social traditions, eat healthy native foods as well as European rations, speak their own languages and teach their children about land, traditions, and recent history. These are remembered as times when Aboriginal traditional knowledge was acknowledged by whites for its value to pastoral work, and when Aboriginal expertise … [was] widely respected
Brewer felt at home in an intercultural environment, writing: ‘nervous person as I have always been, I never felt the least fear of blacks, I suppose because I had lived so much amongst them as a child’. Brewer’s mother was the daughter of an Anglican clergyman and, while she was kind, there was no doubt about her perceived superior position, which Brewer observed when young. She wrote that her mother was also ‘very fond of the poor blacks. She thought the Lubras wonderful, and so useful when taken a little trouble with’. Such regular, close intercultural contact in childhood certainly went some way towards developing Brewer’s relatively high level of respect for Indigenous people and culture.

Feminist scholars were most interested in Brewer’s memoirs of her four years on Merri Merrigal station, as ‘companion and help’ to John Brewer’s wife and six children. This period provided, asserted Haskins and Schedlich-Day, a ‘unique glimpse of the shared space of cross-cultural histories, and a sense of the possibilities and limitations for female friendships across the racial and social divide of colonial Australia’.

Minnie Brewer’s relationships with ‘my mate Ellen’ and Ellen’s sister, Amelia, whom Brewer depicted as her protector, were formed from the time of Ellen’s initial appearance at the station, where she was sheltering from domestic violence. Brewer and Ellen slowly became friends, through jointly taking part in various domestic duties and through leisure activities, mostly on the river: ‘Often the lubras used to come to my window through the night and say, “Come on Minnie and we go have a swim in the river.” I went with them.’ Intercultural friendships were very much a part of Brewer’s daily life and there were regular comings and goings between the Indigenous camp and the homestead. On several occasions, Brewer suggested that the balance of power between the more usually dominant white and subordinated black shifted. In one of these stories, Brewer began, ‘The blacks had a number of bark canoes on the river’. Brewer recalled how she finally got into a canoe with Ellen and another Indigenous girl named Clara:

The river was running very strongly and made the boat unsteady. I got frightened and stood up and over I went in one of the deepest parts. The two girls who could swim like ducks had hold of me in a moment, they would I think have got me out if I had kept quiet but I struggled and got hold of them. Ellen who was a little skeleton could do nothing so yells as loud as she could.
Amelia jumped in, rescued Brewer and then chased the other two girls and ‘gave them a thrashing poor things’. Brewer recorded Indigenous women’s acts and voices with more respect and fondness than her recollections of Mrs Lizzie Brewer, the boss’s wife, or the tutor, Mr Scott. Indeed, Minnie Brewer’s Indigenous friends supported her in her ongoing animosity towards Mr Scott, by helping spot and collect her letters, which he would litter along the riverbank.

After four years of working on the Merri Merrigal station, Brewer left abruptly at the end of 1878, following an argument with Lizzie Brewer, and wrote: ‘poor Amelia and Ellen walked all the way from Merri Merrigal to see me once more [a week later] and say goodbye’. Minnie Brewer asked the couple with whom she was staying temporarily whether the two Indigenous women could sleep over and have something to eat; they obliged. The next morning Minnie departed for Melbourne after walking some way with her two Indigenous friends as they left to go back to Merri Merrigal station, before she departed for Melbourne.

The women stayed in touch and, twenty-five years later, Brewer recorded a visit from Amelia, who by then had been relocated to the Warangesda Mission in New South Wales (the interim co-existence had come to an end). Brewer happily accompanied Amelia to ‘all I thought she would care to see’, including the seaside and the zoo, where Amelia was:

crazy with delight … She laughed & yelled at the Elephant but would not ride him. She laughed till she cried at everything she saw … Poor Amelia I am sure she would never forget that day. She returned soon after to N.S. Wales I never saw her again. She told me she was soon going to die & she did.

Haskins and Schedlich-Day argued that Brewer’s memoirs revised previous understandings of intercultural relationships by demonstrating that:

it could be easier for friendships to form between subordinate white and Aboriginal women than between the senior and subordinate white women, while subtle intercultural alliances could serve to undermine the authority of senior women in both white and Aboriginal hierarchies.

While the personal writings of McCrae and Brewer provided evidence of amicable interrelating and a sense of shared humanity, feminist critics remained alert to their
shared racist paternalism. Haskin and Schedlich-Day pointed out that evaluation of these intercultural colonial accounts was hampered by a thinness and bias of sources, not to mention the glaring absence of first-hand Indigenous perspectives. They ‘caution us to hesitate drawing conclusions on women’s intercultural relationships that are based on the writings of “pioneer wives” and “squatter’s daughters” alone’.144 Because both Brewer and her Indigenous friends, Ellen and Amelia, worked for the same Missus, the asymmetry of power between them was somewhat mitigated. Moreton-Robinson claimed, however, that the subordination of Indigenous women was inevitable, ‘given the extreme inequitable power relations and sexual rivalry between women on the frontiers of white settlements’.145 Despite this, feminist scholars argued that Brewer’s working-class account went further than McCrae’s sympathetic renderings, recognising her Indigenous friends as active agents in their shared history, and imparting more of the possibilities and limitations for friendships among women across racial and social divisions.

Brewer’s intimate relationship with Indigenous women was echoed in accounts of frontier women in Queensland investigated by Rebekah Crow in her PhD thesis.146 Although Queensland was known as a violent contact zone, Crow found little evidence of settler women being afraid of ‘the natives’ or terror linked to such a threat of violence.147 Rather, she identified that when women wrote about Indigenous people, the dominant themes were curiosity, adventure, amusement and frustration.148 These themes omitted or glossed over the firepower (what Deborah Bird Rose identified as likely to be a Colt, a Mauser or a Webley) that underscored white dominance and the land grab of colonists. Indeed, this dominance and taking of land were in these personal accounts scarcely questioned.149 Crow concluded that ‘by far the most common attitude to frontier violence was quiet ambivalence’.150

These themes and the domestic or relational intimacy that Crow’s study revealed can be found in other settler women’s diaries across Australia, including Mary Thomas (1787–1875), who recorded that her initial sighting of ‘a black woman … excited our curiosity … But what surprised us was her musical voice, and the pleasing intonation with which she spoke the English language’.151 Annie Baxter’s thirty-two volumes of diaries were rich in the contact zone dynamics of the Macleay River region of mid-northern New South Wales and the southern coast of what would later become Victoria. There were many incidents recalling intercultural conflicts or reprisals.152 But Lucy Frost also analysed an account of the week Baxter spent nursing a brutally treated and starving Indigenous woman and the agony she endured. Upon the woman’s death,
Baxter lamented: ‘I have entered into this perhaps too fully – but it has cost me a tear, and at this moment my eyes are full! For White, or Black – in Sickness or in Health – we are Sisters in God!’

Bardsley’s comments likewise either bridged or confounded the usual distancing found in writing about Indigenous people. Further, they hinted at the multiple appropriating identities that would continue to reverberate in white women’s intercultural experiences. Bardsley recorded the joy of intercultural intimacy: ‘I am having a wonderful time with the wild gins, they are screamingly funny’. She recalled shared leisure activities, such as swimming together in waterholes: ‘At first I felt shy at being naked but after a few Sunday Hunts the gins found out that I was made the same as they were and stopped staring at me, and so I did not mind’. Bardsley even revealed:

> At times I feel black and I’m sure the natives think that I am some dead relative who has jumped up as a whitefellow. They wanted to tattoo my arms and legs by just cutting the first skin and inserting a white mud, and also put a pattern of dots on by burning a pointed stick and making the dots with this. I was afraid of the sharp glass and the burning stick otherwise I should have been branded for life.

While these comments could be analysed for their contradictions and prejudice, some feminist scholars believed that they served to illustrate the more personally revealing observations that arose when women settlers and Indigenous people shared a domestic world. Meg Vivers, for example, argued that women’s writing differed from men’s accounts of the same period, in that the women’s accounts were more spatial than temporal. She explained: ‘rather than a cause and effect narrative structure and progressive philosophy, they wrote the “unsaid” of imperial discourse and of experiences outside of linear time’.

Sharp pointed to some additional gender differences in the contact zone:

> Women did not band together in mobs to engage in ‘nigger hunting’, nor did they interfere with Aboriginal men … if women held sufficient land to provide comfortably for their needs, they were not constantly seeking more … Compared with the perils of childbirth and illness, for many women such a possibility [threat of wild natives] was almost certainly one of their lesser concerns … Where confrontation with Aborigines could not be avoided, women preferred to negotiate first, then, if that approach failed, to
threaten or intimidate rather than shoot. Their generally successful use of these more moderate methods is an indictment of the trigger-happy men who were responsible for so much senseless slaughter.  

Similarly, Helen Thomson, in discussing intercultural friendships like Bardsley’s and Brewer’s, asserted that a ‘sense of sisterhood with black women, imperfect though it may be, was expressed most powerfully through a shared, benign relationship with the natural world, in contrast to the exploitative violence of men’.  

In 1901, which was Bardley’s last year on Midlothian Station in the Gulf of Carpentaria, by which time most of her Indigenous friends had passed away, she reminisced: ‘I do miss the days of fun with the poor Mary-Marys. My life here [now] is just spent swishing flies away’. While Bardley was horrified at her friends’ diseases and decline, she was hardly actively critical or resistant, and the criticism expressed by Jackie Huggins and others in 1991, ‘just because you are a woman doesn’t mean you are necessarily innocent’, was aimed at these historical white women just as much as at women today. Given women’s subservient position in Bardley’s era, her comments seem hardly surprising, although there were some white women much earlier in the century who had had the courage and position to speak out.  

Eliza Hamilton Dunlop (1796–1880)  

Eliza Hamilton Dunlop (Figure 3.8) was born into a well-educated family, acquainted with the literary world. Her father, Solomon Hamilton, later became a judge of the Supreme Court in India.
Eliza’s first marriage, to an astronomer, produced a son and daughter. After her husband’s death she married David Dunlop, with whom she would have five more children (the last one born in Australia). With their four children and the daughter from Eliza’s first marriage, the Dunlops emigrated to the colony of New South Wales in February 1838, where David Dunlop was appointed Magistrate of the Territory and Police Magistrate of Penrith. At the end of 1839 he was appointed Magistrate and Protector of Aborigines at Wollombi and MacDonald River. Capable and driven, David Dunlop supervised the construction, using convict labour, of their grand family home ‘Villa Mulla’ on the banks of Wollombi Brook.

With her educated background and knowledge of literature, Eliza Hamilton Dunlop contributed to the literary life of the Hunter River circle. Her politics were veiled in poetry, a discipline open to women. Most early poetry in the colonies portrayed Indigenous people as antipodean curiosities rather than as individuals. According to Don Aitkin, the ‘sable race’ provided a useful ‘awestruck backdrop’ against which contrasted the zest and industriousness of the British colonisers. In a succinct summary of early colonial poetry, he mentioned two male poets who made rare references to Indigenous presence:
Michael Massey Robinson voiced the conventional evangelising sentiments of the time by wishing to repair ‘their youth neglected and their age untaught’. The only poem with any significant Aboriginal theme was Charles Tompson’s ‘Black Town’, written as a comment on the government’s establishment of the hamlet of Black Town for the purpose of civilising the natives. It expresses platitudinous pity (‘poor restless wand’ers of the woody plain’) for the Aborigines, who lived in ignorance of the benefits of Christianity, but it reveals no understanding at all of Aboriginality.  

There was also a scarce sub-genre of Australian poetry, known as Aboriginal Laments, mourning the loss of an idyllic lifestyle before white invasion, and of which Hamilton Dunlop’s poetry was an example. These poems were usually sympathetically rendered and adopted an Indigenous voice (usually male). Katie Hansord and John O’Leary argued that Hamilton Dunlop’s poems brought to the Australian colonies a previously little-known sensibility, originating in educated women of the Irish landless gentry.  

The Dunlops arrived when ‘troubles with the natives’ and outlaws were rife (see Figure 3.9). The Myall Creek Massacre, which occurred in northern New South Wales on 10 June 1838, was notorious, not only for its cruel details such as the decapitation and severing of limbs of Indigenous people, but also because it led to the first time that white men were put on trial and hanged for massacring blacks.  

The first controversial trial of the accused was held from 15 to 17 November 1838. A syndicate of landholders and squatters, ironically named the ‘Black Association’, financed barristers to defend the white men. The jury swiftly reached a unanimous verdict of not guilty. The lack of specific evidence on the identity of one of the victims, whose remains were charred and dismembered, was used as a foil. The Australian reported that one juror, upon leaving the courthouse, said: ‘I look on the blacks as a set of monkeys, and the earlier they are exterminated from the face of the earth the better … I would never see a white man hanged for killing a black’.  

The lead-up to these trials and the determination of the Attorney-General, John Hubert Plunkett, to lead the prosecution ‘created a sensation in the colony’. A contribution published under the name of ‘Anti-Hypocrite’ in the Sydney Herald on 19 September 1838, articulated the sentiments of many settlers about Indigenous people:
Chapter Three: Settler Women’s Writing About Indigenous People

[Aborigines were] the most degenerate, despicable, and brutal race of beings in existence, and stand as it were in scorn ‘to shame creation’ … they are insensible to every tie which binds man to his friend – husband to wife – parent to its child or creation to its God … they treat their females only as beasts of burthen [sic] – and have less affection for their children, than has a sow for its offspring.

Such opinion of Indigenous ‘insensibility’ to relationships, specifically attacking the human affections of Indigenous families, especially motherhood, was guaranteed to offend British Christian gentry, who had been inculcated by emancipation and Enlightenment values. It might have provoked the subsequent response from Hamilton Dunlop, a woman of religious conviction. Heated debate ensued and was taken up by some of the relative newcomers, who had fresh liberal perspectives and a lively interest in politics, and probably discussed the matter at social engagements with Governor Gipps and other members of Sydney society. The Dunlops were well connected and their political views were decidedly liberal.

It was not simply a class issue, however, as another correspondent to the Sydney Herald lamented. ‘An Australian’ held that, while many believed Aborigines were ‘an inferior race of beings, who might be murdered with as much impunity as monkeys’, what was worse, in his opinion, was that it was ‘partaken by educated and respectable people, not just convicts or ex-convicts’.

The Sydney Herald editorial of 7 November 1838, in the week leading up to the first trial, argued that Indigenous people had no ‘right’ or ‘claim’ to the land:
this vast country was to them a common – they bestowed no labor upon the land – their ownership, their right, was nothing more than that of the Emu or the Kangaroo … The British people found a portion of the globe in a state of waste – they took possession of it; and they had a perfect right to do so, under the Divine authority, by which man was commanded to go forth and people, and till the land.176

The Dunlops’ friend, Governor Gipps, instigated the first investigation into the massacre. He publicly criticised the actions of the Black Association, which he believed had contributed substantially to the not guilty verdict.177 There was some initial support for the prosecution from various Sydney papers,178 including the Australian, which also published a scathing attack on the actions of the syndicate. Two days after the white men had been acquitted, Plunkett had them remanded. In a second trial, held on 27 to 30 November 1838, seven of the eleven perpetrators were charged on twenty counts, including one count of the murder of a child.179

Approximately two weeks after the second trial, on 13 December 1838, in a climate of outrage and disbelief and just five days before the white men were actually hanged,180 Hamilton Dunlop sent her poem ‘The Aboriginal Mother”181 to the Australian, pointing directly at the trial and ensuing debate. The poem was a public critique of the massacre, mentioning specific details and refuting claims that Indigenous people lacked humanity and familial bonds. Elizabeth Webber, who discovered the poem in the 1960s, characterised it as a radical and brave piece of settler women’s writing, which was not only about Indigenous others but was also about taking on an Indigenous subjectivity, just ten months after Hamilton Dunlop’s arrival in the new colony.182 To publicly identify and defend an Indigenous woman at a time when most white people were more inclined to relegate Indigenous women to the lowest of life forms183 was startling.184 It confirmed her character as well as her political sensibilities, and corroborated her charity.

Hamilton Dunlop’s granddaughter, Margaret de Salis, recalled that ‘tales handed down in the family all lay stress on Hamilton Dunlop’s kindness to the blacks. She must have been deeply shocked at the unnecessary and terrible slaughter which took place’.185 It was not simply that Hamilton Dunlop’s poem was sympathetic to the plight of the victims. She elevated an Indigenous woman’s voice to evoke the distinctly cultured voice of an angel and ideal mother,186 rather than a crude creature in the hierarchy of the Great Chain of Being:
Oh! Hush thee – hush my baby, I may not tend thee yet,
Our forest-home is distant far, and midnight’s star is set.
Now, hush thee – or the pale-faced men will hear thy piercing wail,
And what would then thy mother’s tears or feeble strength avail!

Oh, could’st thy little bosom, that mother’s torture feel,
Or could’st thou know thy father, he’s struck down by English steel.
Thy tender form would wither, like the kniven in the sand,
And the spirit of my perished tribe would vanish from the land.

For thy young life, my precious, I fly the field of blood,
Else had I, for my chieftain’s sake, defied them where they stood;
But basely bound my woman’s arm, no weapon might it wield:
I could but cling round him I loved, to make my heart a shield.187

Given that Anderson, a station hut-keeper and the key white prosecution witness at the trial, asked ‘for protection’188 in return for his testimony, Hamilton Dunlop’s courage was particularly noteworthy, as she must have been aware that her poem would likewise attract animosity.189 The Sydney Herald, in contrast to the Australian, campaigned vociferously against the trial and later gave negative reviews of a musical setting by Isaac Nathan of Hamilton Dunlop’s ‘The Aboriginal Mother’, claiming that the poem was ‘unintelligible’ and that ‘the character of a Black Gin with a ghastly, toad-like brat, gnawing a raw opossum’ would have had a more favourable reception, as ‘the association of ideas would have been representative of the character’.190

Hamilton Dunlop’s erudite response to such criticism was printed in the Sydney Herald on 29 November 1841, and made her intentions clear:

however much the idea is to be deprecated by Supers and Stock-men [the poem] – had its origin in the hope of awaking the sympathies of the English nation for a people … rendered desperate and revengeful by continued acts of outrage … but the author of The Aboriginal Mother did hope, that, even in Australia, the time was past, when the public press would lend its countenance to debase the native character, or support an attempt to shade with ridicule, ties stronger than death, which bind the heart of woman, be she Christian or savage.191

The editors retaliated: ‘We complained of her having, by means of poetical talent … given an entirely false idea of the native character; and that opinion we see no
cause to alter’.\textsuperscript{192} Up to a year later they continued to publish extended negative reviews of Hamilton Dunlop’s poetry, criticising the ethnographic details as ‘nonsense’, full of ‘mistakes’ and ‘ignorance of their customs … calculated to mislead’.\textsuperscript{193}

Not only did Hamilton Dunlop’s poem give a voice to an Aboriginal subject but it also, like Baxter’s earlier example, criticised the hypocrisy of God-fearing, Christian men of empire. This conscious ethical form, and identification with Indigenous subjectivity, illustrated how acceptable feminine traits could be powerfully employed. The usual dynamic of incommensurability and the self-defining guise of oppositional difference attributed to homogenous Indigenous others and the imperialist cause were breached and subverted by a subjective empathy, however misplaced.

While empathy was permissible for male writers in certain contexts, fully identifying with an Indigenous character in such a public and political manner was a more difficult leap. Hamilton Dunlop’s employment of maternal empathy and loss was a powerful evocation of conscience and reform. The focus on a common humanity, and the bond between mother and child, was a call to transcend cultural differences. It refuted the allegations of lack of familial attributes that were being declared in the press.

In addition, Hansord pointed out that the romantic feminine sentiments of Hamilton Dunlop’s poem were not simply evidence of the sympathetic white woman trope or liberal leanings, but also formed ‘part of an international early feminist discourse’ of identifying with the colonised.\textsuperscript{194} This could also be appreciated in a transnational context of Irish Romantic women’s poetry, British Romantic poetry, colonial Romanticism\textsuperscript{195} and a use of ‘transatlantic abolitionist literary conventions’.\textsuperscript{196} Slavery was a common metaphor for women’s oppression in the West and was used to highlight issues of women’s subordination. Hamilton Dunlop’s articulation brought this international discourse into an Australian context and gave a hearing to murdered Indigenous people. She particularised and humanised, giving subject and voice to Indigenous victims. O’Leary argued that, despite questions about the right to speak for Indigenous people, ‘in 1838 Indigenous voices could not be heard; and silence would have colluded with the murderers and their supporters’.\textsuperscript{197}

**Caroline Harper Dexter (1819–1884)**

Another outspoken settler woman who had significant Indigenous content in her writings was Caroline Harper Dexter (Figure 3.10). Her writing was distinguished from Hamilton Dunlop’s in that it could not be so easily dismissed as a poetic product of the
eighteenth-century cult of sensibility, which had ‘focused on feelings of melancholy, distress, refined emotionalism, and benevolence’. Dexter was more explicitly engaged in what Tiffany Donnelly called the ‘taboo for women – politics’, and this extended somewhat to an Indigenous content in her writing.

Educated privately to a high standard in England and France, Caroline Harper married painter William Dexter in 1843. He emigrated to Sydney, arriving in October 1852. Caroline followed him, arriving in January 1855. Both were to become controversial figures in the colony.

Caroline Dexter was another settler woman who did not shy away from public newspaper debate. She is recognised today as one of Australia’s first female journalists and, according to Tiffany Donnelly, was a household name in London in the early 1850s.

A pioneer feminist who had international connections when she embarked for Australia, Dexter was allegedly the first settler woman to give a public lecture in the colonies (Sydney), in February 1855, arguing for women’s inclusion in the public sphere and refuting the idea that a wife should be confined to the domestic arena. Thousands of people attended her ‘sensational’ lectures (4,000 attended one) in which she enlightened attendees ‘on the benefits of women raising their hemlines and wearing visible trousers’, among other topical and women’s issues. She maintained that as society received its moral tone from female refinement, the greater a women’s influence ‘the more extended must be the advantages resulting to the whole human family’.

![Caroline Lynch/Dexter, c. 1861.](image)
Dexter’s first publication, *Ladies Almanack, 1858, The Southern Cross*, which was part calendar, part magazine and part album, appealed to high-society women for its intellectual and artistic stimulation. The first of its kind for the colonies, and unashamedly nationalistic, the publication extolled the virtues of bush life and nature in ‘gorgeous attire’. Dexter wrote: ‘Twenty years ago this most beautiful among the beautiful districts of our Colony was blooming in uncivilized primitive grandeur. The foot of the whiteman had not yet bent one blade of its luxurious vegetation’.

Patrick Morgan argued that Dexter was exceptional in visualising the countryside before intrusion: ‘The notion that the white man “darkened with his shadow its crystal lakes” hints at a perspective on events which many other settlers would not have shared’. Her vignettes of life in the colonies included a strong Indigenous presence, interspersed with sections on how to dry flowers, ideas about fashion, health, a calendar, household and gardening tips, and artistic and intellectual pursuits.

Like her modern views on dress, Dexter’s ‘profound interest in Aboriginals’ was unconventional. Her *Ladies Almanack* contained significant Indigenous content for the time, unusual given its settler women audience. She included a poem describing an Indigenous camp and giving details of the procedure for hunting possums. She mentioned the ‘shrill native Cooee’ and used the analogy of a corroboree, although her writing was superficial and she portrayed Aboriginal people in romantic terms. The drawing she chose for the frontispiece of her almanac was a remarkable portrait by her husband of an Indigenous woman, with the caption ‘Hothpathapatha, the favourite Lubra of the Dargo Chief, Gipps Land’ (Figure 3.11). Hothpathapatha was shown with a ‘*bret*’ human hand around her neck, apparently an item in the Dexters’ collection.

Among other illustrations was a picture of an Indigenous camp and a river setting with an Indigenous canoe, both executed by Caroline’s husband, William.

It seems that the Dexters’ bark hut was in close proximity to a Kurnai camp and it is probable that there were comings and goings between them and the Kurnai people. Around this time they started a collection of Indigenous items such as boomerangs, waddies, shields, emus’ eggs and fishing implements. William Dexter included the Kurnai as subjects in his paintings, and Caroline Dexter included references to the group in her writing.
The Dexters’ marriage, however, was not a happy one and when William decided to leave Gippsland for Sydney, Caroline refused to join him. 216 She subsequently opened a Mesmeric Institution for treating female complaints and illnesses in Melbourne, and her business was successful. 217 Martin Willis and Catherine Wynne concluded that Dexter’s practice ‘fused a feminist agenda to the tradition of female healing power and revised the role of the feminine civilizing mission … assur[ing] the centrality of the female in the creation of new social structures and cultural practices in mid-century Australia’. 218

Dexter’s breakthrough into the male-dominated colonial publishing world of Melbourne in 1860 was to co-edit, with Harriet Clisby, The Interpreter. 219 Although this periodical ran to only two issues, it was an ambitious extension of Dexter’s concerns. This second literary project by two ‘extremely unconventional women’ differentiated itself from Dexter’s first by being aimed at a general readership, not solely at settler women. 220 It was the first magazine edited by women to be published in Australia. Dexter wrote many of the articles, one of which urged colonists ‘to remember England
only for the passion of social reformers, the white man’s betrayal of the “noble savage”\textsuperscript{221}.

In the February 1861 issue, Dexter devoted a romantic and anachronistic article to Indigenous subject matter, titled ‘The Corroboree’, notable for its controversial last paragraph:

> When generations have passed – when naturalized Europeans claim Australia as their nation voil [sic], they will desire to possess some records of those who once trod the wilderness that industry and civilization has converted into a garden. Every little fact connected with them will be considered worthy of interest; therefore we must not let their customs and habits pass out of remembrance, as only indicative of a low level of barbarism, with which we have no sympathy.\textsuperscript{222}

In 1972 J.S. Ryan wrote that Dexter deserved to be remembered as ‘a friend of the Aboriginals’,\textsuperscript{223} no doubt referring to her recurring accounts in her publications, although there is little hard evidence of any personal interrelations. This opinion was to be refuted or at least complicated in twenty-first-century evaluations, but it is evident that she was a liberal humanist with great interest in her Indigenous neighbours in Gippsland. She had close contact with various members of their camp and she did not deny the effects of these experiences. While Dexter was far from considering Indigenous people her equals, in a work called \textit{Colonial Gems},\textsuperscript{224} written under the pseudonym ‘A Gum Leaf’ and satirising several parliamentarians, she identified with Indigenous women for their gendered subordination and punishments endured.\textsuperscript{225} In the rather confusing paragraph cited below, she compared her own metaphorical bludgeoning by the press in response to her free-spirited engagement in the public sphere to a ‘tomahawk chastisement’. This was a punishment of expulsion and chastisement that might similarly be endured by an independent Indigenous woman seeking emancipation from patriarchal constraints:\textsuperscript{226}

> And in conjunction with his aboriginal creed, the law of opinion, which cannot be warped by prejudice, diseased vision, or the ‘ills that flesh is heir to,’ may pass sentence upon any lubra who has confidence in her own legitimate strength, to look at life’s turbid river with her own natural eyes. And moreover, should she choose to plunge therein, with her own natural will, and sustain herself, by keeping ‘head above water,’ without grasping at fatherly, brotherly, friendly or matrimonial prop, she is considered a
dangerous subject for tribe civilization, and forthwith expelled from the camp.\textsuperscript{227}

Dexter’s stereotypical local rendition of the slavery metaphor implied that the press’s misogynistic treatment of her replicated, in Donnelly’s words, ‘aborignes [conduct] towards their “lubras”’, that is, of ‘unenlightened barbarism’.\textsuperscript{228} Nonetheless, Dexter was also publicly suggesting that ‘lubras’ were capable of independent choices to support themselves, of confidence and resistance despite oppression and punishment. This was an insight quite possibly garnered from experience, and like the ‘lubras’, Dexter was strong enough and would not be deterred by the consequences of her resistance. What we can recognise is that in her writing Dexter publicised ‘the very real threat of being in relation’\textsuperscript{229} and disrupted ‘the Empire of the selfsame’\textsuperscript{230} qualities, in common with what Anita Lundberg identified as the ‘post-feminists’ project’ of self-reflexive anthropological writing.\textsuperscript{231}

Dexter was an example of those who took advantage of what Donnelly called the ‘regional and ideological space open to women in the colonies’, effectively broadened by leaving Britain, and enhanced by ‘possibilities for public enterprise’.\textsuperscript{232} She constantly challenged the prevailing views, not only about women but also about Indigenous justice, and for this she was disparaged and ridiculed.

In contrast to other women’s more personal accounts in diaries and memoirs, Hamilton Dunlop’s poems and Dexter’s public representations of Indigenous people were evidence of an early female political voice, presenting a counter-hegemonic narrative, refusing the boundaries of feminine propriety, and standing against the denigrating portrayals and fear-mongering in the press.

**Eliza Davies (1821–1918)**

The devout evangelist and teacher Eliza Davies (née Arbuckle) (Figure 3.12), felt strongly her ‘duty to write’ of her victory over adversity in order that ‘my readers may derive strength from it’.\textsuperscript{233} Davies’ 1881 autobiography and travel memoir, *The Story of an Earnest Life: A Woman’s Adventures in Australia and Two Voyages Around the World*,\textsuperscript{234} contained a contrasting example of stereotypical Indigenous content written by a woman of her era.\textsuperscript{235}

Born in Paisley, Scotland, Eliza Arbuckle emigrated, at the age of seventeen, with a Baptist group to New South Wales in 1838. Employed by Captain Charles Sturt and his wife, Charlotte, she travelled with them to Adelaide.
In November 1839, Eliza accompanied Charles Sturt and George Gawler, the Governor of South Australia, in her position as companion to Gawler’s fifteen-year-old eldest daughter, on a five-week expedition up the Murray River. Gawler’s decision to take women on the journey was probably partly to prove to London investors the safety of the Murray Valley for plantation development. In their report on the expedition, Gawler and Sturt wrote that ‘the Governor anticipated much pleasure on the water … [and] acceded to the desire of Miss Gawler to accompany him’. As part of his strategy for counter-resistance, Gawler employed an Indigenous interpreter, ‘Encounter Bay Bob’, to communicate his policy of protection to Indigenous people along the way.

The expedition formed a dramatic chapter in Davies’ book, where she was said to be ‘the first white creature with petticoats’ the Indigenous people had seen (Figure 3.13). In her story, the journey up the river into the interior evoked a departure from the limits of ‘civilised’ domain and was underscored by the presence of white women. Their presence acted as what Dalziell called ‘symbolic markers of morality and vulnerability’. Dismissing Sturt’s exhortation that she would be ‘a tempting little morsel’ for the ‘nude savages’, Davies was apparently given ‘a right royal welcome’ by ‘a line of painted’, yelling, armed men.
This meeting with four families of the Milmenrura people at Poomunda was amicable, yet Davies wrote that the party proceeded to pitch its ‘tents amidst a tribe of the fiercest savages that roamed the forests’. In Sturt’s account they were ‘welcomed by a tribe of natives who had purposely assembled 36 in number’. They were ‘fine men all of them, with a good and almost European expression of countenance’ who, aside from showing curiosity, ‘behaved extremely well’.

In contrast, Davies’ perverse signs of racial alterity and her thinly disguised allusions to missing link theories were lurid:

his forehead was so low that his hair and eyebrows nearly met, his head receded from front to back, so that his head behind was enormous in size; his eyes were large, black, deep-set, glittering and fierce, and overhung by beetling, shaggy brows; his nose was large and flat; his mouth huge, with gleaming teeth, his lips thick and hanging … a picture of ugliness … moving his great glittering orbs from one side to the other, showing nothing but the white, and moving his thick lips, I felt sick, as if he were about to tear me to pieces and eat me. I turned from looking at his demon-like ferocious countenance …
These descriptions of ‘hideous creatures’ were interspersed with reassuring comparisons of Davies’ white, ‘kind, Christian gentlemen’: Captain Sturt and his Excellency the Governor, her ‘fatherly’ protectors.246 Carrying signs of technological advancement incomprehensible to the ‘savages’, Davies displayed oppositional items such as a wristwatch, matches and a flute, to indicate their advanced standing.

Later that evening at Poomunda, ‘pandemonium let loose; nothing could be more horrible’, Davies wrote, than their ‘glittering eyes rolled around … and their big red tongues … hanging out’.247 Towards the end of her orgiastic portrayal, she evoked further fascinated revulsion when, still watching the corroboree, she was grabbed on the foot by a ‘wriggling animal’, who skulked back towards the fire. Screaming, Davies fell back, only to be caught by the gallant Governor. This ‘animal’ turned out to be one of the Indigenous ‘savages’ who had apparently fallen in love with her. A few days later, Davies miraculously avoided being knocked over the head with the man’s waddy and carried away, but nonetheless was patted ‘under the chin with his great black paw’, and exclaimed, ‘Oh, what an odor!’248

Davies’ writing was an excellent example of using gothic signs of the grotesque that functioned, as Dalziell argued, to ‘construct and encode racial otherness … Difference becomes a matter of hideous excess that requires restraint and intervention’.249 ‘Involv[ing] both pleasure and desire for control over unknown others’,250 it served to justify the civilising project and claims to moral authority. In short, Davies’ narrative presented proof of British civility through the imagining of native savagery.

On another occasion that elicited grotesque fantasies, eighteen to twenty armed and naked men, ‘glistening with grease’ and ‘grinning’, surrounded Davies and her charge, Miss Julie. Davies wrote: ‘one of these panther-like monsters came close up to me … and took my hand, pushed up my sleeve, and put his great horny hand and arm close to mine … pushed the bonnet from my face, and put his face close to mine … he pulled the dress off my feet to look at them’.251 Arousing prurient fascination and dread, Davies’ dangerous sexual innuendo – of inappropriate desire sublimated into an act of taming the ‘dancing demons’ with a simple superior command – was fanciful. Emulating Samson and Delilah, she entranced and emasculated the danger with a simple pair of scissors, when the Indigenous men willingly offered up their ochred hair and beards to be snipped.252 Davies’ ‘fantastic elaborations’253 detracted from what otherwise correlated to real events and an extraordinary life and legacy.254
Barbara Dawson opined that ‘while Eliza recognized the Aborigines’ helpfulness, cooperation and friendliness’ and in other parts of her novel adopted ‘a rational sympathetic tone towards Aborigines’, she may have been employing the trope of fierce savagery ‘with an eye to book sales’. Further, Dawson added that Davies may have been advised by her editor to sensationalise the ‘black savages’ in places to good effect. Dalziell would caution us to look into the context of Davies’ colonial fabrications: the portrayal of Indigenous men as monstrous anachronistic curiosities and a denial of coevalness that assumed to produce Indigenous significations and in the same process fabricated her own heroic white civility. In other words, the Eurocentric ethnographic discourse, which served imperial ends by constructing Indigenous people as anomalies belonging to another age and assigning them a homogenous savage identity, justified European entitlement to their lands and labour by defining themselves as oppositional and superior.

This chapter has outlined ideological forces and constraints that shaped settler women’s writings in general, and has provided examples of five early settler women who wrote about Indigenous people, in order to illustrate not only the writing but also the feminist discourse that brought the writing to light. Chapter Four will develop this discourse to some extent, by accounting for the various genres of women’s writing and, in particular, the participation of women in scientific writing.
Endnotes


4 Mary Louise Pratt, “Scratches on the Face of the Country; or, What Mr. Barrow Saw in the Land of the Bushmen,” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 12, no. 1 (1985), p. 143. Although some scholars evaluated these texts as endorsing the ‘fantasy’ of superiority, dominance was often the reality.

5 Ibid., p. 144.


7 From the late 1980s, scholars questioned the value of binary as an organisational framework; for example, Linda Kerber argued that ‘to continue to use the language of separate spheres is to deny the reciprocity between gender and society and to impose a static model on dynamic relationships’. Linda Kerber, “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History,” *Journal of American History*, vol. 75 (1988), pp. 37–39.

8 Schedlich-Day argued that ‘the discourse of motherhood meant that race was far more important to mothering than class, thus effectively (in theory) invalidating class distinctions. All white women could aspire to be mothers, hence resulting in their valuable input into the Empire. While white men dreamt of colonial glory, women could integrate themselves into such dreams with notions of being the mothers of the colonisers’. Schedlich-Day, “Pioneer Women and Social Memory: Shifting Energies, Changing Tensions,” p. 22.

9 Godden argued that independent women who survived on the outskirts of white civilisation were ignored, because an acknowledgement of them would have meant conceding that women could survive without the protection and assistance of men. Judith Godden, “A New Look at Pioneer Women,” *Hecate*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1979), p. 19.


15 Muswellbrook Chronicle, 2 January 1907, p. 5; Jerilderie Herald and Urana Advertiser, 11 January 1907, p. 6; Riverine Grazier, 28 December 1906; Moree Gwydir Examiner and General Advertiser, 23 January 1907, p. 3; Scrutineer and Berrima District Press, 19 January 1907; Western Champion, 11 January 1907, p. 7.
Endnotes (continued)

20 Dixson, The Real Matilda: Women and Identity in Australia 1788 to 1975, p. 11.
21 Quoted in Lake, “Frontier Feminism and the Marauding White Man,” p. 12.
22 “Woman’s Column,” Sydney Morning Herald, 5 January 1889.
23 Penelope Selby’s letter to her mother, dated 23 December 1849, cited in Lucy Frost, No Place for a Nervous Lady: Voices from the Australian Bush (Ringwood, Vic.: McPhee Gribble, 1984), p. 142. Selby was referring generally here to working-class women. The irony of her statement is that colonials condemned Indigenous male violence towards their wives, citing this as evidence of their ‘primitive’ stage.
25 Margaret Maynard, Fashioned from Penury: Dress as Cultural Practice in Colonial Australian History (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 46. See also Patricia Clarke and Dale Spender, Life Lines: Australian Women’s Letters and Diaries, 1788–1840 (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1992), xiii; the primary occupation then open to women ‘was that of finding a man to support them’.
26 Maynard, Fashioned from Penury: Dress as Cultural Practice in Colonial Australian History, p. 46.
27 Clarke and Spender, Life Lines: Australian Women’s Letters and Diaries, 1788–1840, xxi.
29 Powerful families had a near monopoly on both public and private writing and on the preservation of what was written. This convergence of class and race bias in these sources combined to create a particularly limited sample, and the sources must be approached as such. Schedlich-Day, “Pioneer Women and Social Memory: Shifting Energies, Changing Tensions,” pp. 231–233.
31 Ibid.
Endnotes (continued)

33 ‘Evidence was frequently advanced to support the contention that writing and reading were bad for women’s health, and could result in a range of reproductive diseases’. Clarke and Spender, Life Lines: Australian Women’s Letters and Diaries, 1788–1840, xxii.


35 Schedlich-Day, “Pioneer Women and Social Memory: Shifting Energies, Changing Tensions,” pp. 231–232. This subsequent lack of records is one of the constraints on my thesis.

36 Clarke and Spender, Life Lines: Australian Women’s Letters and Diaries, 1788–1840, xxi.

37 Emigration was advertised in 1857 in a highly masculine form: ‘emigration is a career which calls for pluck, bottom, energy, enterprise, all the masculine virtues’. John Tosh, Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Essays on Gender, Family and Empire (London: Pearson Longman, 2005), p. 180.

38 Clarke and Spender, Life Lines: Australian Women’s Letters and Diaries, 1788–1840, xvii.

39 Georgiana Molloy wrote this in a letter to her sister, Eliza, dated Friday 13 September 1833. Her sentiments would make a remarkable about-turn in later years: ‘I cannot describe to you the brilliancy of the surrounding wilderness, and this year, when I ramble with my little children running like butterflies from flower to flower’. Alexandra Hasluck, Portrait with Background: A Life of Georgiana Molloy (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 103.

40 Georgiana Molloy, letter to Maggie (Margaret Hamilton Dunlop), in ibid., p. 104.


44 Woollacott, To Try Her Fortune in London: Australian Women, Colonialism, and Modernity, p. 11. It should be noted, however, that this position was not always confined to gender, as it was later articulated as a common cultural cringe.

45 Ibid., p. 34.

46 Ibid., p. 110.

47 Maynard, Fashioned from Penury: Dress as Cultural Practice in Colonial Australian History, p. 42.

48 Ibid.

49 Woollacott, To Try Her Fortune in London: Australian Women, Colonialism, and Modernity, p. 12.

50 Ibid.

51 Maynard, Fashioned from Penury: Dress as Cultural Practice in Colonial Australian History, p. 42.

52 Ibid., p. 107.

53 Peter Miller Cunningham, Two Years in New South Wales; A Series of Letters, Comprising Sketches of the Actual State of Society in that Colony; of its Peculiar Advantages to Emigrants; of its Topography, Natural History, Etc. Etc., vol. 2 (London: Henry Colburn, 1866 (1827)), p. 8.
Endnotes (continued)

54 Tanya Dalziell was referring to settler colonials but with particular relevance to the identity of the ‘Australian Girl’. Tanya Dalziell, *Settler Romance and the Australian Girl* (Crawley: University of Western Australia Press, 2004), p. 5.

55 Ibid., p. 3.


64 Agnes (Mrs Richmond) Henty, Tuesday 4 February 1868, quoted in Bird, “Gender and Landscape: Australian Colonial Women Writers,” p. 4.
Endnotes (continued)

65 Agnes Henty arrived in Melbourne after marrying the Victorian grazier Richmond Henty in London in 1861. They had one son, who died at the age of twenty-two from epilepsy. She gained an honourable mention for two drawings shown in the 1861 Victorian Exhibition. Her 1867 diary is held in the State Library of Victoria, MS 12402.


70 Ibid.

71 Ibid., p. 93.


73 Ibid., p. 96.

74 Dawson, “Colonial Women in the Australian Dictionary of Biography.”

75 Woollacott, To Try Her Fortune in London: Australian Women, Colonialism, and Modernity, p. 145. It should also be noted that McCrae had a strong French influence throughout her youth, through her language, teachers, tutors and associates.

76 Georgiana initially went to a convent school in Somer’s Town run by aristocratic ‘noble French ladies’; she then attended boarding schools in Fulham and Somer’s Town and was bilingual from an early age. Georgiana left school at the age of ten to pursue art with a tutor, Louis Mauleon, and then music with Fanny Holcroft. From 1814 to 1820, Abbé Huteau, who was a French priest, took charge of her general education. Brenda Niall, Georgiana: A Biography of Georgiana McCrae, Painter, Diarist, Pioneer, with a Catalogue of the Plates by Caroline Clemente (Melbourne University Press, 1994), pp. 8–22.

77 From 1814 onwards, landscape artists John Varley, John Glover and Dominic Serres, and portrait painter and miniaturist Charles Hayter, taught Georgiana. She exhibited at the Royal Academy from 1816 to 1821. In 1820 she won a silver medal for a portrait of the Fourth Duke of Gordon, her grandfather. A year later, at the age of seventeen, her Portrait of a French Lady won the Royal Society of Art’s silver palette prize.


79 Letter to ‘adopted granddaughter, Edie Anderson’, 7 June 1887, cited in Niall, Georgiana: A Biography of Georgiana McCrae, Painter, Diarist, Pioneer, with a Catalogue of the Plates by Caroline Clemente, p. 2. Georgiana was not allowed to resume her own painting, except within the family circle. During these years in London she painted portraits of her husband’s mother, sisters and brothers. Ibid., p. 89.
Endnotes (continued)

80 James Montgomery was previously the first Crown Solicitor in Port Phillip. He and Andrew McCrae soon became part of the ‘business, political and official elite and were amongst the leaders of the community’. Tim Gatehouse, “The First Residents of Brunswick Street,” in Brunswick Street Lost and Found: Proceedings of a Seminar at Fitzroy, 20 May 2012 ed. Miles Lewis (Melbourne: Fitzroy History Society, and Faculty of Architecture, University of Melbourne, 2012), p. 32.

81 The McCrae family remained at Arthur’s Seat from 1845 to 1851, running their sheep and cattle station. Like their previous business and house, this new venture suffered from lack of capital, poor grazing land and the McCraes’ inexperience. Nonetheless their leasehold of land increased to 21,360 acres by 1849, and their stock expanded similarly. Niall, Georgiana: A Biography of Georgiana McCrae, Painter, Diarist, Pioneer, with a Catalogue of the Plates by Caroline Clemente, pp. 179–184.


83 Spender, Writing a New World: Two Centuries of Australian Women Writers, p. 48.

84 Ibid., p. 49.


87 Fels, “Kangerong, Protectorate Second Station.”


89 George Gordon McCrae, Experiences Not Exploits, MS 2523/4/c, State Library of Victoria.

90 By 1864 William Thomas, the government protector in the Melbourne area, stated that only eleven natives lived at the Mordialloc reserve, and there were none at all after Jimmy Dunbar died in 1877.

91 For example, on 19 December 1846, ‘He told us there were some blacks at the foot of the fence. We accordingly went down and recognized several of our old friends and amongst them Ben-Benjie who readily agreed to shoot ducks for us’. George Gordon McCrae, “Fragment of a Diary kept by George Gordon McCrae: Thirteen Years of Age,” in Georgiana’s Journal: Melbourne, 1841–1865, ed. Hugh McCrae (Sydney: William Brooks & Co., 1978 (1934)), p. 266. There was also evidence of camaraderie and intimacy: ‘Ben-Benji amused us much tonight by throwing his bommerings [sic].’ Ibid., p. 41.

92 Georgiana’s son, George, wrote in his diary on 5 January 1846 of Eliza teaching him songs: ‘Eliza told me the words of a few natives songs … There was one which the Goulburn blacks’ tribes sing when one of their number is sent to jail’, which he wrote down. Ibid., p. 271. As an adult, he made linguistic studies of Aboriginal languages and wrote a number of ballads about Aboriginal life, for example, ‘The Story of Balladeadro’.


94 There was evidence of camaraderie between the children and various Bonurong people; see George Gordon McCrae, ed. Letters to Georgiana from her Four Sons (Arthur’s Seat, Vic.: The Editor, 1962), pp. 269–279; McCrae, Georgiana’s Journal: Melbourne, 1841–1865.

Part One: Contextual Background

Endnotes (continued)

96 There were two slightly different versions of this story, as with others when Georgiana’s grandson Hugh edited her journal. But the basic kindness shown was the same. This undated version was quoted from her unedited journal by Niall in Georgiana: A Biography of Georgiana McCrae, Painter, Diarist, Pioneer, with a Catalogue of the Plates by Caroline Clemente, p. 195. The same event, also undated, was recorded in McCrae, Georgiana’s Journal: Melbourne, 1841–1865, p. 254.


98 Spender, Writing a New World: Two Centuries of Australian Women Writers, p. 51.

99 McCrae, Georgiana’s Journal: Melbourne, 1841–1865, p. 100, entry for 23 June 1843. The use of an Indigenous name was also significant. In many records of correspondence and ethnological writings by men, Indigenous people were, in the main, identified solely by their English name if they had one – there was little evidence of anyone adding the Indigenous name if the English one was mentioned. The derogatory nature of many of the English names was also of note; the following examples are taken from a list of Indigenous men’s names: Parrot, Pumpkin, Silly Billy, Charcoal, Old Sulky Jack, Young Sulky Jack, Major Paddy Gally, Old Bundle, Young Bundle, Frying Pan, Bib of Bread, Billy Lilly, Pidgeon, Billy Wingle, Chit Chat, Puss, King Peiken, and Scabby Harry. Michael K. Organ, Illawarra and South Coast Aborigines 1770–1900: Report to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Canberra, 1 December 1993 (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, 1993), pp. 58–68.


101 Jonny’s real name was Utrunbrook. See Fels, “Kangerong, Protectorate Second Station,” p. 320. Again, Hugh Gordon’s edited version varied from McCrae’s transcribed version. This version was hers from an entry of 1 October 1851: ‘Poor Old “Bogie” in great distress as his son is dying – George went to administer what comfort he could. An hour later “Mrs Bogie” came up to say “Bogie” wished to see George “to speak to him” – On George’s return we learnt that the old man wanted string or rope to bind the corpse hand and foot, – & to help dig the grave … The Father and the (5th) stepmother deposited the body in the sand. They then covered it with twigs – and then – after placing the last bottle of medicine I had sent him and a new pannickin [sic] beside the body, the sand was replaced and well trodden-down and before George had left them’. A photograph of this section of McCrae’s handwriting is compared to Hugh Gordon’s edited version in Therese Weber, “Port Phillip Papers: The Australian Journals of Georgiana McCrae” (PhD thesis, Australian Defence Force Academy, 2001), pp. 654–659.


103 McCrae, Georgiana’s Journal: Melbourne, 1841–1865, p. 213, entry for 3 October 1851.

104 McCrae, “Experiences Not Exploits.”


106 There is an anomaly with the portrait dates. Design & Art Australia online records the date as c. 1951 (www.daa.org.au/bio/georgiana-mccrae/works/, accessed 5 May 2014), but the online record by the National Trust records Eliza’s portrait as titled Portrait of Eliza, c. 1845 (www.nationaltrust.org.au/vic/georgiana-mccrae-artist, accessed 5 May 2014.)

107 Aside from Ben-Benjie and Eliza’s portraits, McCrae painted Sally and Georgem, Bunurong Tribe, c. 1851.

Chapter Three: Settler Women’s Writing About Indigenous People

Endnotes (continued)


110 Ibid., pp. 6–7.


114 Report of the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the Aborigines (Melbourne: John Ferres, Government Printer, 1859), p. 12, quoted in “‘You have all this place, no good have children ...’ Derrimut: Traitor, Saviour, or a Man of his People?,” (The Free Library and Royal Australian Historical Society, 2014), p. 12.


118 Haskins and Schedlich-Day speculated that both Minnie’s adopted son and the child of the Indigenous girl, Amelia, were fathered by the ‘boss’ (Minnie’s husband-to-be, John Brewer). Haskins and Schedlich-Day, “‘My Mate Ellen: Cross-cultural Friendships between Women in a ‘Pioneer Memoir’,” p. 72.


124 Ibid., p. 103.

125 Ibid., p. 100.
Endnotes (continued)


128 Ibid., viii.

129 Ibid., p. 161.

130 Heather Goodall, quoted in Evans, “Katie Langloh Parker and the Beginnings of Ethnology in Australia,” p. 17.


134 Ibid., p. 74.


136 Ibid., p. 224.

137 Ibid., p. 244.

138 Ibid.

139 Ibid., p. 192.


141 Ellen died earlier, killed by her husband, Larry.


143 Ibid., p. 72.

144 Ibid., p. 82.


146 Crow, “Colonialism’s Paradox: White Women, ‘Race’ and Gender in the Contact Zone, 1850–1910.”

147 Though the initial devastation of Indigenous populations had passed.


Endnotes (continued)

152 Jan Critchett revealed that, in one eighteen-month period (March 1845 – April 1847), there were ‘twenty-one mentions of Aboriginal violence’ in Baxter’s diaries. For some fine analysis of this violence and Baxter’s ambiguous responses, see Jan Critchett, “A Closer Look at Cultural Contact: Some Evidence from ‘Yambuk’, Western Victoria,” Aboriginal History, vol. 8, no. 1 (1984), p. 16.


154 For example, Daisy Bates, Sandra Holmes and Elizabeth Durack.


156 Ibid., p. 108.

157 Ibid., p. 65. Bardsley’s friends wanted her to undergo women’s initiation rites, such as tattooing and front-tooth extraction.

158 For example, Vivers compared the detached masculine entry in Christison’s diary at the death of his close Indigenous friend: ‘August 18th Friday, 1899, Lammermoor Barney died, age about fifty-three years old’ with Mary Bennett’s more revealing writing that Christison was overseas at the time and ‘was inexpressibly sad to lose his best and oldest friend and not even be with him’. Ibid., p. 177. Anecdotes of companionship and Indigenous support and interaction around birth, childcare and medicine seemed to be a common feature of such intimate diaristic accounts, as well as around domestic Indigenous help and taking and raising Indigenous children. See Vivers, “Dealing with Difference: Evidence of European Women in Early Contact History,” p. 93; Riddett, “‘Watch the White Women Fade’: Aboriginal and White Women in the Northern Territory, 1870–1940;” Crow, “Colonialism’s Paradox: White Women, ‘Race’ and Gender in the Contact Zone, 1850–1910;” Sharp, “A Study of Relationships Between Colonial Women and Black Australians.”

159 See Vivers, “Dealing with Difference: Evidence of European Women in Early Contact History.”


162 Young, Jane Bardsley’s Outback Letterbook: Across the Years, 1896–1936, p. 117.


165 Margaret de Salis, Two Early Colonials, by a Great-Granddaughter, Margaret de Salis (Sydney: Compress Printing, 1967), pp. 40–41.

166 The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature described Hamilton Dunlop as ‘a literary figure of considerable standing in her period’; thus she was able to bring some expertise to her renditions. See William Hyde, Joy Hooton and Barry Andrews, The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature, 2nd edn (Melbourne and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

Endnotes (continued)


169 The horrific mass murder of at least twenty-eight Kwiambal people – mostly elders, women and children – was committed by a group of eleven convicts and ex-convicts, led by a squatter named John Fleming, who subsequently escaped and was not tried.


171 ‘Anti-Hypocrite,’ quoted in Eliza Dunlop, “Songs of an Exile (No. 4),” Australian, 18 December 1838.

172 Although Figure 3.9 depicts a massacre in South Australia, it is typical of the way ‘dispersal’ of Aboriginal people took place in New South Wales.

173 Various clergymen incited religious retribution fever, including Reverend John Saunders, whose sermons were published in the Colonist on 17 and 20 October 1838. Saunders condemned the whole colony to divine punishment for its injustice towards the Aboriginal people. See O’Leary, “Giving the Indigenous a Voice: Further Thoughts on the Poetry of Eliza Hamilton Dunlop,” p. 87.

174 Eliza’s Hamilton Dunlop’s granddaughter, Margaret de Salis, noted that ‘a complete [and ‘magnificent’] dinner service and … tea set were given to Eliza by the Lord Mayor of London (W.T. Copeland) on her departure for Australia’. Eliza had a close friendship with Copeland, a Whig candidate before his election as Lord Mayor in 1835. The Whigs supported liberty, free trade, Catholic emancipation, the abolition of slavery and women’s suffrage. The friendship survived geographical distance; the contents of their continuing correspondence, as well as the anti-slavery and women’s suffrage themes of her poetry, suggest that Hamilton Dunlop was ‘just as active in politics as her husband’. de Salis, Two Early Colonials, by a Great-Granddaughter, Margaret de Salis, p. 11.


177 This group of pastoralists continued to assist the accused, even after their guilt had been well established, although they denied that they favoured the killing of Aboriginal people. See O’Leary, “Giving the Indigenous a Voice: Further Thoughts on the Poetry of Eliza Hamilton Dunlop,” p. 87.

178 Rumours that the massacre had been done in the course of the duties of the assigned servants were repeated in Sydney papers – The Monitor, The Australian, and The Gazette – which supported the prosecutions. See Rowley, The Destruction of Aboriginal Society, p. 36. On 14 December 1838 the Monitor reported the motive for the massacre: ‘In order that their cattle might never more be “rushed”, it was resolved to exterminate the whole race of blacks in that quarter’.

179 A reason for not prosecuting the remaining four perpetrators was that the main evidence against them was that of a ‘civilised’ Aboriginal man who worked at Myall Creek. Because he was ignorant of the ‘ordinances of religion’, his evidence was not acceptable to the court. Ibid.

180 The convicted men were hanged on 18 December 1938.

Endnotes (continued)


183 According to one commentator, ‘their hands, arms, feet, and legs being more like the paws and claws of the lower animals’. Quoted in Rouach Pierson, Ruth Nupur Chaudhuri and Beth McAuley, eds, Nation, Empire, Colony: Historicizing Gender and Race (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 36.

184 ‘A Native’s Lament’, one of the earliest examples of the small sub-genre of Australian poems known as Aboriginal Laments, was published anonymously in the Colonial Times and Tasmanian Advertiser on 5 May 1826, p. 4, and was possibly written by a woman. Another poem by Hugo, titled ‘The Gin’ and published in the column ‘Original Poetry’ in the Sydney Gazette on 16 July 1831, represented a female Indigenous persona, who praised the wonders of her environment, but lamented the absence of her husband, Bian, seduced by the doubtful delights of Sydney. The crucial difference of Hamilton Dunlop’s poem was that it was clearly a response to a contemporary event and was composed in dialogue with recent commentary in the Australian.

185 de Salis, Two Early Colonials, by a Great-Granddaughter, Margaret de Salis, pp. 65–66.


187 de Salis, Two Early Colonials, by a Great-Granddaughter, Margaret de Salis, p. 10. ‘Aboriginal Mother’ was the fourth poem in the series ‘Songs of an Exile,’ followed by ‘The Irish Mother’. Hamilton Dunlop used her Irish Indigenous language, Erse, a version of Gaelic: ‘The last line is the Irish cry of a broken heart, of which there can be no adequate translation. The name Varia, MARY. The other Irish words are expressions of fondness for which the English tongue offers no sounds half so tender’. Ibid., pp. 11, 16.


189 John O’Leary contended that Hamilton Dunlop’s poem ‘was a deliberate, strategic contribution to the newspaper debate’ and made her enemies. O’Leary, “Giving the Indigenous a Voice: Further Thoughts on the Poetry of Eliza Hamilton Dunlop.”


192 Ibid.


196 These included the trope of the mother, the use of Christian language, and the inversion of the civilised/savage dichotomy used to support anti-enslavement.

Endnotes (continued)

198 Ibid.


201 One of William Dexter’s reasons for emigrating was the gold rush at Bendigo, where he arrived in 1853 and became a visual propagandist for the diggers’ cause. He played a controversial role in denouncing Britain and urging for a republic and women’s suffrage. Patrick Morgan, Folie à Deux: William and Caroline Dexter in Colonial Australia (Quakers Hill, NSW: Quakers Hill Press, 1999), pp. 29–43, 56.

202 An extended, mocking and damaging exchange in 1855 between the editors of the Sydney Morning Herald and Dexter was a great slur on her reputation. This continued in Victoria with the Age. The issue of 18 December 1857, p. 6, made ‘snide remarks’ on Dexter’s writing, insinuating that she was an opportunist,poser and fraud. For a detailed overview, see Dunlop, “Letter ‘Aboriginal Mother’” and Michael Watson, “Caroline Dexter (1819–1884): Some Previously Unrecognised Works,” La Trobe Journal, vol. 8, no. 32 (1983), p. 34.


204 In France in the 1840s she was a friend of George Sand, a celebrated feminist and writer, who greatly influenced her. “M.J.C.”, Recollections of Ballarat: A Lady’s Life at the Diggings Fifty Years Ago, Clendinning-Rede Papers, Manuscript MS 10102, State Library of Victoria, pp. 7–8.

205 Donnelly, “‘Trumpery Stuff’: Gender Politics in Australian Publishing, 1858,” p. 29.

206 Morgan, Folie à Deux: William and Caroline Dexter in Colonial Australia, p. 64.

207 In the Australian press Dexter wrote: ‘I ask you, Mrs. Jones, what can be said in favour of long petticoats? They get draggled when it is wet, and they trip us up when we walk, and they entangle us when we run, and we can’t get over a stile with them, and we are forced to hold them up at a crossing, and to put trousers on when we ride, and gentlemen set their chairs on them at dinner, and they don’t keep us warm when it is cold, and they blow over our heads when it is windy – in short, I am a convert to the new style’. Caroline Dexter, “The Bloomer Dress,” Sydney Morning Herald, 25 January 1855, p. 5.

208 “Mrs Dexter’s Lecture,” Sydney Morning Herald, 28 February 1855, p. 4.

209 Caroline Dexter, Ladies Almanack, 1858, the Southern Cross, or, Australian Album and New Year’s Gift: The First Ladies Almanack Published in the Colonies / Respectfully Inscribed to the Ladies of Victoria by the Authoress (Melbourne: W. Calvert, 1858).

210 Ibid., p. 36.

211 Morgan, Folie à Deux: William and Caroline Dexter in Colonial Australia.


213 Dexter, Ladies Almanack, 1858, the Southern Cross, or, Australian Album and New Year’s Gift: The First Ladies Almanack Published in the Colonies / Respectfully Inscribed to the Ladies of Victoria by the Authoress, p. 31.

214 Morgan quoted anthropologist Alfred Howitt, who described this custom, by which a dead loved one’s hand is removed and hung around a family member’s neck, under the left arm. Morgan, Folie à Deux: William and Caroline Dexter in Colonial Australia, p. 77.
Endnotes (continued)

215 Morgan wrote that William Dexter collected these implements; see ibid. Given Caroline’s interests and visits to the Indigenous camp that she recounted in *The Interpreter, Vol. 2*, it is possible that she also was involved in collecting. During her second marriage, to a lawyer, when money was no longer scarce, she became a great art collector.

216 Caroline Dexter’s decision was the result of a buildup of suffering, poverty and ill treatment, including having to financially support her husband. Ibid., p. 84.

217 One can only speculate whether Dexter garnered any Indigenous healing practices or remedies from her Indigenous neighbours in Gippsland but, given her interest in herbal remedies and native flora, it is likely.


225 This probably signified a local rendition of the slavery metaphor for women’s oppression in the West to highlight issues of women’s subordination.

226 This was an early example of what Aboriginal women accused white feminists of doing: assuming sisterhood and putting concerns of gender before racism. See the argument in Haggis, “White Women and Colonialism: Towards a Non-Recuperative History,” p. 174.


228 Donnelly, “‘Trumpery Stuff’: Gender Politics in Australian Publishing, 1858,” pp. 41–42.


230 Ibid., p. 37.

231 Ibid.


234 Ibid.
Endnotes (continued)

235 Like Eliza Fraser’s and Ellis Rowan’s writings, motivation to increase book sales by intrigue could be a factor in the sensationalising of some Indigenous content, as in other parts of the book the portrayal of Indigenous people was more rational, albeit patronising.

236 Davies was employed by the Sturt family as a lady’s maid, but in her literary account she elevated her status to their equal.


238 There was, in fact, a trio of women: Mrs Sturt, Miss Julia and Davis herself, whom she described as ‘the first party of white females’ on the Murray River.

239 Dalziell, Settler Romance and the Australian Girl, p. 48.


241 Ibid., p. 129.


246 Ibid., p. 129.

247 Ibid., p. 131.

248 Ibid., p. 132.

249 Dalziell, Settler Romance and the Australian Girl, p. 30.

250 Ibid., p. 32.

251 Davies, The Story of an Earnest Life: A Woman’s Adventures in Australia and in Two Voyages Around the World, p. 139.

252 Ibid., pp. 140–141.

253 It is possible that Davies was encouraged by her publishers to enhance her manuscript with more saleable and thrilling details.
Endnotes (continued)

254 The Bush Missionary Society established a school in Willoughby in the early 1860s. At that time it was isolated and access was difficult. ‘In fact, although so near Sydney, poverty and ignorance prevail to a great extent it is as destitute of the means of education as places in the remote interior’. Board of National Education, Miscellaneous Letters Received Mar. 1863 – Nov. 1863, State Records of New South Wales. Its first teacher was Eliza Davies. ‘In June 1862, Eliza Davies had opened a school with 18 children in a bush hut’. By the time Davies retired, the school had over forty students and was the only public school on the North Shore. Within six months, she had the support of four leading citizens of the district to forward an application to the Board of National Education for the support of a ‘non-vested national school’. Geoffrey Sherington, “Willoughby Public School: From the ‘Bush’ to the Suburbs,” n.d. www.willoughbydhs.org.au/History/Suburbs/Willoughby%20Public%20School%201862-1880.pdf.

Chapter Four:

Genres of Women Settlers’ Early Writing

Chapter Four moves on from the selection of five women writers in Chapter Three, which exemplified early women’s writing with Indigenous content, to consider the various genres in which such writing about Indigenous people occurred. Settler women wrote about their encounters with Indigenous people in different contexts, both private and public, and from divergent perspectives. They used various genres, from letters and diaries to poems and journalism, as demonstrated in Chapter Three, but it was scientific writing from which the first female ethnographical knowledge production emerged.

Historians Patricia Clarke and Dale Spender raised the importance of letters and diaries as a literary form in their research on early Australian and British women. Drawing on settler letters and diaries and discussing the role of their writing, themes of anxiety, reassurance, self-discovery, authority, responses to Indigenous people and contributions to national identity emerged. Such writing could serve both private and public ends. Leigh Gilmore analysed the ‘self-invention, self-discovery, and self-representation’ of women’s autobiographic writing, finding that, rather than attempting the genre’s ‘masculinist’ grand ‘truth’ narratives of white men, women’s identity was more often constructed by articulating fragmented and interrupted subjectivities, revealing the often conflicting dynamics of discourse, self-representation and the ‘truth’. Clarke’s book *The Governesses: Letters from the Colonies 1862–1882* was published in 1985. Spender’s book *Writing the New World: Two Centuries of Australian Women Writers* followed in 1988 and referred to various women writers who wrote about Indigenous people. In 1992, Clarke and Spender collaborated to publish *Life Lines: Australian Women’s Letters and Diaries 1788–1840*. Redressing the lack of Australian women’s literary history, Spender was keen to demonstrate the breadth of previously ‘devalued’ women’s literature, arguing that its significance was that women writers ‘presented a very different view of the world than the one encoded by men’ in documenting ‘the existence of those who are not dominant’.

In 1988, Debra Adelaide published *A Bright and Fiery Troop: Australian Women Writers of the Nineteenth Century*, which contained a critical analysis of the letters, journals, memoirs and novels of colonial women, then in 1999 Lucy Frost published *No Place for a Nervous Lady: Voices from the Australian Bush*. These anthologies contained excerpts from the letters of women like Annie Baxter, which included
intercultural material. Both Spender and Helen Thompson⁹ wrote of women writers’
distinctively empathetic response to Indigenous people, which was later refuted by other
authors.¹⁰

Women’s colonial writings, like the writings of many of their male counterparts,
often contained pejorative representations of Indigenous people. A typical example was
found among the everyday letters of the genteel settler Penelope Selby (1811–1851).
Selby optimistically departed England with her two young sons and husband, leaving
impending bankruptcy behind them, arriving in the Port Phillip District in 1841. Four
years later, writing to her sister Mary from the rough town of Port Fairy (then called
Belfast), she shared her contemptuous opinion of its Indigenous inhabitants:

The natives here are a most disgusting set. We have plenty here carrying
away the offal, and I am not surprised at the want of what we consider
proper delicacy of feeling when all classes are constantly coming in contact
with men and women in a state of complete nudity. I must say I have felt my
own cheeks burn when I have seen ladies in company with gentlemen
talking and laughing with savages in that state, and know that I am
considered most fastidious. I hope my boys will not get contaminated.¹¹

The tone of the letter conformed to general racial bigotry and sentiments of settler
entitlement in written accounts of Indigenous people as colonisation expanded in a
devastating wave from the coastal settlements. The popular two-volume work *Two
Years in New South Wales*,¹² written by the ‘liberal and humane’¹³ naval surgeon Peter
Miller Cunningham (1789–1864) and published in 1827, cited violent retributive
massacres against Indigenous people as commonplace, and contumely mocked the
victims:

the abject animal state in which they live, and their great and glaring
deficiency in all the useful mechanical arts (in comparison with other
savages), should place them at the very zero of civilization, constituting in a
measure the connecting link between man and the monkey tribe? – for really
some of the old women only seem to require a tail to complete the
identity … The quick and hurried movements and gestures of many of our
natives, seem indeed closely allied to those of the wild animals of the
forest.¹⁴
In her *Notes and Sketches of New South Wales During a Residence in the Colony from 1839 to 1844*, Louisa Ann Meredith (1812–1895) (Figure 4.1) was also disparaging. In her chapter on the ‘natives’ she mentioned a corroboree,

which Mr. Meredith describes to me as highly absurd … painting their naked black bodies in a hideous manner … which give them an indescribably ghastly and fiendish aspect – their strange attitudes, and violent contortions and movements and the unearthly sound of their yells, mingled with the wild and monotonous wail-like chant of the women, make altogether a very near approach to the horribly sublime, in the estimation of most Europeans who have witnessed an assembly.

![Figure 4.1](image)


Repugnance for immoral subjects, rather than concern, was also evident:

Judging from what I have heard, I imagine their marriage customs are as truly *savage* as any other of their strange ceremonies. Polygamy is general among all who can attain the desirable wealth of several wives … Female children are sometimes ‘promised in infancy to their future husbands’ (frequently decrepit old men), and others appear to be taken by means of force and ill usage, as in the case among many savage nations.¹⁷
Dalziell contended that, as in the writing of Eliza Davis, much colonial writing encoded Indigenous people ‘as monstrous, savage and excessively sexual, among other derogatory and anxious fabrications of irreconcilable otherness’, which was ‘not only disrespectful and often wilfully ignorant of ‘native’ knowledge: it also announced and justified the authority of colonial agents’.\textsuperscript{18} This general assessment of white women’s colonial writing made scholars wary of more amicable accounts of Indigenous people, for example those of Georgiana McCrae and Minnie Brewer, which I have considered in Chapter Three.

While I have discussed the early journalistic writings of Dexter, settlers commonly used the press to propagandise ‘outrages’ and incite violence:

\begin{quote}
We say to the Colonists, since the Government makes no adequate exertion to protect you, protect yourselves; and if the ferocious savages endeavour to plunder or destroy your property, or to murder yourselves, your families, or your servants, do to them as you would do to any white robbers or murderers – \textit{SHOOT THEM DEAD}, if you can.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

In journalism, biased antagonism was used to justify settlers’ actions.\textsuperscript{20} One Victorian newspaper article from 1842, headlined ‘The Aborigines’, began:

\begin{quote}
The aggressions upon the settlers by the aborigines are coming upon them so thick and fast, and attended with waste of property to an immense amount, and loss of life in a fearful degree … the man that would not … do all in his power to remedy the grievous evils that they are now continually subject to would be underserving the name of man and ought to forfeit all claim to the privileges of civilized life.\textsuperscript{21}
\end{quote}

The lengthy article concluded: ‘British rule … should not suffer with impunity as a meal for a cannibal stomach and the blood of the industrious labourer of Great Britain to gorge the Australian savage’.\textsuperscript{22}

While many men declared their views about Indigenous people in the public domain, women’s views in the first fifty years of settlement were almost all confined to the private domain of letters, diaries and memoirs.\textsuperscript{23} A few women did begin to write to the newspapers from around the middle of the nineteenth century, although initially their contributions were confined to the social pages.\textsuperscript{24} It is also possible that women disguised their gender with pseudonyms\textsuperscript{25} and contributed to the racist contempt in colonial newspapers. Two of the women I discussed in Chapter Three, Eliza Hamilton
Dunlop and Caroline Dexter, were exceptions to this trend by refusing to be restricted to the private domain. Both women developed substantial public profiles by canvassing controversial public issues, and Caroline Dexter became a successful businesswoman – virtually unheard of at that time. They did not so much contradict the feminine constructs of nineteenth-century society but were, rather, the exceptions that proved the rule. Patricia Clarke26 revealed the routes and strategies of Australia’s first women journalists and recorded the careers of many unknown early women journalists, including Louisa Atkinson, who will be investigated in more detail in Chapter Five.

Settler women tended to write about their first-hand, intimate experiences, particularly in letters, diaries and memoirs. The shortage of white women, and the distances between them in remote areas, played a significant role in their desire to reflect on their experiences in diaristic fashion, that is, in subjective conversations with the self, although, Gilmore argues, ultimately with an audience in mind.27 These first-hand, intimate experiences included coming into contact with Indigenous women, especially in the domestic sphere of feeding, childrearing, caring, healing and relating. As these areas were predominantly within the realm of domesticity, they were admissible subjects for female discourse. By the 1890s there was increasing demand for journals devoted specifically to women’s concerns. Journals and magazines such as The Interpreter (1858–59), The Dawn (1888–1905), Women’s Voice (1894–95) and New Idea (1902–11) were, as Ann Vickery explains, ‘crucial in extending and authorising women’s presence beyond the private realm’.28

In these early private and public writings, revelations of ‘feminine’ perspectives and relationships at times privileged the lived experience of difference over the knowledge, beliefs and ideologies that codified them, as we saw in the writings of Caroline Dexter and Georgiana McCrae. Such relational and feminised perspectives did at times contradict and counter the dominant ‘masculine’ text, and were also evident in the concerns of women’s travel writing.

Many early books by Australian women were autobiographical. Their diaries and correspondences were collated and edited to be published, sometimes many years later,29 in book form as memoirs or travel commentaries.30 For example, Baxter refashioned some passages from her Yesabba diaries into a book of letters about ‘bush life’ addressed to a fictitious correspondent, Henrietta, in the early 1840s.31 Several decades later, in 1873, Baxter produced Memoirs of the Past by a Lady in Australia.32 Occasionally women writers embarked upon such undertakings after returning to England,33 or the works were published there to satisfy a market for tales from the exotic
rim of empire. Such books were common among the popular travel literature of the time. They included naturalist, Indigenous and social commentary, although, as Barbara Gates pointed out, gender dictated that ‘most functioned more as interpreters of what they saw with their own eyes than as originators of scientific knowledge or theory’.

In seeking to describe any interesting antipodean feature of difference and interest, these writings were generally accessible and occasionally opinionated. But if domestic concerns and feminine perspectives distinguished women’s writing, they did not necessarily preclude it altogether from legitimacy. According to Gates, it was the ‘exoticism inherent in imperial outposts’ by which women writers ‘gained authority largely in proportion to their remove from English society’. Indigenous people and flora and fauna were evidence of authentic exotica, and were staple material to these ends.

Patricia Grimshaw and Ann Standish argued that colonial women adapted this colonising genre – to the rather specific Australian colonial economic reward – ‘through appropriation of the land’, thus perpetuating a view of the land as uncultivated and open to settlement and development. Grimshaw and Standish’s argument resonated with Simon Ryan’s view that writing conventions were employed for a similar purpose, where ‘aesthetic conventions’ of the picturesque and panoramic found in explorers’ writing ‘reveal the nexus between power and surveillance within the journal’. ‘Once the existence of this nexus is realised’, said Ryan, ‘it is possible to see that “innocent” aesthetic responses are actually expressions of imperial greed’. In a similar fashion, Grimshaw and Standish queried the innocence of colonial women incorporating notions of home and other familiarities, such as the aesthetic conventions Ryan referred to, and argued that writers like Meredith ‘wrote books that both adhered to expectations of appropriate female traits and fulfilled a colonizing function’.

The botanist, artist and travel writer Ellis Rowan (1848–1922) (Figure 4.2), who wrote from the 1860s onwards, was a case in point. She may have pushed the boundaries of appropriate female traits with her independent adventuring and close engagement with Indigenous people, but once again could be seen perpetuating the primitivist myth of white superiority, expanding dominant narratives to elevate her own status. In A Flower Hunter in Queensland and New Zealand, the first part of which was based on letters to her family written during her trips to Queensland, Rowan wrote in detail about Indigenous people’s activities and customs.
Although Rowan relied on the labour and guidance of Indigenous people to help gather her specimens in both Australia and Papua New Guinea, she failed to acknowledge this or credit their necessity to her work. Nor did she recognise Indigenous sovereignty and knowledge, perpetuating the common characterisation of common Indigenous knowledge as colonial ‘discoveries’. Her comments were often disparaging, evidence of a mindset of white supremacy: ‘On Sunday they refused to climb coconut trees because it was Sunday, but they don’t mind all the same (they say) selling their wives for a trifle to the traders’. The use of the homogenising ‘they’ served to distance the Indigenous people she came across in the contact zones of remote Australia. Passages about Indigenous people with snippets of ethnographical detail often appeared largely self-promoting, contrived to accentuate Rowan’s adventuring into hazardous ‘wilderness’ and to exoticise her travelogues (Figure 4.3), for example:

Those natives are cannibals, they wear no clothes at all and have huge welts across the shoulder and breast. I saw one of these tribes and a dance which I don’t think any white person had ever seen … This tribe had the distinctive mark in each man and woman of a tooth knocked out. In the dance they wore masks of tortoise shell. They would have killed me if they had dared.
Occasionally, early female travel writers noted challenges to the discourse of primitivism and imperialism in some diaries and journalism. Vivers used passages from Emma Macpherson’s early memoir of New South Wales to illustrate a slippage of complicity and resistance, a compelling example of ‘tension or struggle’. Much of Macpherson’s assumed ‘natural’ superiority, like Rowan’s, denigrated Indigenous people, and reinforced imperial power relations. Towards the end of her chapter on Indigenous people, Macpherson at first defended the usurpation of Indigenous lands as being ‘in the interests of humanity and the cause of civilization and progress’, but added, ‘For my own part, though daring to hold and confess to such apparently cruel sentiments as I have expressed, I fancy there are very few who ever felt more kindly towards the natives than I did’.

In the genre of fiction, *Alfred Dudley, or, the Australian Settler* of 1830 was one of the first novels to include Aboriginal characters and, although published anonymously, it has been attributed to the English woman Sarah Porter, who did not visit Australia. According to Hyde *et al.*, Porter’s gender possibly influenced the portrayal of ‘an early, and rare, spark of optimism in fiction about the possible union of the two races’, standing out from most of the stereotyped and divisive representations of Indigenous men as violent and treacherous savages that proliferated in the second half of the century.

![Figure 4.3](image)
*Photographer unknown, Mrs Rowan in the Heart of Papua, 1922.*

Although Eurocentric, some settler women’s writing offered fragmentary, humane and sympathetic passages about Indigenous Australians, drawn from the author’s own experiences. Such sentiments, found in the writings of both men and women in the contact zone, unsettled the dominant discourse of colonisation and denigration. Novels
from later in the century by Rosa Praed (Figure 4.4)\textsuperscript{50} such as *Australian Life: Black and White* of 1885\textsuperscript{51} and *Fugitive Anne: A Romance of the Unexplored Bush* of 1902,\textsuperscript{52} as well as Catherine Martin’s *An Australian Girl* of 1890 (Figure 4.5),\textsuperscript{53} contained such content.

The authors’ gender and their concerns about sexuality, marriage, class and colonial women’s identities distinguished their novels from the masculinised antipodean adventure fiction and nineteenth-century short stories of the colonial frontier. Rachel Weaver found that the latter were ‘frequently driven to represent’ the ‘horror or celebration’ of frontier violence, riven with anxieties about place, race and identity.\textsuperscript{54} In contrast, Belinda McKay distinguished settler women’s ‘domestic and romantic focus’, which ensured a different view of the colonial enterprise in their texts,\textsuperscript{55} serving to diminish and contain the risk of destabilisation.

Dalziell’s analysis of Praed’s and Martin’s work revealed similar anxieties identified by Weaver, but she emphasised the sexual and reproductive signification of colonial women’s identity as a powerful factor in potentially destabilising and certainly ‘delimiting the boundaries of respectable bodies and social relations’.\textsuperscript{56} Women’s identity was being constituted in settler women’s writing, struggling with the constrictions and complexities of femininity. Tim Dolin wrote that women’s struggle with representations of their experiences in the nineteenth century was also reflected in the literary history of the British novel, ‘a compound of realism and romance’ governing:  

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\textsuperscript{50} Praed, *Australian Life: Black and White*.

\textsuperscript{51} *Fugitive Anne: A Romance of the Unexplored Bush*.

\textsuperscript{52} *An Australian Girl*.

\textsuperscript{53} Weaver, *Horror or Celebration*.

\textsuperscript{54} McKay, *Domestic and Romantic Focus*.

\textsuperscript{55} Dalziell, *Sexual and Reproductive Signification*.

\textsuperscript{56} Dolin, *Women’s Struggle with Realism and Romance*.
the spaces female protagonists are permitted to inhabit, and the plots available to give shape to their represented actions, and meaning to their lives. In effect, this struggle took place along class and religious lines, and reflected volatile ideologies of normative and aberrant femininity, and their complex relationship to other ideological faultlines of the Victorian middle classes—around industrial labour, Roman Catholicism, racial difference, and so on.57

Ann Vickery and Maryanne Dever argued that in their novels these early women nationalised ‘a particular form of femininity, the Australian girl at once refined the scope of a nascent sexual identity while, at the same time, counteracting the volatile feminism of the New Woman’.58

A less threatening pioneer portrait was developed in another genre that also included varying Indigenous content. Settler women began to participate in foundational history writing, developed in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, Ernestine Hill (1899–1972) modernised the form. In this genre, and particularly towards the end of the nineteenth century, alongside a rising awareness of women’s rights, settler women increasingly articulated their contribution to and integration with the duty of empire and its colonial enterprise. The agency and agenda of the writers, who carved a place for women in the public and political realm, were more easily discerned.

Janette Hancock’s study of South Australian foundational histories by settler women found that their narratives were hardly ‘sentimental diversions’.59 In fact, the works of Ellen Liston (1838–1885) (Figure 4.6), Jane Sarah Doudy (1846–1932)60 and Myrtle Rose White (1888–1961)61 valorised pioneer settlement, validated white occupation and normalised white subjects in the national imagination, while marginalising, denigrating and omitting Indigenous presence.

Hancock argued that such women were writing as ‘politicians in print’. She maintained that they used narratives to avow:

very clear ideas about social behaviour, cultural norms, national patriotism and racial hierarchies. Indeed, the concern over who rightfully belonged and who did not pervaded much of their writing, as did the derogatory scripting of others. In short, these women were assertive ‘nationalist managers’ who had a lot to say about the creation of their ‘homely nation.’62
McKay argued that these women writers represented themselves ‘both explicitly and implicitly as sympathetic and knowledgeable spokespersons for Indigenous people, and positioned themselves as observers rather than participants in the violent processes of colonial expansion’. But McKay, along with Margaret McGuire, Standish and others, questioned this innocent emphasis, arguing that through their representations and ‘shaping of the imaginative landscape of colonialism, women writers were active participants in the ongoing colonial projects of subjugating Indigenous people and managing public perceptions of that process’.

By writing about issues of race, white women, as Moreton-Robinson contended, served as an indicator to the white Australian public of both the increasing standing of women as professional writers, and of the credibility of their claims to be knowledgeable interpreters of the contact zone. White women writers thus became, in Georgi-Finlay’s terms, ‘authors and agents’ of colonialism. It is worth reiterating that in Australia, the privileged status of whites, including white women, as spokespeople for Indigenous women and ‘detached chroniclers of colonial processes’, remained unchallenged until the recent explosion of publications by Indigenous people, especially the life writings of Indigenous women.
Scientific Knowledge Production

Thus far, I have discussed general frameworks, pressures and constraints of femininity, and how, in a broad sense, these pressures and constraints shaped an emerging colonial identity and political agenda in the various genres of settler women’s writing, especially with respect to writing about Indigenous people. I now consider how these early personal anecdotal writings and fictions about Indigenous people developed into more scientific knowledge production.

Apart from diaries, journalism and ventures into fiction and foundational histories, early colonial women’s texts generally belonged to the genre of travel writing, which was noted for its subjective and unscientific content. The context of the travel genre is the journey. Further to this point, Wheeler argued that travel writing could be distinguished from ethnological writing by the immediacy of ‘being there’ in a progression from place to place, and by conveying a vivid sensory, primarily visual, experience – a conversation of aesthetics in which Indigenous people simply stepped forward now and again from the main backdrop of autobiography. These texts were, as with Meredith’s and Rowan’s books, primarily autobiographical travel narratives, ‘enlivened’ by observations of passing landscapes and social interactions along the way.

Such accounts of Indigenous people were subjective and were inevitably open to the bias of a writer who had little, if any, intimate contact or conversation with the Indigenous subjects being discussed. Thus, despite a shared Eurocentric lens and ideology, there were enough contradictory portrayals of Indigenous people to expose the speculative nature of the genre. These ranged from views of the ignoble, as against the noble, savage, and were highlighted in debates about cannibalism and Indigenous emotional and intellectual ability. By contrast, scientific epistemology sought to move beyond such subjective bias and hearsay. The rational empirical authority in specialist branches, such as ethnology, would be increasingly defined against popular genres such as adventure fiction, colonial travel accounts, journalism and the personal accounts of colonial administrators and missionaries.

These representations of the other were inseparable from the colonists’ exercise of power, and were paralleled by other forms of knowledge that also empowered the colonisers – the naming and mapping of the continent, a process initiated by explorers, surveyors and settlers. Bain Attwood argued that the production of European knowledge assumed even greater significance in the colonial relations of power as ‘the killing
times’ came to an end in southeastern Australia, and less physically violent forms of coercion were adopted.\textsuperscript{72}

How then did these genteel settler women venture beyond their private cultural spheres and popular genres, into the masculine intellectual realm of studying ‘wild’ peoples? Mindful that Indigenous people signified an oppositional difference and wildness, how did these women, ‘whose domestic space was essentially a cultural one, and who could not – except in unusual cases – take part in the active (public) civilizing of the landscape’,\textsuperscript{73} willingly contest the social inhibitions constraining their participation? How did they make a conspicuous assertion of, or bid for, scientific authority in a masculine discursive arena? To develop a passion for ‘savages’ would have challenged respectability, modesty and femininity.

William Walker illustrated the provocation such women caused.\textsuperscript{74} Writing to his father in 1821, Walker related that he was horrified by the crude nature of Indigenous performance at a ‘Five Island’ (Wollongong) corroboree, but he was positively scandalised by the attendance of a white woman at these ‘obscene’ festivities, ‘frequently marked with horrid barbarity … of a cannibal barbarian’.\textsuperscript{75} Walker was expressing a common concern: how were these refined ladies, ‘conditioned to take offence at open displays of sexuality and discussions of nudity’, able to investigate and ‘write openly about life in the Australian bush, where they were unable to turn a blind eye to Aboriginal nudity, sexuality and pregnancy’?\textsuperscript{76} The recovery of women settler’s achievements in natural sciences in the social and historical context of their lives in colonial Australia is one of the focuses of this thesis.

\textbf{Emergence of Women’s Ethnography from the Natural Sciences}

From the eighteenth century, the sciences, including natural history, were made increasingly available to women through popular texts and literature, such as encyclopaedic dictionaries and public lectures.\textsuperscript{77} As Lynn Barber pointed out, natural science had won moral and religious justification in Victorian times as evidence of natural theology.\textsuperscript{78} In 1795, Christoph Christian Sturm’s \textit{Reflections for Every Day in the Year on the Works of God and of his Providence Throughout All Nature} was translated into English.\textsuperscript{79} His reflection for 13 January was titled ‘Discoveries made by means of the Microscope’. These instruments, Sturm wrote, let us ‘see how great our Creator is’ and lead us to ‘praise God, whose glory manifests itself so wonderfully in small objects’.\textsuperscript{80} Sightseeing, rambling, riding and collecting in the landscape were the
pastimes of the wealthy and evidence of their reverence for God’s creation – ‘worshipper[s] at Nature’s shrine’81 witnessing ‘the hand of a Deity in the most minute of his works’.82 Dorothy Jones wrote that the letters and diaries of settler women ‘often contain detailed accounts of Australian flora, perhaps also because collecting, pressing and painting flowers were among the standard leisure activities of nineteenth-century middle-class women’.83

Women’s pursuits were initially directed primarily to botany. As Clarke and Spender observed, ‘given that a knowledge of the flora and fauna – indigenous and imported – could well prove for the settlers to be a matter of survival’,84 this had obvious benefits.85 Not only was botanical study a useful, instructive, ‘morally uplifting’ and healthy outdoor activity that did not require the cruelty of some collecting practices, such as pinning butterflies,86 it also involved suitably genteel tasks of gathering, documenting and illustrating plant and seed specimens. Moreover, as Judy Skene reminded us, ‘there was the long-standing association between women and flowers that legitimated the activity of collecting, in spite of some reservations expressed about the suitability of young women discussing the sexual aspects of plant reproduction’.87 Such reservations were made unambiguously clear in 1842 when the German botanist Matthias Schleiden wrote, ‘in the vegetable kingdom … I would … banish the word sex, if it were not to be feared that those who are not free from ignorant prejudices would, with the abandonment of the word in the one kingdom, seek to do the same in the other’.88 This was not the only issue, as Skene remarked:

Women who botanised occupied an ambiguous position in that their class gave them access to land in unexplored localities and the ability to demand assistance from servants, children, and the local Nyungar. Yet, at the same time, the activities of women collectors challenges the masculinist nature of the pioneer history, refiguring space/time by enlarging the range of roles open to women to include the masculine occupation of scientist.89

In his 1855 publication, Glaucus: Or, the Wonders of the Shore, naturalist Charles Kingsley wrote about the acceptable feminine ideal:

amid all the excitement and temptation of luxury and flattery, with her heart pure and her mind occupied in a boudoir full of shells and fossils, flowers and sea-weeds, keeping herself unspotted from the world, by considering the lilies of the field, how they grow.90
In keeping with this Victorian tradition, educated women frequently participated in the natural sciences of botany and zoology, and especially in the study of birds, shells and insects. Elizabeth Macarthur was the first recorded woman to take to the practice of botany in the colonies. In 1791 she wrote of her search for a suitable occupation, after finding astronomy rather challenging:  

I wanted something to fill up a certain vacancy in my time, which could neither be done by writing, reading or conversation … having no female friend to unbend my mind to, nor a single woman with whom I could converse with any satisfaction to myself … These considerations made me still anxious to learn some easy science to fill up the vacuum of many a solitary day and at length, under the auspices of Mr Dawes, I have made a small progress in botany. No country can exhibit a more copious field for botanical knowledge than this.  

Given that recording was the primary task of scientific exploration, women’s contributions were welcomed. For example, Elizabeth Gould (1804–1841) (Figure 4.7) visited Australia between 1838 and 1840, where she produced various drawings and watercolours of Australian flora and fauna, many of which were included in her husband’s fourteen books on Australian birds and mammals (Figure 4.8).  

Skene pointed out that, unlike professional male naturalists and botanists, who were able to travel and pursue their collecting across different regions to enhance their scientific standing, most women were confined by their domestic duties, with little opportunity to collect beyond their immediate localities. They could, however, observe the flora and fauna of the same location over different seasons and collect ‘excellent specimens … [even if their work] tended to increase the reputation of their patrons’. Thus Australia, with its array of botanical curiosities unique to the continent, provided settler women with a singular opportunity to play a vital role in scientific research.
As the flora and fauna of more settled areas – especially around the ports and along the coast – were documented and catalogued, settler women residing in less explored locations were potentially valuable researchers.\textsuperscript{95} For example, on Ash Island in the Hunter River Estuary,\textsuperscript{96} 100 miles north of Port Phillip, sisters Harriet Scott (1830–1907) and Helena Scott (Forde) (1832–1910) documented plants, animals and insects (Figure 4.9 and Figure 4.10);\textsuperscript{97} and in the Vasse region, 150 miles south of Perth, Georgiana Molloy (Figure 4.11) collected plant specimens (Figure 4.12) for English horticulturalist James Mangles.\textsuperscript{98} Clarke and Spender stated that Molloy’s ‘diligence, dedication and talent place her among the first of Australian scientists’.\textsuperscript{99}

Like all sciences, however, botany was primarily a male domain. This dominance increased with the mid-nineteenth century momentum towards specialisation. There was a move to ‘defeminise’ women’s ‘amusement’ in botany and reshape plant study for the serious thoughts of men.\textsuperscript{100} Nevertheless, botanical science still relied on large numbers of women.
Chapter Four: Genres of Women Settlers’ Early Writing

Figure 4.9
Helena Forde (née Scott), Land Shells, 1868.

Figure 4.10
Harriet Scott, Card design, 1880.

Figure 4.11
Artist unknown, Georgiana Molloy, 1829.

Figure 4.12
In Australia, the most famous nineteenth-century botanist, Ferdinand von Mueller, was employed in 1853 by Lieutenant-Governor Charles La Trobe as the first Government Botanist of Victoria and, in the same year, became the inaugural Director of Melbourne’s Botanic Gardens. Like anthropologists some decades later, von Mueller advertised in the press and was able to amass a network of nearly 3,000 known collectors, many of whom were women. In 1883, The West Australian published an article that urged those ladies residing in remote parts of Western Australia to assist von Mueller by collecting flora for him. The article included lengthy quotations from him:

‘… inland and northern and far eastern settlers to induce the natives to bring, in baskets, specimens of all sorts of plants, to be dried at the stations and forwarded to me by post’ … There are already many ladies living in these far distant parts of the colony bereft, to a great extent, of those intellectual resources to which many of them have been accustomed. And upon these ladies, in particular, we would impress the interest they might derive from actively aiding our great Australian botanist in his valuable scientific researches.

Remarkably and ‘perhaps uniquely’, in Australia between 1830 and 1880, numerous serious women botany collectors contributed to this effort. Their collecting often brought them into contact with Indigenous people, who had the greatest botanical knowledge of the area, thus providing a further opportunity to work in the natural sciences, namely ethnography. Botanical studies and ethnography became closely related, because the work of systematising nature involved a process of collecting, documenting, classifying and comparing, to which Indigenous people and their culture were also subjected. Surveillance and classification methodology, frequently founded on oppositional dualisms and hierarchical values, easily migrated between botany and ethnography – especially when the two were being undertaken simultaneously.

As Avril Maddrell argued, in the nineteenth century, gender was a powerful metaphor for ways of knowing: ‘objectivity and reason were defined as masculine and identified in opposition to female subjectivity and emotions’. Women could only, at best, contribute to ‘legitimate’ knowledge within the constraints of the specifications and rules of men. Science became ‘the means of illustrating and therefore legitimating and perpetuating the natural order, which in turn served to preserve’ hierarchies of gender, race and class. Chapter Five analyses the contribution of Charlotte Waring
Barton, who was one of the first settler women to embark on a literary contribution of scientific general knowledge in the colonies.\textsuperscript{107}

In conclusion, women writers used colonial discourses to complement masculine forms of control and in service of their own empowerment. Hancock emphasised that their writing ‘often relied on a system of omission, misremembering and the dehumanisation of the Aboriginal peoples’.\textsuperscript{108} Clearly, such women served as willing agents of nation-building propaganda.\textsuperscript{109} In her analysis of South Australian women writers, Hancock argued that ‘by portraying their heroines as messengers of God, both Liston and Doudy were not only attempting to highlight the cultural, social and political power middle-class women possessed, but were also justifying the presence of these women on the colonial scene’.\textsuperscript{110}

These findings served to validate the 1990s critique of feminist and postcolonial scholars\textsuperscript{111} that settler women were not guileless or detached. Rather, while conforming to acceptable Christian mores, they revealed their racism in exclusivist and prescriptive texts. Schedlich-Day, too, argued that the pioneer legend to which they contributed was thus largely silent on issues of race and ethnicity, and built up a highly romanticised and stereotyped memory of pioneer [white] settler women by omitting those who did not fit its limited classification of ‘mother, wife, Christian, white, loving, [and] loyal’.\textsuperscript{112} And by eliding undesirable aspects of the past, including ‘frontier violence, rape and murder of the Aboriginal peoples of the land, dispossession and the ‘marauding white man’,\textsuperscript{113} McKay\textsuperscript{114} and Dalziell\textsuperscript{115} emphasised that even the few so-called sympathetic white women’s representations of Indigenous people and intercultural relationships were couched in colonial perspectives and ethnocentric presumptions – although surely, being of their time, it would be extraordinary if they were not.

Though women writers viewed and wrote about Indigenous people through layers of ‘racial’, class and national bias typical of the times, hard and fast categorising of white women’s agency overshadowed the dynamics of Indigenous influence and transculturation, however slight. Praed’s yearning to write a black epic at the turn of the century was ahead of its time by several decades, undoubtedly influenced by her early immersion in the contact zone.\textsuperscript{116} In terms of later women’s fiction, the challenging work of Barbara Baynton (1857–1929),\textsuperscript{117} Katharine Susannah Prichard (1883–1969)\textsuperscript{118} and Eleanor Dark\textsuperscript{119} would ensure that women’s interior worlds or domestic and romantic focus could not be so easily dismissed. Writers such as Mary Bennett, Mary Durack, Mary Gilmore, Mrs Aeneas Gunn and Alice Morton Kemp, through writing based on personal intercultural involvement, would also have a profound influence on
the representation of Indigenous people and on the public perception of Indigenous Australia.

Women wrote about Indigenous others from a spectrum of different approaches. They were subject to the larger forces of their times: the discourses of gender, colonialism, primitivism and progress, which sought to keep treasured ideas of race domination and difference intact. Because of women’s constraints and perceived inferiority, their public writing was influenced by a concern to empower their own respectable identities. For some, a need for validation and a fear of, or disdain for, difference resulted in exaggerated oppositional representations of Indigenous people, particularly for those writers who had only superficial contact, such as Meredith, Davies and Rowan.

Chapter Four has demonstrated that in the nineteenth century, settler women’s identity was unsettled and that genteel women used notions of their own racial and moral superiority and ‘civilising’ ability to delineate their own identity and empowerment. At the same time, the gender-specific constraints imposed on settler women writers, from both public and independent – but always masculine – spheres, could be employed to resist and complicate fabrications of colonial hegemony and racial alterity. For writers such as Brewer, Dunlop and Dexter, it was largely by employing feminine attributes of empathy, everyday contact and solicitude that they were able to contrast an intercultural lived experience and relating, against imperial masculine codes and discourses. Despite the complicities and contradictions that arise, largely from settler women’s structural position in the colonial enterprise, I argue that their ‘feminine’ renditions of personal intercultural relations could be powerfully deployed to undermine and displace the fixity of otherness in imperial discourse.

Even women who embarked on the production of scientific knowledge production were often motivated by contact and relationships. Those women who had an ‘inheritance of concern’ or liberality, as in the case of Dunlop, or who were born in the contact zone, as was the case with Katie Langloh Parker, raised by Indigenous women and in the company of Indigenous playmates, a more ambivalent writing is discerned. It is the social nuances of such writing that is the concern of this thesis.

Part One has, firstly, situated this scholarship by commencing with a literature review of various pertinent texts and ideas from the related disciplines of Australian history, postcolonial, feminism and whiteness studies. Secondly, it has established the relevant context in which historians have analysed the expectations and conditions experienced by colonial women in the Australian contact zones. This included the
Chapter Four: Genres of Women Settlers’ Early Writing

gendered and racialised terrain of nineteenth-century Australia, the sexualised politics of the frontier and contact zones, the gender constraints of the era, and how such factors shaped colonial women’s representations of their identity and intercultural encounters in their writing. Thirdly, it has identified various perspectives in accounting for these women’s lives and writing, particularly concerning intercultural responses. Fourthly, it has undertaken an overview of the various genres of women’s writing with Indigenous content and how they have been interpreted. A complexity of feminist scholars’ appraisals and moral or ideological evaluations has been raised. These range between identifying compassionate engagement and denigrating colonial complicity, courageous contributions and shortcomings, acknowledgement and fault. Lastly, the focus turned to the conditions and development of women’s scientific writing as the genre from which ethnological knowledge production emerged.

Part One has thus established the general frame within which I make my argument in Part Two, which seeks a more nuanced position than the dismissal of these women as racist or their intercultural interest as merely self-serving. Nor does it perpetuate their innocence or fix on the contradictions. Rather, it looks to what we can learn from these writings about the agencies of both parties and transculturation, which are often overshadowed in overly theorised positions.

Part Two begins with identifying the emergence of the pursuit of ethnography from the scientific genre of knowledge production in the little-known writings and case studies of Charlotte Barton and her daughter Louisa Atkinson. It proceeds to identify various women of their kind who pursued ethnographical research in a vocational manner, and investigates their commonalities, distinctions and contributions. Such features are further explored in the relational ethnography of Ethel Hassell, particularly revelations of Indigenous agency and transculturation in the social nuances of their shared domestic space within station boundaries.
Endnotes


3 Spender, *Writing a New World: Two Centuries of Australian Women Writers*.


5 Spender, *Writing a New World: Two Centuries of Australian Women Writers*, p. 301.

6 Ibid., p. 296.


8 Frost, *No Place for a Nervous Lady: Voices from the Australian Bush*.


11 Penelope Selby, Letter to her sister Mary, 1 March 1845, Penelope Selby Letters, 1839–1851, Copy held by the Port Fairy Historical Society.

12 Cunningham’s volumes were reprinted in large numbers twice more in two years and were translated into a German edition in 1829.


14 Cunningham, *Two Years in New South Wales; A Series of Letters, Comprising Sketches of the Actual State of Society in that Colony; of its Peculiar Advantages to Emigrants; of its Topography, Natural History, Etc. Etc.*, 2, p. 39.

15 Louisa Anne Meredith, *Notes and Sketches of New South Wales: During a Residence in that Colony from 1839 to 1844* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010 (1844)).

16 Ibid., p. 91. Meredith had only limited personal experience of Aboriginal people, basing many of her published comments on the experiences of her husband, Charles.

17 Ibid., p. 98.

18 Dalziell, *Settler Romance and the Australian Girl*, p. 5.

19 “[Editorial],” *Sydney Herald*, 14 November 1838, p. 2. Although women may not have been so forthright in the press, Annie Baxter’s diary entry for Wednesday 24 January 1884 was equally indicting: ‘The blacks have been very troublesome for some days – they rob the corn most terribly – I gave the men some caps for their guns, and advised them to shoot quietly! – I shall be taken up for manslaughter – or aiding it’. Annie Maria Baxter, Diary Entry for 14 January 1844, Published on Australian National Corpus http://arms.gcloud.qcif.edu.au/corpora/cooeo/2-285-original. It should be noted that Baxter was to become much more amicable towards Indigenous people later on.
Endnotes (continued)

20 One of these settler actions was elaborated by Niel Black, a squatter in Glenormiston in Victoria’s Wester District, in 1840: ‘A few days since I found a grave into which about 20 [aborigines] must have been thrown. A settler taking up a new country is obliged to act towards them in this manner or abandon it’. Niel Black, “Letter to his Partner T.S. Gladstone in Scotland, 5 August 1840,” 1840.


22 Ibid. An example of a woman’s aggression and sense of entitlement in relation to such antagonism, though not in the public domain, can be seen in Annie Baxter’s journals. When her husband was away for a few weeks, some of their cattle were speared. Her immediate response was to arm herself and confront and threaten a group of the accused. When one of them asked why she was bearing arms she replied ‘[to] shoot him blackfellow, if he kill him cattle!’ Turning to leave, she ‘saw a spear coming towards me, so I waited for a second, and then put my head on the saddle pummel, and “whiz” it flew past me … It was a very narrow escape with my life, and it made me feel very revengeful at the treachery of the blacks’. Annie Baxter Dawbin, Memories of the Past: By a Lady in Australia (Melbourne: W.H. Williams, 1873), p. 83. Her attitude indicated no awareness that she was the first aggressor and no consideration that her cattle were ruining the Indigenous people’s waterholes, land and game.

23 Dale Spender wrote: ‘With the exception of Eliza Hamilton Dunlop’s “Letter to the Editor”, most letters … were of a private nature’. Spender, Writing a New World: Two Centuries of Australian Women Writers, p. 65.

24 An early exception connected to the colonies, although not published in an Australian newspaper, was Caroline Chisholm’s regular column on life in the colony, which she had been invited in 1846 to write for the Weekly Newspaper in London.

25 Catherine Helen Spence (1825–1910) wrote under a pseudonym ‘Voice from the Colony in South Australia’. In the late nineteenth century, Jessie Couvreur published many items in the Australasian under the pseudonym ‘Tasma’.

26 Clarke, Pen Portraits: Women Writers and Journalists in Nineteenth Century Australia.


29 Such as Mary Broome, Letters to Guy (London: Alexander Macmillan, 1885). Guy was Mary’s son, who was schooled in England while she followed her husband, Sir Frederick Broome, when he took up his post as Governor of Western Australia.

30 Such as Meredith, Notes and Sketches of New South Wales: During a Residence in that Colony from 1839 to 1844.


32 Dawbin, Memories of the Past: By a Lady in Australia.


34 For example, ibid. and Rosa Praed, Lady Bridget in the Never-Never Land: A Story of Australian Life (London: Pandora Press, 1987 (1915)).
Part One: Contextual Background

Endnotes (continued)


36 Ibid., p. 78.


40 Ellis Rowan, A Flower-Hunter in Queensland and New Zealand (London: John Murray, 1898).


43 Rowan, quoted in ibid., p. 102.


47 Sarah Porter, Alfred Dudley; or, the Australian Settlers (London: Harvey and Darton, 1830).


49 For elaboration on the use of primitive signifiers emphasising savagery and blackness as opposed to using human or civilised signifiers, see Torgovnick, Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives.

50 Rosa Caroline Praed (1851–1935) wrote forty-three novels between 1880 and 1916. She was the third child of Thomas Lodge Murray-Prior and his wife Matilda (née Harpur) at Bungroom in Queensland, where the nearest neighbour was about a day’s drive away. She grew up in the contact zone (in 1856, the family moved north to the furthest edge of settlement, at Hawkwood on the Auburn River) in close proximity to, and interacting daily with, Indigenous people. Belinda McKay accused Praed of fictionalising and sensationalising, concluding that, despite ‘some strong criticism [of Colonisation]’, her memoirs served to ‘exculpate the white colonists by demonstrating that they pitied civilization against savagery’. However, McKay noted an important distinction in Praed’s writing: that she wrote of incidents where ‘boundaries between the civilising world of the station and the savage world beyond it become blurred’. See Belinda McKay, “Writing From the Contact Zone: Fiction by Early Queensland Women,” Hecate: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Women’s Liberation, vol. 30, no. 2 (2004), p. 56. See also Grimshaw and Evans, “Colonial Women on Intercultural Frontiers: Rosa Campbell Praed, Mary Bundock and Katie Langloh,” pp. 79–95.


52 Rosa Campbell Praed, Fugitive Anne: A Romance of the Unexplored Bush (London: John Young, 1902).
Endnotes (continued)


55 McKay, “Writing From the Contact Zone: Fiction by Early Queensland Women,” p. 53.

56 Dalziell, *Settler Romance and the Australian Girl*, p. 45.


59 Hancock, “A Not So Innocent Vision: Re-visited the Literary Works of Ellen Liston, Jane Sarah Doudy and Myrtle Rose White (1838–1961).”

60 Jane Sarah Staines Doudy, *Growing Towards the Light* (Tennessee: Lightening Source, 2008 (1909)).


63 McKay, “Writing From the Contact Zone: Fiction by Early Queensland Women,” p. 68.

64 See also Standish, *Australia through Women’s Eyes*; McGuire, “The Legend of the Good Fella Missus.”

65 McKay, “Writing From the Contact Zone: Fiction by Early Queensland Women,” p. 68.

66 Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin’ up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism*.


68 See Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin’ up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism*, pp. 1–31; McKay, “Writing From the Contact Zone: Fiction by Early Queensland Women.”


Endnotes (continued)

75 A more extensive quote from the same letter detailed Walker’s concerns: ‘Their motions did not display
great agility; and, as far as gracefulness of the scene, it was of too shocking a nature, too unseemly – too
disgraceful to describe. Were not my duty concerned, my curiosity could never prevail on my sense of
delicacy, to visit a Corrobaraa [sic]. To a sensible and susceptible mind it is sufficient to say, they were
naked. For the sustenance of the indelicate I have no descriptive food … You would not be able to
accredit the assertion of the fact, did you not know its source, that a female, an English woman, should be
present at such an assembly as the above mentioned. Females, I am assured, are frequently at these
obscene assemblies’. Ibid.


77 For example, Elizabeth Carter, Newtonianism for Women (translated from Alagoretti’s Newtonianism
per le dame) (London, 1739); Sarah Trimmer, An Easy Introduction to the Knowledge of Nature, and
Reading the Holy Scriptures, Adapted to the Capacities of Children, 16th edn (London: F.C. and J.
Rivington, 1819 (1780)); Matthias Jakob Schleiden, Principles of Scientific Botany, trans. Edwin
Lankester (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1849 (1842)); Priscilla Wakefield,
Introduction to Botany: In a Series of Familiar Letters (Oxford University Press, 1807); Frances Arabella
Rowden, A Poetical Introduction to the Study of Botany (London: T. Bensley, 1801).


79 Christoph Christian Sturm, Reflections for Every Day in the Year on the Works of God and of His

80 Ibid., pp. 31–32. Charlotte Barton quoted Sturm on the title page of her 1841 book A Mother’s Offering
to Her Children: By a Lady, Long Resident in New South Wales (University of Sydney Library,


82 Priscilla Wakefield, Domestic Recreation, or, Dialogues Illustrative of Natural and Scientific Subjects


84 Clarke and Spender, Life Lines: Australian Women’s Letters and Diaries, 1788–1840, p. 204.

85 Skene wrote about the constant exchange between Britain and the colonies, as ‘settlers were as anxious
to obtain vegetables, cuttings of fruit trees and vines and familiar flowers as their relatives were to grow
plants from the new colony’. Judy Skene, “The Power of Naming: Women Botanical Collectors and the
p. 5.

86 Killing and stuffing animals were not as acceptable for women, although some, for example, Louisa
Atkinson and Isabella Dawson, did learn the arts of taxidermy.

Botany,” p. 5. The innuendo of eroticism in the plant world was in circulation in eighteenth-century
literature as allegories of sexual genitalia, such as those explicit in John Cleland, Fanny Hill: Memoirs of
a Woman of Pleasure (London: G. Senton, 1748).

88 Schleiden, Principles of Scientific Botany, p. 531.

89 Skene, “The Power of Naming: Women Botanical Collectors and the Contested Space of 19th Century
Botany,” p. 4.


91 Lieutenant Daws had given Elizabeth Macarthur some lessons in astronomy.
Endnotes (continued)


94 Women such as Georgiana Molloy from the regional areas of the Swan River Colony were ‘ironically both marginalised by their gender and status as amateurs, while being central to the quest to classify the flora of the new colony’. Ibid., p. 5.

95 Although many explorers had collected botanical material, their activities were generally localised and along the coast. Ibid., p. 2.

96 Ash Island is an important subtropical habitat for waterbirds and other wildlife, located in the estuary of the Hunter River. It was part of a land grant to Alexander Walker Scott, who settled there (part-time) in 1831, and it became his principal residence after he married Harriet Calcott in 1846. Although relatively isolated, it attracted many visitors, such as scientists, collectors and artists, including Conrad Martens, John and Elizabeth Gould and Ludwig Leichhardt.

97 Trained by their entomologist father, Alexander Walker Scott, the Scott sisters contributed greatly to the 100 watercolour plates in his Australian Lepidoptera and their Transformations: Drawn from the Life by Harriet and Helena Scott (London: John Van Voorst, 1864). Among their diaries is an 1862 handwritten catalogue, The Indigenous Botany of Ash Island, with illustrations and scientific descriptions of moths and butterflies.

98 Mangles was a cousin of Ellen Stirling, the wife of the Governor of the Swan River Colony, who wrote to Molloy and gave her an unsolicited gift of seeds, requesting that she collect seeds for Mangles in return. Molloy was known for her wonderful garden and ‘green thumb’, so it was not surprising that she quickly became an enthusiastic and proficient botanist.


101 For example, Edward Curr ‘sought the assistance of colonial governments and the press. Curr recruited a wider range of informants, including missionaries, government officials as well as pastoralists and stockmen’. Describing his project to the Argus newspaper in 1883, Curr wrote, ‘My collection comprises vocabularies of about 200 of our languages … approximately 300 contributors were ‘residents in the bush’. Samuel Furphy, Edward M. Curr and the Tide of History (Canberra: ANU e-press, 2013), p. 145.


103 “Occasional Notes,” West Australian, 24 July 1883. These advertisements were successful. In Western Australia, von Mueller recruited many collectors to his network, including Miss Irvine and Mrs MacHard of the Geographe Bay region; Miss Eaton, Miss Swell, Mrs Heal and Miss Adams of Avon Valley; Mrs Richards and the Brooks of Israelite Bay; and Georgiana Molloy and Mary Bull of the southern region.

104 See Olsen, Collecting Ladies: Ferdinand von Mueller and Women Botanical Artists. Skene argued, however, that the contribution of women settlers in Western Australia was problematic, and was seldom acknowledged. Skene, “The Power of Naming: Women Botanical Collectors and the Contested Space of 19th Century Botany,” p. 5.

Part One: Contextual Background

Endnotes (continued)

106 Ibid., p. 39.

107 Louisa Anne Meredith was another better-known writer who brought a scientific legacy to Australia’s fauna and flora. Although she ‘shifted the focus from the strange, exotic and inexplicable to the ordered and comprehensible’ in her writings about flora and fauna, this was not extended to her writings about Indigenous people. See Spender, Writing a New World: Two Centuries of Australian Women Writers, p. 71.


109 Hancock used Georgi-Findlay’s argument that women writers were never innocent but constitutive of the expansionist project, asserting their own control over Indigenous lands and peoples for their own ends. Georgi-Findlay, The Frontiers of Women’s Writing: Women’s Narratives and the Rhetoric of Westward Expansion, p. 291.


114 McKay, “Writing From the Contact Zone: Fiction by Early Queensland Women.”

115 Dalziell, “‘We Should Try, While There is Yet Time, to Gather All the Information Possible of a Race Fast Dying Out’: Unsettling Sympathetic Women.”

116 Praed, Lady Bridget in the Never-Never Land: A Story of Australian Life, p. 47. It was not until the Jindyworoback (a nationalistic Australian literary movement, active from the 1930s to around the 1950s, whose white members sought to promote Indigenous Australian ideas and customs, particularly in poetry) and the work of Katharine Susannah Prichard and the Durack sisters, that Aboriginal people were treated more comprehensively in literature.


118 Katharine Susannah Prichard, Coonardoo, Australian Classics (Sydney: HarperCollins Australia, 2012 (1929)).
Endnotes (continued)

PART TWO

Women in the Field
Chapter Five:

Natural Science and Scientific Knowledge Production:
Early Anecdotal Ethnography

Chapters Three and Four discussed the early settler women who wrote about Indigenous people, and the various genres they employed. Because feminist critics were the first to pay serious attention to this writing, my overview used their revisionist histories of nineteenth-century women’s texts as a way into this writing. At the same time, I argued that these revisionist histories were delimited by moral perspectives that tended to underestimate the achievements of these colonial women within the constraints of the time.

Important to my thesis is the analysis of women’s scientific writing. Because much of this occurred in the more personal genres of diaries and memoirs, and was often embedded in fiction, it was first necessary to locate the scientific research material within these overarching genres. Now, in Chapter Five, I undertake a focused examination of the scientific aspects of selected women’s writing, changing tack from looking at the feminist discourse on women’s writing and its limitations, to examining particular ethnographic texts, albeit within the parameters of feminist revisionist histories.

Charlotte Waring Barton (1796–1867)

Charlotte Waring Barton (Figure 5.2) was one of the first settler women to make a literary contribution of scientific general knowledge in the British colonies of Australia. Figure 5.1 shows the locations of Waring Barton, her daughter Louisa Atkinson and the Indigenous peoples with whom they interacted. Waring Barton’s writing first came to attention in 1841 with *A Mother’s Offering to Her Children: By a Lady, Long Resident in New South Wales*, now regarded as Australia’s first children’s book. It consisted of short stories about Australian history and contemporary events, natural science and Indigenous Australia. The *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* reported that, ‘though ostensibly an offering to children, adults might spend an hour much less agreeably than threading their way through its interesting pages’.
Figure 5.1
Locations and Language Groups for Charlotte Waring Barton and Louisa Atkinson.
According to John Foster, Ern Finnis and Maureen Nimon, ‘early references to Aborigines in Australian children’s fiction were negative, almost without exception’. Waring Barton’s book was a good example, they claimed, citing her recounting of ‘the terrible death’ of a Stirling Castle shipwreck survivor, ‘at the hands of ‘the inhuman savages [who] held his feet and legs in the fire’. Dismissing Waring Barton’s book as negative or racist, however, overlooks a wealth of interesting subtleties and textual complexity.

Racism in the early nineteenth century was endemic in Australian society, not just in its documents, public and private, but also in the thought patterns and worldview of settlers. Indeed, although Waring Barton’s book is now judged as overtly racist, in its time A Mother’s Offering was praised in the press for its noble moral instruction. The lack of conscience or shame evidenced by having young children speak in callous terms of Indigenous tragedy and suffering showed clearly what was acceptable guidance for young readers in the 1840s. If these standard racist perspectives of the day are not taken into account when evaluating the text, then to focus on such socially acceptable racism
neglects telling resistance to the dominant colonial view, even if expressed using more subtle nuances.

Although Charlotte’s early life prepared her well for scientific work, unforeseen and tragic events precipitated her writing. Thus to fully appreciate the context and achievement of her scientific study, we need first to be acquainted with certain aspects of her biography, particularly those that gave rise to her closer contact with Indigenous people. This reveals essential background for the textual analysis that follows.

Charlotte met the necessary prerequisites for women’s scientific endeavour in the nineteenth century, as discussed in the previous chapter: a good education and a genteel background. She was born in London in 1796, the third of four girls. Her father, Albert Waring, was a barrister and talented artist who owned a ‘grand house on the Thames’, where he kept his considerable art collection. Noted as a child prodigy, Charlotte could apparently read by the age of two. She was educated in languages, music, sewing and drawing, and upon completion of her formal education, had private lessons in Italian, French, music and drawing. She was instructed in painting by the English artist John Glover, then President of London’s Society of Painters in Water Colours. This painting skill would later prove useful to Charlotte in her ‘botanising excursions’. From the age of fifteen, Charlotte took up governessing for ‘families of wealth and standing’.

Upon Charlotte’s father’s death in 1826, his estate passed to her young half-brother, one of two children from her father’s second marriage. Soon after, at the age of thirty, Charlotte applied for a well-paid position as governess to the family of Hannibal Hawkins Macarthur, a pastoralist living in New South Wales. Harriet King, Macarthur’s sister-in-law, interviewed and hired Charlotte, commenting that she came ‘highly recommended’. But King soon became critical of Charlotte’s boldness and behaviour, as she had insisted on taking a first-class passage to Sydney. In a letter, King wrote, ‘She is very different from what she ought to be or we expected. We had not been 2 hours on board before I saw she was flirting with Mr Atkinson … she does not act with propriety’. Only ten days after setting sail on 19 September 1826, Charlotte became engaged to James Atkinson, one of New South Wales’ leading landowners and farmers, who was returning to Sydney, where he had settled in 1820. Atkinson and the thirty-one-year-old Charlotte were married on 29 September 1827 and they moved to Atkinson’s 2000 acre property, named ‘Oldbury’, at Sutton Forest, 85 miles south of Sydney (Figure 5.3).
The Atkinsons were well matched. They shared Protestant liberal ideals; they both had a passion for literature and natural science and were accomplished writers. There was, however, antipathy towards their marriage from Harriet King and Atkinson’s friend Alexander Berry, who owned a large neighbouring estate some 60 miles away at the mouth of the Shoalhaven River. King and Berry had questioned Charlotte’s suitability for Atkinson. At a time when women were usually married before they reached thirty, Charlotte’s age of thirty-one at the time of her wedding attested to her status as an undesirable woman. Additionally, Charlotte had worked as a governess, and although this form of employment was deemed acceptable in the mid-nineteenth century for those women who needed to work, salaried labour of any form was not considered appropriate for gentrified women. In a colony that was seeking to establish the values and virtues of civilisation, ‘a woman who needed to work for her living was excluded from the class of women for whom leisure was mandatory’. When Atkinson died in 1834, Berry’s disapproval of Charlotte would deepen.

Figure 5.3
Louisa Atkinson, Oldbury, c. 1855–72.
James Atkinson was well liked\textsuperscript{24} and wrote two useful and popular texts for prospective settlers: *An Account of the State of Agriculture and Grazing in New South Wales*\textsuperscript{25} of 1826 and *On the Expediency and Necessity of Encouraging Distilling and Brewing from Grain in New South Wales*,\textsuperscript{26} published in 1829. Both texts promoted the expansion of colonisation and agriculture in New South Wales and gave advice to prospective farmers for better adaptation to Australian conditions, including assurances that ‘the natives are peaceable and inoffensive and present no impediment to colonization’.\textsuperscript{27}

In June 1827 Atkinson was appointed as the local magistrate for Sutton Forest, where he mainly dealt with re-offending convicts.\textsuperscript{28} He also had dealings with the local Indigenous people, whom he had described in his 1826 publication as a ‘mild, cheerful, and inoffensive race’.\textsuperscript{29} Elizabeth Lawson argued that although Atkinson’s texts evidenced a ‘benign liberalism’,\textsuperscript{30} they displayed little recognition of the results of pastoral invasion for Indigenous people. Atkinson did not disparage Indigenous people but he did not understand the displacement caused by settler encroachment.

On 12 May 1828 Atkinson wrote to the Colonial Secretary, Alexander McLeay, about the circumstances of the local Gundungurra people, whom Atkinson called the Budjong Tribe:

Sir, … The Black Tribes in this district have greatly decreased in number within the last few years, and it is probable in a short time, will be nearly extinct; – When I was first acquainted with this country about 8 years since, the Sutton Forest Tribe consisted of at least 50 Men, Women and Children. They are now reduced to 18 … Blankets recommended to be given Eight … This Tribe, although one of the most docile and peaceable possible have never had any Slops given to them. The principal person among them is Thomas Errombee an elderly man of the most quiet inoffensive disposition, and greatly respected by his countrymen. I beg to recommend that a plate should be presented to him inscribed ‘Errombee Chief of the Budjong Tribe.’\textsuperscript{31}

Atkinson’s sympathetic letter was unusual for its time\textsuperscript{32} in that he expressed concern about the population decline of the Gundungurra people. He had voiced similar concerns two years earlier in his publication of 1826 where he wrote of intercultural hostilities, exonerating any Indigenous blame in disputes and stating that Indigenous
people, ‘unable to bear the continual ill treatment of the unprincipled herdsman and shepherds … who, in cases that have come within my own knowledge, have taken away their women by force, and otherwise wronged them … have at length been roused to revenge’.33

Lawson argued that Atkinson’s 1826 book allayed ‘possible settler fears of hostilities from blacks’,34 assuring readers that Indigenous people, ‘live among the settlers on terms of perfect amity and confidence’.35 ‘Thus his reportage and apparently sincere concern can seem, from today’s perspective, disingenuous. Atkinson’s lack of awareness about his own role in the displacement of Indigenous peoples through agricultural incursions was hardly surprising, for his writing pointed to some degree of regard for Indigenous people. Indeed, to deny this is to ignore the judgements of those people, who reciprocally held Atkinson in at least some degree of regard, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

Life on the Gundungurra lands was rewarding for the Atkinsons. In six years, they extended the size of their estate, built a grand home, and produced four children. In 1834, when their youngest child was only two months old, and when Atkinson was ‘at the height of his success as a leader of the community and as a farmer’,36 he took ill and died while travelling overland to an outlying property. Charlotte, in addition to caring for four children under the age of six, was left with the responsibility for three properties, staff, convicts, 3,000 sheep and 200 cattle.37 Her position was made considerably more dangerous and difficult by a spate of bushranger activity and lawlessness in the Sutton Forest district.

James Atkinson’s will named his friends Alexander Berry, John Coghill and Edward Wollstonecraft, along with Charlotte, as executors of his sizeable estate, a position that she was required to relinquish should she remarry.38 Charlotte survived the first eighteen months after Atkinson’s death with the help of an appointed overseer, George Barton. On 30 January 1836, after many robberies and constant ransacking of the estate by bushrangers, Charlotte was travelling with Barton to her sheep outstation at Belanglo, when they were held up at gunpoint. During the ordeal, Charlotte was violently threatened and she witnessed Barton being stripped of his upper garments, tied to a tree and viciously whipped, almost to death. The incident was reported in the Sydney Herald, with Charlotte’s attempts to prevent Barton from being further whipped being documented in detail.39
The fact that the widowed Charlotte had journeyed alone with Barton and had been involved in a bloody incident, replete with crude language, cast aspersions on her moral rectitude.\textsuperscript{40} The \textit{Sydney Herald} quoted one of the bushrangers, who told Charlotte that she too should be whipped, because ‘she allowed her men to be treated so very bad in her establishment’.\textsuperscript{41} Although Charlotte contested this allegation, the incident and its press coverage drew ‘comment and innuendo’\textsuperscript{42} about her vulnerability as a widow and about her independence and autonomy, which were perceived as unseemly for a lady. The bushranging incident, along with the fact that Charlotte’s honour had been called into question in the press, may well have been a factor in Charlotte’s decision to marry Barton, whom she knew to be a heavy drinker.\textsuperscript{43} After Barton’s traumatic incident he slid into mental derangement, his alcoholism worsened, and in 1854 he would be convicted of manslaughter.

After her marriage to Barton in March 1836, Charlotte Waring Barton was legally prevented from acting as custodian or trustee of the estate of her first husband, James Atkinson, which was subsequently leased to her second husband. Despite Barton’s lengthy bouts of intoxication and threats to her family, and in spite of the executors of Atkinson’s will acknowledging that Barton was ‘a useless idler who neglects his concerns’,\textsuperscript{44} they pressed her to ‘exert yourself and look well after him [Barton] … to prevent his making away with the property’.\textsuperscript{45} In December 1839, shortly after receiving this advice and in fear of Barton’s violent intoxicated rages, Waring Barton and her four children fled Oldbury, accompanied by an Indigenous guide and some servants. They travelled down the precipitous Meryla Pass (Figure 5.4) to the remote station Budgong, near the Shoalhaven River.\textsuperscript{46} Her departure prompted the executors to withdraw her allowance, thereby forcing her family into poverty. Waring Barton remained at Budgong for seven months and while there she raised some funds by selling furniture that she had earlier smuggled out of her home at Oldbury while Barton had been drunk. Nevertheless, she was forced to go into debt to support her children. These events were the catalyst for her writing of \textit{A Mother’s Offering}.\textsuperscript{47}

Although Budgong was only a rudimentary cattle outstation, it afforded Waring Barton refuge from Barton’s aggressions. At Budgong, Waring Barton was released from responsibility for workers, stock and her husband, while the need to become more self-reliant precipitated a more intimate relationship with her environment. As Bird suggested, settler women’s adaptation to their new surroundings was facilitated by domestic concerns that fostered ‘a closer relationship with that land. As the women
plant and milk, churn and sketch, they negotiate knowledge of the details and nature of the land, which is different from a typically masculine, imperialist, exploitative relationship with the landscape.’

Budgong had not been settled to the same degree as Sutton Forest had, and there were no white settlers in Waring Barton’s immediate vicinity. In this setting she had regular contact with her Indigenous neighbours. Some years later, Waring Barton’s daughter Louisa Atkinson recorded that some Gundungurra and Tharawal people were concerned and protective towards her mother, and she cited an occasion when Woomby, ‘commonly called Neddy’, visited:

‘Mrs –,’ he said … ‘you used to have a big house and plenty jumbucks (sheep); me bin say where they all gone?’ A reply that those who should have guarded the orphans’ property had abused their legal power, excited him to fury; with an oath he exclaimed, referring to one in question, ‘I’ll shoot him.’ ‘No, no; that will never do,’ was the alarmed reply. ‘Bail shoot? I see! make too much noise, I’ll spear him.’

Given Waring Barton’s background as a governess, and the ages of her children (ranging from four to ten), her time at Budgong provided an opportunity to focus on their education, not least in history and the natural sciences. Waring Barton later stated
that her ‘most anxious desire’ had been to ‘remove her children from [Barton’s] control and example and to devote herself to their moral and intellectual improvement’.\(^52\) While Waring Barton was at Budgong, the executors of her first husband’s estate terminated Barton’s lease and sold the remaining livestock. Barton was persuaded to leave Oldbury in 1840 and by July of that year Waring Barton briefly returned to Oldbury before moving to Double Bay in Sydney, so that her older children could attend school\(^53\) and she could obtain legal advice.

Soon after Waring Barton’s arrival in Sydney, relations between her and the executors of Atkinson’s will deteriorated.\(^54\) In spite of Waring Barton’s destitute circumstances, the executors continued to deny her access to her late husband’s wealth. Six years after Atkinson’s death, Waring Barton turned to the law in an attempt to force the executors to provide her with an allowance. On 1 September 1840, the case of *Atkinson Versus Barton and Others* was before the Equity Court, with a petition from Waring Barton to the Chief Justice, Sir James Dowling, which testified to her family’s ‘state of complete destitution’.\(^55\) The two trustees, Alexander Berry and John Coghill, blamed Waring Barton, along with her husband George Barton, for the decline of the properties. They also claimed that she was not a ‘fit and proper person to be the Guardian of the Infants … in consequence of [her] imprudent conduct’.\(^56\) During the proceedings, Barton claimed that his wife had ‘cohabited with Aboriginal men’.\(^57\) And, in a sworn statement submitted in 1841, Barton accused his wife of ‘improper and criminal intercourse with convict men and various other persons’.\(^58\) George Barton claimed that these events had occurred while his wife was overseeing the outstations, while Waring Barton alleged that she was obliged to supervise the stations since he was incapacitated.

Like Eliza Dunlop and Caroline Dexter, Waring Barton was penalised for not conforming to middle-class expectations of feminine respectability and servitude.\(^59\) The court’s first interim order ruled against her, but when Waring Barton’s appeal went before Sir James Dowling on 9 July 1841, he overturned the judgement, declaring:

> whatever assumed personal unfitness there might have been in Mrs. Barton to be the guardian of her infant children, that suggestion was without foundation, and all intention of separating her from her children was not only abandoned, but even a desire expressed that she should still have uncontrolled access to them.\(^60\)
In a case now regarded as a landmark for women’s rights, the judge acknowledged Waring Barton’s separation from Barton, confirmed that she should retain custody of her children and ruled that she be granted a small allowance from her first husband’s estate. Although Waring Barton was by now deeply in debt and impoverished, the ruling stated that she was to receive the allowance in quarterly instalments. In her destitute circumstances she appealed for a payment in advance, but was forced to wait several months for the first instalment to arrive.61

In an act of financial desperation, Waring Barton sent the manuscript of *A Mother’s Offering* to the publishers in time for the Christmas rush of 1841. In some ways the book was a shrewd public defence of its author’s feminine virtues, class and parenting capability, all of which had been denounced in the trials and questioned in the press.62 Her authorship cast her as an agent of righteous Christian morality and natural theology63 and, as such, a proponent of cultural colonialism ‘in which one system of knowledge erodes and ultimately supplants’64 prior systems (Figure 5.5).

![Image of A Mother’s Offering to Her Children](image)

Figure 5.5
Charlotte Waring Barton, *A Mother’s Offering to Her Children: by a Lady, Long Resident in New South Wales* (University of Sydney Library, 2003 (1841)).
A Mother’s Offering to Her Children

Just before Christmas 1841, Waring Barton was rewarded with positive reviews of her book. For example, in the *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* she was praised for her foray into educational scientific writing and for recording events from the colony’s short history. The reviewer commended the book as suitable for readers of all ages. A Mother’s Offering was widely advertised in the *Australian* and on 30 December 1841 the newspaper carried a review that read:

> We again call the attention of the public to an excellent little book entitled ‘A Mother’s offering by a lady.’ [sic] This is really a valuable work, upon the natural history of the colony … and is a credit to the colony in which it has been written and published. It forms a useful Christmas present from friends here to friends in England. We hope it will have the extensive circulation both here and at home which it so well merits.

*A Mother’s Offering* drew on an older English tradition of instructional dialogue between children and their tutor or parent. The book was structured around a series of dialogues between a mother, Mrs Saville, and her four children, Clara, Emma, Julius and Lucy, who sat by the fireside each evening and discussed a wide range of topics, such as station life, explorers and shipwrecks. A strong moral narrative was woven through these dialogues, which frequently took the form of a question and answer exchange between the children and their mother.

In her approach, Waring Barton successfully intuited the ‘broader imperial Zeitgeist of middle-class interest in science’. Although women’s writing was generally regarded as too sentimental and subjective for the purposes of scientific writing, in the mid-nineteenth century, more and more women were writing about science. In this vein, Waring Barton’s first story, ‘Extraordinary Sounds’, provided a scientific geological explanation for mysterious noises, which Mrs Saville attributed to activity occurring in underground caverns, gas explosions and geological movements. The book included chapters giving conchological details of shells, geographical information about Timor and volcanic caves in Europe, and Waring Barton wrote about fossils discovered on top of the Illawarra Range. She gave botanical details of Australian flora and fauna and recorded the Indigenous names of plants and plant foods.

Elizabeth Bohls, Sarah Mills and Susan Roberson argued that it was challenging for women to adopt an independent subject position in literature, that is, one
that exercised the privileged masculine authority of perceiver and mobile participant, as women were traditionally excluded from such agency in literature. In the nineteenth century, female authors frequently constructed their own subject positions and those of their female characters in a way that did not confront, though often complicated, Victorian beliefs and ideals about femininity. Roberson suggested that such compliance was regarded as a necessary prerequisite to success and led to many female writers and their writings ‘working within – not against – a male-dominate tradition’. As such, women’s scientific narratives were complicated by the interplay of different ideologies of domesticity and active knowledge making.

According to Roberson, one strategy that female authors deployed was to draw attention to their own feminine respectability by ‘linger[ing] over domestic scenes … in part assuring readers of their feminine gentility’. In the case of Waring Barton, ‘it is likely that the character of Mrs Saville represents the author’s projection of her own subjectivity as mother and story teller’. Indeed, given the opprobrium to which Waring Barton had been subjected by the press coverage of the preceding years, it seems highly probable that Mrs Saville’s motherliness and propriety, core qualities of mid-Victorian femininity, served to counter her alleged disrepute. A Mother’s Offering was published anonymously. This was not unusual for books penned by women but, in this instance, namelessness was one way of seeking to prevent the book from being tainted by its author’s sullied reputation. Additionally, anonymity underscored her feminine modesty and humility.

Female authors and their female characters were often self-deprecating, apologising for their shortcomings and devaluing their knowledge so as not to threaten gender hierarchy. These were devices Waring Barton employed in A Mother’s Offering; Mrs Saville frequently declared that she ‘can give no information on that subject, my dear’ and then immediately provided the required information. Before giving a scientific explanation of unexplained noises, Mrs Saville advised the children, ‘I can tell you some of the causes; but it would be presumptuous in [sic] me, with my contracted knowledge in these matters, to fix on any of them, as the actual causes of the noises we have been describing’. Mrs Saville was also careful to always attribute discoveries and opinion to learned men. Further, the frontispiece made clear that the information contained in the book provided a noble ‘opportunity to raise my thoughts to the Creator … who has given to earthly things, the power to please and cheer my soul’.

Waring Barton created an authoritative voice with relative confidence but within a
A Mother’s Offering opened with an intimate evening setting. Mrs Saville, epitomising an angel at the hearth, was ‘engaged at her needle’,83 watching over and educating her four children. This sentimental setting adhered to the notion of women as guardians of morality, their beneficent and refining presence influencing the minds and hearts of their cohabitants in order to uphold correct social values. One reviewer praised ‘the successful attempt by Mrs Barton to elevate the character of the rising generation of her adopted land by her excellent work, giv[ing] her a claim upon the public that entitles her to their best wishes and patronage’.84

In women’s public writing, a theme of their roles as civilising moral guides was important, particularly in maintaining their status above the commonly perceived low standing of women in Australian society. Mrs Saville made the intentions of her dialogues clear: ‘I am glad to hear you apply so well what you learn, my dear boy; for that is the use of all learning: to make us wiser and better’.85 The book was nonetheless not overly moralising in comparison to older, duller versions of instructional dialogue, such as Thomas Day’s The History of Sandford and Merton of 1826.86

Waring Barton broke free from the constraints of the instructional format by importing a refreshing immediacy, as well as including grisly tales of captivity and bushranging, dramas of cannibalism and gripping yarns of the colony’s early history. Brenda Niall described A Mother’s Offering as ‘a kind of documentary – a collection of facts and anecdotes within a fictional framework’.87 Waring Barton drew on current events and described the founding in 1838 of Port Essington in northern Australia, and she made much of the shipwrecks of the Stirling Castle in 1836 and the Charles Eton in 1834. As Chris Healy argued, shipwreck stories were vital to shaping settlers’ understandings of the possession of the Australian continent. Healy stated that, in the 1830s, ‘practically the entire European population of the colonies had personal experience of the fragile maritime links that sustained the Australian colonies and the possibility of shipwreck was a significant risk on any sea voyage’.88 One of Waring Barton’s stories, ‘Loss of the Stirling Castle’, was possibly the first literary reference to the well-known story of Eliza Fraser (Figure 5.6).89

Mrs. S.—What are to be the amusements of the evening?
Clara.—Could you favour us with the recital of something entertaining, Mamma?
Julius.—Of shipwreck, please Mamma?
Mrs. S.—You appear to take great interest in shipwrecks I think.

Emma.—We are very, very sorry for the poor people who suffer through them, Mamma; but it is very interesting to hear of so many things that occur in consequence, quite new to us, you know.

Mrs. S.—True my love. A very calamitous shipwreck occurred on this coast, to the north.

Julius.—What was the name of the ship Mamma?

Mrs. S.—The Stirling Castle.

Julius.—Who commanded it Mamma?

Mrs. S.—Captain Fraser.

Clara.—Julius let Mamma tell it without interrupting her so often …

With the predictable bias and racism of the day, the survivors’ fate echoed a Brothers Grimm fairy tale, with ‘the natives allowing them no other food, than the entrails of snakes, fish bones, and such like disgusting things; and treating them with great barbarity’. The moral of the Fraser tale, Waring Barton informed the reader, was the fleeting nature of earthly possessions and fortune, teaching us ‘never to despond; however painfully we may be situated’.

Critics of Waring Barton’s book focused on her matter-of-fact racist remarks about Indigenous people. For example, in the story ‘Wreck of the Charles Eaton’, the Fraser Islanders who killed the shipwreck survivors were discussed in the following manner:
Clara.—Were they cannibals, Mamma?

Mrs. S.—Yes, my dear. They ate the eyes and cheeks of the shipwrecked people. This they do with the idea that it increases their desire for the blood of the white people.

Clara.—What dreadful sanguinary creatures. It makes one shudder even to hear of it.93

In the preface, Waring Barton explained that her book’s ‘principal merit is the truth of the subjects narrated; the accounts of the melancholy shipwrecks being drawn from printed sources’.94 In pursuit of historical accuracy Waring Barton frequently drew on details reported in the newspapers.95 Hence, in ‘Wreck of the Charles Eaton’ she did not spare the gory details that had been reported in the press and she made much of the macabre details of the beheaded ‘remains of seventeen human bodies’.96 An exchange between Mrs Saville and Emma in ‘Joseph Forbes’ made clear that this was a book intended to convey truths:

Mrs. S.—You know mine are true narratives. I am not at liberty to invent …

Emma.—That makes me like to hear them so much, Mamma. I like to hear of things that really happened; they are always much more interesting than imaginary tales.97

Mills argued that women travel writers ‘struggle with “discourses of imperialism and femininity”, neither of which they could wholeheartedly adopt’, and this pulled them in different textual directions.98 Mills’ argument provided a useful way for thinking about Waring Barton’s position in relation to her gender and in the context of colonialism. Waring Barton’s use of a convincing feminine framework that positioned Mrs Saville as an ‘Angel in the House’99 posed no risk or threat to the ideals of femininity or masculinity. And yet, she spoke the ‘truth’, and in so doing adopted a position and mastery that were normally accorded to the masculine voice. Moreover, she relayed scientific truths and this granted her an objectivity normally attributed to masculine authority. In effect, Mrs Saville occupied two subject positions, one being the Angel in the House, who fulfilled her more passive maternal duty in the homely setting of fireside storytelling, the other having her speak with scientific authority, an authority that, in the mid-nineteenth century, was positioned in the realm of masculine knowledge. One male reviewer appeared to have been struck by Waring Barton’s ability to provide tales of morality while simultaneously conveying truths, and wrote that she had produced ‘a powerful auxiliary in inculcating true morality and profitable information’.100
Although *A Mother’s Offering* was the first children’s book published in Australia, and this no doubt contributed to its appeal, its popularity was probably also attributable to the fact that it contained early Australian colonial history, provided considerable information about Australia’s natural environment, reported on recent current affairs such as the Eliza Fraser episode, and spoke of Indigenous people. Across the full range of these subjects, Waring Barton was able to make ‘arcane or inaccessible knowledge public and accessible’. Further, she was reiterating images and metaphors of a burgeoning Australian culture in which, as Healy argued, the structural basis was ‘patriarchy, colonialism and nationalism’. Waring Barton’s endeavour then was complicit in ‘the naming, the representing, and the claiming’ of a new colony to a European perspective and possession.

‘Anecdotes of the Aborigines of New South Wales’

The final story in *A Mother’s Offering*, ‘Anecdotes of the Aborigines of New South Wales’, began with Mrs Saville saying, ‘Little Sally the black child has been accidentally killed’. Following the pleas of her children, Mrs Saville proceeded to give extensive background to this event in the form of a second narrative, that is, a story within a story, titled, ‘History of Nanny and Her Children’. Of the twelve stories, this story dealt the most comprehensively with interactions between Indigenous people and settlers. And, in keeping with the book’s pursuit of truth, the story referred to elements of contemporary life in New South Wales, including characters such as Governor Darling and places such as Sydney. Moreover, this story drew most closely on Waring Barton’s experiences and her relations with Indigenous people and she referenced geographic locations with which she was personally familiar. Wingelo, which is approximately 15 miles from Waring Barton’s Oldbury residence, was named as the setting for some of the events in the story, and other events were set in Bombarlowah, a neighbouring district.

Oldbury was situated on Gundungurra lands, and the neighbouring lands, including the site on which Waring Barton’s outstation Budgong was built, were those of the coastal Tharawal people. Waring Barton was familiar with both groups, who would occasionally camp on her properties. Thus, when Waring Barton wrote in ‘Anecdotes of the Aborigines of New South Wales’ that ‘One day when the tribe was encamped near the house … and Nanny and her child nearer than any of the rest’, she was relating her own life experiences. Similarly, when Mrs Saville exclaimed, ‘Surely
Clara and Emma you must remember Nanny coming occasionally, with other blacks?’. Waring Barton was drawing on her past. This also established from the outset her congenial intercultural relations, as many settlers would not let Indigenous people camp near them or inside their paddock fences. Further, Mrs Saville spoke of ‘the grave on the side of our hill, [which] must have been made at least 23 years ago; and yet the carving in many of the trees is quite visible’. Here, Waring Barton was referring to the Aboriginal burial mound that was on Mount Gingenbullen on the Oldbury estate, which she and her daughter visited. (Figure 5.7).

Waring Barton’s reference to the ceremonial carvings and the burial mound was one of many ethnographical observations permeating this story. She described with accuracy several mortuary customs and rituals, including burying personal possessions with the deceased and the taboo of uttering the name of the deceased. While information about funerary practices appeared throughout the story, one particular passage is worth quoting at length as it attested to Waring Barton’s detailed knowledge about Indigenous cultural practices:

She then went to look for its mother; she soon found her, sitting with her chin resting between her knees; crouching before a fire: another woman sat near her; who was (according to their ideas on the subject) endeavouring to draw away the pain her friend felt. This was done, by laying a string across the body of the sick woman, where the pain was most violent; the other end was held by her friend; who kept drawing it across her lips, till they were sadly cut; and bled very profusely: while she was doing this, she kept up a mournful monotonous chaunt. The cottager left her to prepare some tea; she returned with it in about a quarter of an hour; when she found the woman was dead; and several black women were preparing her body for interment. They tied her knees to her chest; and her arms to her sides; by passing strips of stringy bark round her. A hole was then dug; and she was put into it; and her dead baby by her side.
While there was no direct evidence of Waring Barton attending an Indigenous funeral, her attention to detail on cultural protocols hinted at the possibility that she was drawing on knowledge that she had obtained first-hand. Irrespective of how Waring Barton learnt of these practices, the above passage, along with other ethnographic information in ‘Anecdotes of the Aborigines of New South Wales’, spoke of her deep interest in Indigenous culture.

In her essay ‘Travelers’ Tales: Observations on the Travel Book and Ethnography’, Valerie Wheeler distinguished between the ambitions of travel writers and those of ethnographists. She suggested that travel writers were inclined to report on that which they regarded as strange, peculiar and fantastical; these served, by means of contrast, to reaffirm the ordinariness and normalcy of the writer’s values. Ethnographists, she suggested, were more inclined to ascertain factual details and context, thereby allowing the strange and peculiar to be rationalised and explained. According to Wheeler, travel writers were thus more inclined towards making moral judgements, while ethnographists aspired to moral assessment and reasoning by way of context. While Waring Barton did provide information that was fanciful and bizarre, there was, throughout this story, a strong sense that she was seeking ethnographic accuracy. As Waring Barton had her character Mrs Saville say, ‘I have taken a great
deal of pains to question both parents and children’. And Mrs Saville revealed a
cconcern with establishing a cultural context for certain practices. For instance, Clara
noted that Aboriginal children did not develop milk teeth; Mrs Saville confirmed that
this was true and noted that, ‘This may account for the large size of their babies’ teeth:
which we have thought so extraordinary’. In contrast to such fanciful notions,
elsewhere she avoided moral judgement and provided reasons for behaviours. In
commenting on the observation that Indigenous children were sometimes not weaned
until they were four or more years old, Mrs Saville suggested that this may have been
due to ‘the uncertainty and difficulty in procuring proper food’.

Waring Barton’s intention may in fact have been to counter contemporary moral
judgements with contextual scientific reasoning; again there appeared to be evidence of
knowledge gained from observation, when Mrs Saville spoke of the Indigenous practice
of ‘rubbing themselves with the fat of the animals which they kill’. For Indigenous
people this practice not only provided warmth but increased their attractiveness or
healthy appearance by nourishing their skin and giving it a shine.

Because of the racist oppositioning of settler and Indigenous people, there was a
tendency for critics to focus on particular objectionable phrases, isolated out of context,
and to arrive at a reductive interpretation. In Clare Bradford’s article on A Mother’s
Offering, one of her subheadings was ‘“How Droll They Look”: The Indigene as Child’.
Bradford discussed the following exchange between Julius and Lucy:

**Julius.**—The Natives find the Bangalee very useful. You know their little
baskets are bits of bark of the Bangalee, tied up at each end; and their canoes
are just the same, only larger.

**Lucy.**—How droll they look paddling along so fast. Their little oars look
like fishes’ fins.

Bradford argued that the repetition of the term ‘little’, the phrase ‘how droll they
look’ and the implication of the canoes as playthings all positioned Indigenous people
as children and that ‘most of all, the implied distance’ between Julius and Lucy and the
Indigenous people, ‘contrasts mature white children and child-like black adults for
whom life is play’. In the context of Waring Barton’s real life experiences of her own
children (James and Louisa) watching Indigenous people on the Shoalhaven River, it
was unlikely that they would have dismissed Indigenous people as ‘childish’. One of the
men who fished from Bangalee canoes had saved their father’s life and was a revered
leader of the Tharawal people, who were their neighbours. There was evidence of
Louisa’s respect (referred to later in this chapter) for these same Indigenous individuals, that is, those who fished along the river.

Although I agree with Bradford’s conclusion that *A Mother’s Offering* instructed its readers in ‘how to view the imperial project in which their elders are engaged’, there were significant complexities to *A Mother’s Offering* that, when overlooked or ignored, detract from a careful evaluation of the work, the author and especially the possible influence of the Indigenous people who interacted with Waring Barton. Julius considered the Bangalee a noteworthy Indigenous resource. It is possible that he may well have considered it clever as well as ‘useful’ to apply the same bark material of the Bangalee, and its Indigenous design used for ‘little’ baskets, to their canoes. The term ‘little’ to describe the baskets seems an appropriate contrast to the ‘larger’ canoes. The Indigenous oars used were smaller and more fin-like than the long, broad, European oars used on lifeboats and rowing boats of the day. And it was the motion of their distinctive whirling or ‘fast’ paddling that was described as ‘droll’, not the Indigenous people themselves.

Bradford’s great emphasis on the ‘implied distance’ seems odd when referring to early to mid-nineteenth-century Australia, when of course difference between Indigenous people and white settlers was a given. This is not to refute that Indigenous people were perceived as childlike, but rather to draw attention to the more reductive conclusion that Bradford contended: Waring Barton’s ‘sensation stories … seek to demonstrate that Aborigines are indeed disorderly children in need of the discipline of imperial rule, and that they are incapable of properly managing the land in which they live’.

Waring Barton’s descriptions of Indigenous people and their customs stood in sharp contrast to those of her contemporaries. Consider, for example, the following extract from Louisa Ann Meredith’s writings of 1844: ‘The sable picanninies [*sic*] were naked, long-armed, large stomached, little bodies, giving one the idea of a new sort of spider; I never had seen a black child before, and did not see enough of them then to familiarise me with the novelty’. These words were written while Meredith was travelling through Bathurst, New South Wales, and in ascribing beastly, freakish qualities to the children she rendered them subhuman. Unlike Waring Barton, who inhabited the country that she was writing about, Meredith’s relationship with country and people was transient; hers was a fleeting gaze – in effect the gaze of a tourist. Waring Barton wrote about Indigenous people whom she knew personally and about
cultural practices that she had witnessed, so her writings did not position Indigenous
people as incommensurably ‘other’ to the same the degree as Meredith’s. This context is
highly significant to a fair evaluation of Waring Barton’s writing.

Nonetheless, Indigenous subject matter certainly gave women like Waring Barton
and Meredith ‘not just a subject but also a momentary scientific status they were not
granted in Britain’.124 In ‘Anecdotes of Aborigines of New South Wales’, Waring
Barton’s authority and credibility were vulnerable because she spoke from her own
experience with no direct reference to male opinion, as was evident in Meredith’s
writing, where she attributed much of the information about Indigenous people,
particularly an account of a corroboree, to her husband’s observations.125 (It is
interesting to speculate that Meredith could hardly have reported witnessing
corroborees, since to do so might have called into question her moral standing; thus her
husband’s gaze was required for the sighting and reporting of naked Aboriginal men.)
Information framed according to conventional binary contrasts between Indigenous and
European people affirmed Meredith’s and Waring Barton’s legitimacy as authorities of
civility and, in Waring Barton’s case, Lawson noted its ‘embarrassingly racist
prejudice’.126

In ‘Anecdotes of the Aborigines of New South Wales’, Mrs Saville told a second
story, ‘History of Nanny and her Children’. Waring Barton presented a respectable
feminine choice of subject, a maternal narrative, and an acceptable moral one, by way
of Nanny’s ‘deplorable end through giving way to unrestrained passions’.127 At the same
time, the narrative offered an opportunity to shore up Waring Barton’s own identity
through difference and a discussion of a white woman’s civilising role. Given her
husband’s allegations that Waring Barton had cohabited with convicts and Aborigines –
a moral as well as a racial transgression – it would have been unwise to write about
Indigenous men.

The narrative began with the accidental death of one of Nanny’s children, Sally.
From the outset, Waring Barton pitched her representation as realistic and sensible.
Unlike the homogenous characteristics that Charles Griffith ascribed to New South
Wales Indigenous peoples, whom he asserted ‘are, with few exceptions; very ugly …
villainous … and ill-formed’,128 Nanny was an Indigenous woman, described as
‘a remarkably fine, well-formed young woman’ rather than as a ‘gin’ or ‘lubra’, which
were more customary terms at the time. Similarly, Nanny’s ‘little Sally’ was described
as pretty, and as an ‘interesting child; with large black eyes, black curling hair, a
pleasant laughing countenance, fat, [who] had all the appearance of being happy’.129 From the beginning, Waring Barton’s subjects were more fully formed as human characters than was the case in Meredith’s writing, and they inhabited a shared contemporary space, rather than being anachronistically primitivised by positioning them as Stone Age people.

Mrs S.—Surely Clara and Emma you must remember Nanny coming occasionally, with other blacks? The last time I saw her she had this same little Sally with her; who could just then run alone.

Clara.—Oh yes, Mamma! …

Emma.—And I remember we asked you to give her a little frock: but before you could get one they were gone.

Intended acts of charity aside (there were two references to giving clothes and to administering medicinal help), the narrative continued with a local settler, ‘Jane D ... ... n’, who, having recently lost her own child, took ‘a fancy to little Sally ... a half-caste or brown child’. Nanny ‘agreed to leave the child: as soon as it was weaned’.130 Such an act distinguished Nanny from Mrs Saville and Waring Barton’s own maternal devotion. What followed is worth elaborating here for its display of moral superiority.

After some initial distress, Sally adjusted to her new carers but, when the ‘tribe’ visited again, Nanny rejected Sally’s joyful rush of recognition and ‘whipt her severely, and left her’. In this instance, Waring Barton judged Nanny an ‘unnatural mother’.131 Emma responded to the news of the whipping by exclaiming, ‘Oh! Mamma, this is too shocking! … I wish you had taken it [Sally] from such a bad mother’.132 Keeping in mind Waring Barton’s immediate circumstances and her longstanding custodial battle that saw her accused of being an unfit mother, Mrs Saville and Waring Barton herself were, by implication, positioned as good mothers. But the opposition between good and bad mother, an opposition that was ‘fundamental to imperial discourse, between white and black, civilised and savage’,133 was not so straightforward, since a few lines later, Mrs Saville declared that Nanny ‘was not in many respects a bad mother’.134 This latter declaration was at odds with contemporary thought, which proffered Indigenous women as ‘cruel mother[s], heedless of the voice of conscience which prompts her to love her innocent offspring’.135 Again, Mrs Saville adopted an ethnographic approach by seeking to make, at least to the colonial reader, the inexplicable explicable, when she suggested of Sally that ‘Perhaps her mother considered that she was better situated with Jane, than
she could be wandering about the forests, in search of precarious food. You know at the best, the women and children are badly off'.

As if in confirmation of Mrs Saville’s judgement that Indigenous women and children were ‘badly off’, Nanny was murdered by her half-brother, Woombi, who ‘threw a spear after her; which entered the back of her neck’. This incident provided further evidence of unrefined and unnatural behaviour and was given greater emphasis by the fact that these brutalities were occurring in a familial setting. Mrs Saville’s focus on practices that were deemed unnatural, which was given discursive weight when Clara declared, ‘it seems unnatural for a mother to part with her child’, conferred an order of naturalness and respectability on Mrs Saville and her children and, by extension, on white colonial readers, a position that was entirely dependent on the devaluation of non-whites.

Although a dualistic framework structured much of Mrs Saville’s narrative, the oppositions between, for example, natural and unnatural, refined and unrefined, civility and savagery, were frequently punctuated by writing that testified to a shared humanity. For example, Sally was described as ‘uttering the most piercing coo-ee-es [sic] imaginable’ as she desperately called to her mother. To this, Lucy retorted, ‘Oh! Mamma that is just what I should do, if I lost you: cry as loud as ever I could; and be so very, very sorry!’ This declaration that Lucy and Sally had an emotional affinity pointed to commonalities between them. A sense of emotional alignment between the Indigenous and settler characters and the attribution of fully-fledged human emotions and values to characters such as Nanny and Sally was hinted at elsewhere. Nanny was described as being ‘very fond and proud of her little George’, and she ‘shewed she wished to keep her little boy clean’. Her children ‘bore evident signs of her affection and care’, and she was described as being ‘in extasies’ [sic] and as ‘very much ashamed’. Sally was described variously as ‘naturally much distressed’, as ‘lamenting her deserted state’, as having a ‘pleasant laughing countenance’ and as ‘being happy’. Secondary Indigenous characters conveyed ‘regret and sympathy’, and were described as being ‘surprised and effected’ and as ‘very kind parents’. These were hardly the typical descriptions or qualities of people who, between the 1820s and 1840s, were more customarily ascribed regressive animalian characteristics and behaviours as, for example, the *Sydney Morning Herald* did in 1838 when it published a letter to the editor that asserted:
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these hordes of Aboriginal cannibals, to whom the veriest reptile that crawls
the earth holds out matter for emulation, and who are far, very far, below the
meanest brute in rationality, and every feeling pertaining thereto ... they can
only be classed in the order of creation, as the first great link, which
connects in its chain man with the brute.¹⁴⁸

The writer even claimed that, as a ‘Grazier on the Murrumbidgee’, he was an
authority on Indigenous people, believing ‘their manners differ as little as their language
– and one tribe is a specimen of all – cannibals of the most revolting characters they are
all – they make no secret of it – their wives and children as often become a prey to
cannibalism in the tribe to which they belong as to another’.¹⁴⁹ A few years later, in
1844, Charles Griffith wrote of Indigenous women and children of New South Wales:
‘their hands, arms, feet, and legs being more like the paws and claws of lower animals
than the limbs of Christians … The children are like little pot-bellied cherubims, made
of India rubber, and are rather nice-looking little animals’.¹⁵⁰

In comparison to these contemporaneous views, Waring Barton endowed the
Indigenous people of New South Wales with a humanity that was rarely acknowledged
by others. Even as late as 1910 the amateur anthropologist John Mathew’s description
of a group of Indigenous people hunting was more reminiscent of admiring the comical
antics of meerkats:¹⁵¹

They were fitted to their country like the kangaroo and the emu, the platypus
and barramundi. Man generally seems to stand outside and above Nature, but
they were decidedly a part of it. To see a large squad of them on the march
in single file, or bounding along – the hillside and shouting – in the
excitement of the kangaroo hunt, was quite a treat.¹⁵²

This is not to suggest that Waring Barton did not subscribe to the racist views or
stereotypes of her day, for clearly she did, but the positions of her subjects were less
fixed and less rigidly locked into a dichotomous framework than was the case in the
writings of Charles Griffith or the later writings of Mathews. Additionally, Waring
Barton’s characters were portrayed within the realm of culture, rather than being
relegated entirely to the realm of nature. They engaged in intercultural relationships,
they camped close to Mrs Saville’s home and shared a contemporary domestic space of
motherhood, rather than being displaced beyond the boundaries of the property.
While ‘Anecdotes of the Aborigines of New South Wales’ largely addressed contrasts rather than commonalities, occasional significant passages reached across the cultural divide. For example, Waring Barton wrote about Jane’s deep cross-cultural attachment and grief over Sally’s accidental death:

for the last few years her love for the child, who was very docile and affectionate, had quite overbalanced any trouble she might have had with her; and she found her a great comfort … her husband ran immediately for Dr. A., who told me the man was as much distressed, as if it had been his own child.154

Clara, one of Mrs Saville’s children, mentioned to her mother the ‘little boy, who[m] his parents wish you to take’.155 Towards the end of the narrative, Mrs Saville revealed that Nanny’s half-brother had murdered her because he was infuriated about her choosing to partner with white men. Mrs Saville recounted Nanny’s relationship with a neighbouring white overseer, explaining that he was ‘very anxious to marry her: but Governor Darling would not allow it’.156 Nonetheless, they had a son, George. This passage provided an opportunity for Mrs Saville’s portrayal of Nanny’s ‘natural’ affection for her child157 and the boy’s apparently successful assimilation into white culture; George attended school in Sydney, he then worked for his father as a shepherd, and had ‘sheep and cattle of his own’.158 These were the attributes of a ‘civilised’ work ethic and showed George as capable of entering the circuit of economic exchange.

Throughout Waring Barton’s recounting of the tragic fate of Indigenous women and children she oscillated between humane and deprecating commentary. While Nanny was initially judged an unnatural mother, Waring Barton later attributed to Nanny some of the same signs of white civility and refined femininity she had earlier attributed to Jane. She wrote that ‘Nanny was very fond and proud of her little George, before he went to school she used to wash him and comb his hair; which was light and curly … and shewed [sic] she wished to keep her little boy clean’.159 Of Jane she wrote: ‘Jane treated her adopted child very kindly, and tenderly; dressed it well; and kept it very clean’.160 Notwithstanding that the comb ‘had probably been used to comb a horses [sic] mane’, the emphasis here on cleanliness functioned as a marker of maternal care and propriety. Despite Nanny’s emulation of European conventions of grooming and her momentary elevation to the status of ‘good mother’, the next scene immediately unsettled her position. In an effort to wean her son, George, ‘Nanny had bitten the child
severely on the back of his arm’.161 Lucy responded, ‘that is just what pussy does’ and Mrs Saville agreed, commenting, ‘It reminded me of a cat Lucy; and I felt quite disgusted with Nanny: but upon the whole her children bore evident signs of her affection and care’.162 Over the course of these two scenes, Nanny’s subject position vacillated between being suitably civilised or succumbing to savagery.

The final sentence of the above scene suggested that Mrs Saville was disgusted by unrefined conduct and improper behaviour. It was the failure to adhere to conventional codes of conduct that caused affront, rather than it necessarily being Nanny’s Aboriginality itself. All characters in the book, black and white alike, were judged by behaviours informed by Christian values. After all, as Anne McClintock asserted, ‘the bounds of empire could be secured and upheld only by proper domestic discipline and decorum, sexual probity and moral sanitation’.163 Towards the end of ‘Anecdotes of the Aborigines of New South Wales’, Mrs Saville’s son Julius asked why Sally was not buried in the church yard. Mrs Saville responded matter-of-factly: ‘She was not a Christian, my dear’.164 Any suggestion that Sally’s position as heathen was linked only to her Indigeneity was quickly eclipsed when Mrs Saville cast aspersions on her adoptive white mother, Jane:

> Jane had neglected to have her christened; though she told me she had intended it. Another melancholy instance of procrastination. Oh! my children! how very, very fatal is this habit of putting off from day to day, what should be done immediately; for we know not the day, nor the hour, when time may cease for us; and we be summoned into eternity. Let us, dear children, endeavour to profit by the frequent warnings we have, of the uncertainty of life.165 [italics in original]

Rather than reiterating the common opinions of native laziness,166 Waring Barton accused Jane of abrogating her Christian duty. Mrs Saville clearly considered that moral choice, responsibility and potential salvation were open to all.167 In this regard, ‘Anecdotes of the Aborigines of New South Wales’ was a morality tale about the consequences of unrestrained passions and social failings, including procrastination.

Waring Barton boldly used her instructional narrative to address pressing colonial issues of public and ethnological interest, including intercultural engagement, miscegenation, the potential of mixed-heritage children to be assimilated, and settler women’s civilising capacity. But unlike other early ethnography aspiring for scientific
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legitimacy, these topics were not limited to voyeuristic and detached descriptions, suspending generic subjects in an anachronistic world. Waring Barton’s ethnography was a little more coextensive, set in intersubjective time – clearly, intercultural dealings were significant to her. We know that in her own life Waring Barton was struggling to retain custody of, and feed, her own children. She must surely have understood from her own experiences the pressures imposed on her character, Nanny, for both struggled to provide sustenance for their children and both were pressured to relinquish them.

What was unique about Waring Barton’s narrative was that she bestowed an individual Indigenous woman with a history. She provided a rare cameo, however limited and sketchy, of a Gundungurra or perhaps Tharawal woman in the 1830s. Nanny was not portrayed only as a disempowered, primitive, childlike servant or as a representative, timeless other, but also as a sociable, independent woman making her own choices and engaging with the sweeping changes of invasion and colonisation. This representation acknowledged an attempt, albeit a very limited one, to record a little of the real life story of Nanny and her children. Nanny’s son, George, recognised and supported by his white father, inherited the prospect of an autonomous future.

‘Anecdotes of the Aborigines of New South Wales’ contained racist commentary and nineteenth-century attitudes of assumed superiority, but also gave an Indigenous character a central role and a certain level of agency. The Gundungurra and Tharawal freely came and went of their own choosing. It appeared that Nanny made her own decisions about her partners and her children. She did, after all, show a preparedness to incur the wrath of ‘the blacks’ who had ‘a great objection to their women living among white people’. A genuine relationship was implied by the fact that George’s father approached the governor for permission to marry Nanny. This focus on relating and motherhood framed Indigenous women as located in contemporaneous time, engaging with modernity, as ‘wives and mothers like ourselves’, rather than as ‘other’. These were Indigenous people with whom Waring Barton had some level of recurring engagement, and their representation lacked the fear and othering of many of her contemporaries.

Another passage attested not only to the longstanding nature of these intercultural relationships and family connections, but also sensitively to an Indigenous woman’s gentle remonstration and instruction, which Waring Barton heeded:
The tribe belonging to the neighbourhood where our property is situated, were very much attached to your dear lamented father … they were giving me to understand, the regret and sympathy they felt at his loss. I had the locket with me at the time, which has a lock of all our hair in it. I showed this to them, pointing out his (to us) much valued brown curl; when they uttered a piercing cry; and all turned away; holding down their heads a short time: when they looked up I saw they were in tears. One of the women stepped aside; and whispered to me ‘Bail you show that to blacks ebber [sic] any more missus.’ This of course I promised to refrain from. I was much surprised and effected [sic] at their manner; having wished to give them pleasure. It was six years after our bereavement.

This remarkable passage unsettled the reductive judgements that ‘History of Nanny and her Children’ simply instructed ‘how to view black female sexuality’ (that is, as promiscuous, primitive and dangerous) and sought to legitimise colonisation by representing Aborigines as unredeemed and ignorant children, incapable of acting as good parents. With its emphasis on cross-cultural relationships, this passage recorded the Indigenous peoples’ desire to offer their condolences, shared sorrow and tears for the loss of Waring Barton’s husband, whom they had cared about, while also revealing Waring Barton’s own desire to share her most precious keepsake for their pleasure. There was a lot more to ‘Anecdotes of the Aborigines of New South Wales’ than a demeaning portrayal of inferior others, written in order to legitimise colonisation.

Waring Barton’s ethnography was anecdotal but it also stood as a significant early contribution to empirical knowledge about Indigenous culture. For example, in ‘Extraordinary Sounds’, her botanical description of the local Indigenous food staple, the Zunica palm, was vivid and informative. Mrs Saville explained that the nuts, although poisonous, were prepared by the Indigenous people to use as food, and asked Clara to ‘oblige us with a thorough description of their mode of preparing them’:

Clara.—They roast the nuts, which removes the husks, and then place them on flat stones in which they have hollowed out places to receive them, and pound them with round stones, this cracks the shells, which are not thick, or it removes them as may happen; it also bruises or cracks the nuts; they next place them on bundles of coarse grass, and put them in a running stream for twenty-four hours, this removes the poison and renders them a wholesome and palatable food.
It was notable that in naming the Zunica palm, which grows on Budgong country, Waring Barton also provided its Indigenous nomenclature, the *burrawang*.

Unlike many of the other stories in *A Mother’s Offering*, ‘Anecdotes of the Aborigines of New South Wales’ drew on Waring Barton’s experiences. With an apparent lack of misgiving about her own incursion into Gundungurra land, she narrated the gathering at Oldbury of ‘200 blacks on our estate: they were assembling to fight; and we found it a great nuisance … and the men found it almost impossible to continue their ploughing’ (Figure 5.8).

![Figure 5.8](image)

*Figure 5.8*

*Joseph Lycett, Contest with Spears, Shields and Clubs, c. 1817.*

In spite of the ‘great nuisance’, Waring Barton was genuinely concerned to represent the co-presence of Gundungurra and Tharawal with accuracy and humanity. This could be seen not only in her portrayal of Gundungurra and Tharawal as relatively full subjects and individuals, but also in her accounts of their cultural practices and beliefs, intercultural engagements and, at times, through her display of a comparative level of respect.177

Indigenous people figured large in Waring Barton’s adult life, and in her most ostracised and isolated years she found them kind and protective.
Ahead of her Time

To judge Waring Barton’s *A Mother’s Offering* simply as a negative and ethnocentric portrayal of Indigenous people misses important subtleties and the constraints under which female authors worked in the nineteenth century. It is probable that Waring Barton took at least some of the content about ‘monstrous savages’ and some distasteful mockery178 from newspaper reports, and used this reportage to legitimise her voice among her contemporaries. For instance, her ethnocentric remarks about the Raffles Bay people on the Cobourg Peninsula in Northern Australia conformed to nineteenth-century thinking about evolutionary hierarchies, and assisted in establishing her scientific authority, at a time when it was widely believed that Islanders and Maoris were superior to mainland and Tasmanian Indigenous people:

The impression received of the natives of Raffles Bay in general, was very unfavourable. They appeared to have little intellect, courage, or gratitude: while their habits were very disgusting. They were greatly inferior to the inhabitants of Murray’s, or even the ferocious Darnley, islanders.179

What many critics did not seem to consider was that, for many members of the public in the nineteenth century, even evolutionary theory was progressive when compared to biblical chronology and ‘the theory of degradation’, in which savagery was deemed a fall from grace and incomparable to the human state, not simply an earlier stage of shared progression. In the subsequent pages, Waring Barton also described incidents of great Indigenous compassion and skill, demonstrated by ‘inoffensive friendly’ Larrakia people helping lost Europeans.180

A more careful reading of Waring Barton’s book reveals contradictions and complexities that show the discrepancies between her education, her reading and her experiences. I argue that she did not try to repress any of these in favour of one, but tried to maintain them simultaneously, an ambivalence governed by an overriding morality.

While most settlers in the first half of the nineteenth century considered themselves subjects of the British Empire, and made many of their observations with nostalgic references to England, Waring Barton appeared to have been captivated by the indigeneity of place: localised plants, inhabitants and history. She was one of the first women to anticipate, even articulate – however unconsciously – an early discourse of
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Australian identity which, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, would begin to shape the politics of the Australian colonies. The Australian Natives Association (formed in 1872 by Australian-born colonists) and the Royal Society of Victoria (founded 1854) were two of the associations that came to support this view, in particular the desire for ‘useful’ scientific knowledge about the colonies and their Indigenous peoples, flora, fauna, geology and geography.181

Debra Adelaide stated that ‘until after the middle of the nineteenth century Australian literature was usually much disdained, said hardly to exist’.182 Even modern historians overlooked Waring Barton’s instructive text because of its apparent format as a children’s book. This structure, however, allowed her to say things that would have been difficult in a strictly scientific text. The book was also a type of metaphor, patently addressed to the new colony as a ‘child of empire’, and this is how it was received and why it was taken seriously in its day. It showed that colonial life extended beyond a male world of shipwrecks, bushranging and exploring, to include the domestic sphere and intercultural relating.

Louisa Atkinson (1834–1872)

Caroline Louisa Waring Atkinson, best known as Louisa Atkinson (Figure 5.9) was the youngest of Charlotte Waring Barton’s four children, born at Oldbury in 1834. She was to become a highly regarded naturalist and one of Australia’s earliest conservationists. She spoke out against the destruction of the forests and wildlife, and argued for the replanting of fauna and the establishment of sanctuaries for native animals. Like her mother, Louisa was a popular writer.

The first Australian-born woman to publish a novel (in 1857)183 and the first woman journalist to publish a long-running series in the press,184 Atkinson in her fiction and scientific writing projected a distinctively colonial identity that, following her mother’s inclination, prepared the way for a national literature. As well, Atkinson’s writing shared her mother’s informative and vivid descriptions, her moralising, her amelioration of negative judgements, and an ambivalent racism.

As a child and throughout her life, Louisa suffered from tuberculosis. The sudden death of her father in 1834, when she was two months old, and the ensuing tumultuous years must have affected her greatly. Unlike her siblings, who attended school, Atkinson was educated at home by her mother, due to her ill health.185 Some time in 1846 or 1847 the family returned to Oldbury, which by then was in a state of
disrepair.\textsuperscript{186} For the next twenty years, until Waring Barton’s death in 1867, Atkinson lived with her mother, initially at Oldbury and later at Kurrajong in the Blue Mountains. Waring Barton’s experience in teaching enabled her to recognise and foster her daughter’s talent. Louisa’s early notebooks contained drawings, paintings and descriptions of the flora and fauna around Oldbury (see Figure 5.10). In these she documented seasonal changes, revealing a comprehensive knowledge of plants and an ability to classify them according to their genera.\textsuperscript{187}

![Figure 5.9](image)

\textbf{Figure 5.9}

*Unknown photographer, Louisa Atkinson, c. 1870.*

Indigenous companionship was still a part of life at Oldbury in these latter years. In one undated account from ‘A rambling paper on zoology’, Atkinson recorded the gift of a ‘beautifully spotted’ koala skin:

In regard to this animal I could gain no positive information, many of the Blacks offering that they had never seen one like it before, others that such a species existed in the Great Shoalhaven gully, where it was killed by an aborigine who accompanied my brother as a guide when exploring. They were encamped for the night when he was startled by the shrieks and shouts of his guide, who had gone to the river, and presently he presented himself dragging the slain bear.\textsuperscript{188}
Raised under the stress of bad health and her mother’s difficult relations with men, she could have had a more morose or inhibited personality. Louisa Atkinson’s mother had lost much that was precious to her, including her first husband, James Atkinson, and her daughter Emily who, in 1853, died in childbirth at the age of seventeen, followed some months later by the death of Emily’s infant son. It is testimony to both Louisa’s spirit and her mother’s parenting that there are only glowing reports of Louisa’s charisma, indefatigable botanising and charity. After her death in 1872, the well-known botanist William Woolls wrote to Henry Deane: ‘I wish you had known Louisa Atkinson. She was an excellent creature and worthy to be had in remembrance’. In a letter of 17 March 1891 to Atkinson’s daughter, Woolls wrote:
'she was beloved by all the people there [Kurrajong, Blue Mountains]'\textsuperscript{192}. In a compassionate and unostentatious way ‘she endeared herself … visiting the sick, comforting the afflicted, and speaking a kind word to everyone’.\textsuperscript{193}

By the second half of the nineteenth century, the publishing world was increasingly open to women as novelists and as contributors to magazines and newspapers. Following in her parents’ footsteps, Louisa Atkinson pursued writing. Like her mother before her, she was motivated at least in part by the need for financial independence. As the nineteenth century progressed, more women incorporated science into literary genres, as Waring Barton had done. Female writers most frequently embedded scientific knowledge in genres that were conventionally regarded as befitting their gender, such as children’s fiction, travel writing and poetry.

Louisa Atkinson’s work represented a significant departure from this convention; unlike her predecessors, she made the leap into professional scientific writing. Along with populist articles on botany and geology, and ethnological commentaries that were widely published in the \textit{Illustrated Sydney News}, \textit{Sydney Morning Herald} and \textit{Sydney Mail}, she wrote several articles on ferns that were published in the more scholarly \textit{Horticultural Magazine}.\textsuperscript{194} At the time of her death in 1872, Atkinson was awaiting the publication of a natural history that she had spent many years writing and illustrating. The distinguished botanist and first Government Botanist of Victoria, Ferdinand von Mueller, had sent Atkinson’s manuscript to Germany for publication, but the manuscript was misplaced in the tumult of the Franco–Prussian war. The work, which remained untitled, was never recovered and only a few illustrations survive.\textsuperscript{195}

The seven months that Atkinson spent as a five-year-old with her family at their Budgong outstation from late 1839 to mid-1840 was formative in stimulating her interest in the Indigenous world. She referred to characters and incidents from that time in her later writings. The simplicity and isolation of Budgong, far from prying eyes and near an Indigenous encampment along the upper reaches of the Shoalhaven River, probably helped Atkinson forge closer bonds with the Indigenous workers and the local Tharawal people. Clarke demonstrated how much of Atkinson’s fiction was autobiographical\textsuperscript{196} and Lawson drew attention to the repeated excursions made to the Indigenous camp by the main protagonists in Atkinson’s novel of 1857, \textit{Gertrude, the Emigrant: A Tale of Colonial Life}.\textsuperscript{197} Atkinson’s descriptions of these expeditions probably drew on her visits to the Indigenous neighbours at Budgong. When Waring Barton and her children fled Oldbury in December 1839, they were accompanied by at

\textsuperscript{207}
least one Indigenous worker, ‘our black boy’ named Charley,\textsuperscript{198} who guided the family down the Barrengarry mountain range and through the treacherous Merilie Pass,\textsuperscript{199} an episode Atkinson later wrote about in the \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}.\textsuperscript{200} It is also likely that the family had an Indigenous woman servant, similar to the character portrayed in \textit{Gertrude}, described as follows:

The wife of Cobbon Jack … used to live at a farm-house as domestic servant, for weeks at a time … and she was said to be a very proficient laundress; she dressed neatly, was clean and useful, but would tire of settled occupations, and return to her tribe and husband.\textsuperscript{201}

Atkinson wrote most about the family’s longstanding relationship with Jim (Jem) Vaugh, an influential man, ‘whose native name was Yarrawambie’.\textsuperscript{202} Yarrawambie was chief of ‘perhaps a hundred’ Tharawal people of the ‘Shoalhaven Tribe’. His standing was also indicated by the fact that ‘at different periods he had eight wives’.\textsuperscript{203} In 1895 the anthropologist R.H. Mathews documented an important Tharawal initiation rite known as the \textit{Bunan}, which, he recorded, had been performed for the very last time in the 1880s, near Coolangatta Mountain.\textsuperscript{204} This mountain range at the mouth of the Shoalhaven River formed part of Yarrawambie’s estate.\textsuperscript{205} In his capacity as leader, Yarrawambie would have presided over the \textit{Bunan} and other significant ceremonies.

Clearly, Atkinson had warm respect for Jem. She recalled that Jem ‘remembered and described the visit of the first white people to Shoalhaven’\textsuperscript{206} and that he spoke of ‘the terrible destruction among the native tribes by smallpox’.\textsuperscript{207} Before Atkinson was born, Jem had saved her father’s life while they had been exploring the gullies between Oldbury and Budgong. Atkinson recounted the way Jem had cared for her lost and starving father in 1863, in her regular \textit{Sydney Mail} column, ‘A Voice from the Country’:\textsuperscript{208}

The provisions … came to an end. In this emergency the black sought some alleviation of their difficulty, and killed a large iguana … positively refusing to partake of it himself; so, when he discovered a bees’ nest … served to support my father for three days … but the black did not eat any of it, his relief was to tighten the belt of oppossums’ fur yarn around his waist as hunger gnawed. ‘Masser (he said) could not do so well as blackfellow without food.’\textsuperscript{209}
Atkinson also recalled a group of Indigenous people who had visited her mother soon after Atkinson’s birth. Given Yarrawambie’s status and the fact that Atkinson regularly referred to him as the leader of the group, it is highly probable that he was among those ‘assembled to visit her [Waring Barton] and see the new inmate [Atkinson] – born since they had been there last … gratifying their wish to see all the orphans’. 210 Atkinson recorded that Yarrawambie also brought his tribe to camp at Oldbury to visit ‘friends [the Atkinsons] he had known on the Shoalhaven’. 211 This event most likely occurred either in mid-1840, when Waring Barton and her children returned to Oldbury after their seven-month stay at Budgong, or some time after 1846, when they returned to Oldbury after living in Sydney. Atkinson recalled with particular affection that Yarrawambie ‘loved to dwell on those days in the Merilie gullies, and recount his care of “Masser”’. 212

With the death of James Atkinson in 1834 and the impoverished circumstances that Waring Barton and her children soon confronted, their relationships with Yarrawambie and the Tharawal would surely have shifted. At Oldbury the family had lived a life of comfort and prosperity in their large, two-storey, sandstone home. The patriarch of the family, James Atkinson, was a respected leader of the community, serving as magistrate while overseeing a large workforce on his extensive properties. In contrast, Budgong was a small outstation in barely explored country. The wooden shack that Waring Barton and her children occupied there was basic and isolated. And the key male figure at Budgong was Yarrawambie. Here, at Budgong and its environs, Yarrawambie was sovereign; he ‘claimed several mountains on either side of the Shoalhaven [named Coolondo, Cooloolondal, and Illarro] and used to delight in … bestowing them on the lady’. 213 Perhaps Atkinson was thinking of Yarrawambie when she wrote:

The aborigines appear to pity the Europeans, as persons under self-imposed slavery to toil, holding themselves as quite their superiors. The difference of employer and employee they appreciate, and distinctions of Australian born, or otherwise: ‘You brudder [sic] of mine; all same as me, native,’ is a high mark of esteem. 214

In light of customary Indigenous protocol, and considering the longstanding nature of the relationship between Yarrawambie, James Atkinson and Charlotte Waring
Barton, it is probable that Yarrawambie designated James as a kinship classificatory brother or son. Broome asserted that:

in traditional Aboriginal fashion they attempted to build up reciprocal relations and obligations with the Europeans by bringing them into their kinship system. They were in effect attempting to assimilate the Europeans into the Aboriginal way of behaviour, the mirror image of what the whites tried to do with Aborigines.\(^{215}\)

Both James and Yarrawambie were of equal standing in their respective cultures as ‘law men’; Yarrawambie had saved James’ life, guided and accompanied him down to the Shoalhaven on many occasions and, according to Atkinson, was ‘very attached’ to him.\(^{216}\) If Woomby had been prepared to shoot or spear Alexander Berry in retaliation for his poor treatment of Waring Barton after the death of her husband, then surely it was most probable that Yarrawambie would feel an even greater obligation to James Atkinson’s widow, who, in the absence of a male provider, was struggling to maintain her family. Yarrawambie was probably also well aware of the abusive nature of her second marriage. As Atkinson later attested, ‘the blacks are close observers and great mimics, and go where they will they gather all the news and will repeat in a circumstantial manner’.\(^{217}\)

This likely classificatory kinship relationship possibly had some bearing on Waring Barton’s decision to take refuge at Budgong, country that was under Yarrawambie’s jurisdiction. On those occasions when George Barton was incapacitated, Waring Barton had taken on the responsibility of visiting her outstations, including Budgong. Though Waring Barton was familiar with Budgong, her relocation from Oldbury to this remote outstation in December 1839 was striking. At the height of summer, in a state of poverty and with four children under the age of eleven, why did Waring Barton choose the long trek to the isolation of Budgong? Why did she not seek refuge with her brother-in-law’s family, where she would have been safe from the bushranger attacks that she had frequently experienced? Why did she not move to Sydney? And, most curiously, why did she take her writing desk on the back of the dray that transported her and the children down the dangerous and precipitous Merilie Pass? While the reasoning behind Waring Barton’s choice of Budgong can only be the subject of speculation, it seems that Yarrawambie was delighted that she had taken refuge in his land and could share in its bounty.\(^{218}\) For an impoverished mother with four young
children, here at Budgong, within walking distance of the Shoalhaven River, food was plentiful.

In one of her newspaper articles, Atkinson referred to Yarrawambie’s protective stance towards her mother and siblings, and recalled an occasion when he demonstrated his complete authority over an Indigenous man from another district, who stole from their kitchen:

Jem was made acquainted with the loss. He stepped into the verandah and uttered a rapid: ‘hi, hi hi.’ The culprit, who was at some distance, immediately returned, put down the money in silence, and withdrew, evidently bowing to the rule of the chief whose subject for the time being he was. This was the only sort of dishonesty I ever knew any of them guilty of, and their honesty arose not from want of opportunity, as the reverse has frequently been the case.219

In light of the high regard in which Yarrawambie and others held Waring Barton’s deceased husband, it is appropriate to consider whether Yarrawambie’s protection, guardianship and authority gave her some measure of confidence in relocating to such an isolated part of the country. Atkinson wrote in her ethnographical journalism that Indigenous people ‘attach themselves warmly to those who show them kindness, and are ready to exhibit their friendship in various ways’.220

With this in mind, Yarrawambie’s benevolence and friendship with the late James Atkinson likely pre-established Waring Barton and their children into kinship relations with Yarrawambie’s immediate family, and indeed these were the people about whom Atkinson wrote more personally. She included brief but respectful accounts of four of Yarrawambie’s sons,221 his tall son Jacob; Burrura Jacky, whom she described as ‘a sensible, proud, independent man’; Jemmy Meretts, whom she noted as handsome, sensible and fluent in English; and Jackey Urutta, who was ‘distinguished for his good sense and great conversational powers … Whenever Jackey Urutta visited us he would tell where he had been, whom he had seen, and repeat their conversations with the utmost minutia [sic]’.222

As leader of his community, Yarrawambie would have excelled at hunting, and Atkinson wrote about his fishing abilities. No longer needing to hunt in order to feed his adult children, Yarrawambie, like Ben-Benjie with the McCrae family, may have helped supplement the Atkinson family’s food supply. It is also probable that Yarrawambie and
his sons took Louisa Atkinson’s brother, James junior, on some of their fishing or hunting expeditions and that Indigenous women were part of the young family’s lives, sharing their knowledge and skills in hunting and gathering, as so many Aboriginal Australians did with settlers in remote areas.

Ross Lamond reported that many early settler farming families near the Shoalhaven River supplemented their diet by gathering ‘wild vegetables which could be found using the aboriginal knowledge of the day’. Atkinson, like her father and mother in their narratives, mentioned Indigenous foods in her later writings, for example, ‘Brachychiton, whose turnip-like roots were eaten by Aborigines who gathered to feast on the ripe seeds’, and the native yam, Marsdenia flavescens, ‘which could produce three distinct and valuable products – gum, hemp and esculent roots … a commonly sought Indigenous plant and food product’. She also mentioned an Indigenous liquor made from Duboisia myoporoides:

\[\text{It grows also on the Shoalhaven and at Illawarra, and has an intoxicating property. The Aborigines make holes in the trunk and put some fluid in them, which when drunk on the following morning produces stupor. Branches of this shrub are thrown into pools for the purpose of intoxicating eels and bringing them to the surface. I have known an instance in which giddiness and nausea have arisen from remaining in a close room where branches of it have been placed.}\]

Atkinson’s article ‘A Peep into the Herb Doctor’s Basket’ of June 1862, from her series ‘A Voice from the Country’, gave a catalogued description of nine native plants with medicinal properties. These included the ash from a particular tree, used to treat bites and stings, and ‘the leaves of Acacia decurrens and A. melanorylon, the green and black wattlea, [sic] and some of the smooth barked Eucalypti, or gums … [for] valuable astringent medicines’. Given the family’s destitute circumstances, it is reasonable to speculate that they learnt and applied such knowledge while living alongside Tharawal people at Budgong.

As in most cross-cultural relations, reciprocity would play its part and the relationship between Yarrawambie’s family and the Waring Barton family was clearly valued by both parties. What Waring Barton did not allude to in A Mother’s Offering, Atkinson proudly recalled:
Yarrawambie’s tall son Jacob ‘had dreamed that he should die, and in conformity with their custom set about making the prophecy correct by refusing all food; his despondency and evident sinking attracted the attention of a lady [Waring Barton], who, by dint of coaxing, laughing at, and remonstrating, succeeded in getting him to partake of nourishment, and his life was saved; had no such friend been at hand, he would have succumbed to an imaginary decree’.

If Waring Barton did ‘save’ Yarrawambie’s son in this way, it implied a certain level of trust and intimacy between them. Lawson emphasised Atkinson’s honesty and devotion to Christian morality, evident from her writings and charitable actions. Such virtues were noted also by her friends; presumably Atkinson shared her mother’s strong emphasis on the importance of truth, so we can assume her stories were based on honest, though subjective, perceptions. While we have no understanding of exactly how Yarrawambie and his family saw these relationships, we can gather from their actions that there was a certain attachment and at least forbearance. Atkinson’s story, if nothing else, confirmed that there was a bond between families.

Atkinson’s writings began to be published in 1853, with articles of ‘nature notes’ published monthly in the *Illustrated Sydney News*, the second illustrated paper in Australia. Among her botanical and naturalist contributions to this paper was a series called *The Native Arts*. These were probably the first published articles on Aboriginal art by a settler woman in Australia; in them Atkinson set about to make a purposeful contribution to knowledge and its scientific discipline.

Although this was a humble beginning, this interest in Indigenous Australian art was further developed by women, particularly in the twentieth century. For example, Daisy Bates used the same title for an extended chapter intended for her book on Western Australian art, which synthesised previous writings on Aboriginal art with her own new material. Atkinson’s first article on the topic, ‘The Native Arts, No. 1’, was intended as part of a series; it discussed ‘burial grounds’, with articles ‘on dress, and domestic and war implements to follow’. Her second article, ‘The Native Arts, No. 2’, which was on a possum skin cloak, did eventuate in 1854, but no others followed.

The articles were rudimentary. Atkinson introduced her first topic of a burial mound on Mount Gingegenbullen at the Oldbury estate (see Figure 5.7) as ‘the only durable constructions’ made by Indigenous people. Her patronising introduction stated:
In wandering over this vast continent, we cannot fail to be struck with its utter absence of ancient remains. ‘No sign of antiquity exists – not a structure of former art’. A piece of common pottery would be an object of interest … The native graves – the only artificial elevation we can trace, are of recent date. But, if the field of speculation is limited, it is likely to become lessened, as the aborigines have almost relinquished the little attempts at art we find.237

The piece was a metaphor for the convenient myth of the ‘inevitable’ decline and extinction of Australia’s Indigenous people – which deflected an awareness of ongoing culture under the destruction of ‘genocidal assault’.238

Differentiating these burial grounds from those on the Bogan, Lachlan, Murrumbidgee, Darling and Murray rivers, Atkinson described the site, mentioning that trees surrounding the mound were ‘carved with various devices’, other trees spaced at intervals on the flank of the mountain. In this early ethnographic article of 1853 she did not describe the designs carved on the trees, although ten years later, in 1863, she gave them more attention.239 Her real theme was the impending passing of a ‘primitive’ race. Atkinson contrasted the time and labour involved in traditional burial practices with a more recent interment, in which an Indigenous body had been tied in a sitting posture and placed into a hollowed termite mound. Atkinson frowned on this shift in cultural practices, believing that it led towards the inauthentic:

It was a melancholy instance of the degraded state of the wretched aboriginal race, as a care of the body of the dead seems inherent in the human breast, in proportion to the advance of civilization … How great the change from the time when the native blacks toiled in the erection of that tumulus! Now their foot rarely, if ever, treads there, and the sleepers are unknown and forgotten.240

It is hard to reconcile this mournful writing with the relatively enlightened commitment to Indigenous concern evident later, in Atkinson’s early fiction and anecdotal writing, where she repeatedly blamed settlers for the breakdown of tribal life.241

‘Native Arts No. 2’ was a descriptive piece about the process of making a possum skin cloak: ‘when completed, a warm and durable robe’.242 Atkinson respected the authenticity of the craft and the ‘long patient labour’ required to incise portions of the
inner skin with small stones ‘in waves and circles’, during which process ‘the skin is softened by fat and ochre, and becomes, in consequence, of a red hue within’. She wrote with a strange mix of objectification and moral reprove, intended for a Sydney readership:

Of the more ornamental part of the costume we may mention the smooth white bone passed through the cartilage of the nose, and the Kangaroo teeth suspended from the ends of the hair. But perhaps the ladies of Sydney should like to have a complete description of a native belle – here, then, is her portrait. The naturally glossy black hair falls in many ringlets round her swarthy neck … and the teeth before mentioned clatter gently when she moves; her necklace, many yards in length, is passed in increasing circles round the neck. It is of a golden yellow, and made of the jointed stalks of a parasitical rush found on decaying timber, which are cut into oblong beads [sic] and strung. The opossum skin cloak is placed beneath one arm and secured on the opposite shoulder, falling with some taste round the slender form … The arrangement of the cloak displays the tattooing on the arm and shoulders, which is effected with great agony. Such is an aboriginal girl in full costume; and with her large dark eyes and white teeth, her free movements and retiring manner, when as yet she is free from the evils gained about the settlements of the white men and public houses, she is an interesting object.

In these articles, her earliest attempt at ethnographical writing, Atkinson drew on her scientific training of illustrating a specimen using traditional biological methods of classification. As Lawson acknowledged, ‘the writings of her Victorian contemporary Edward Curr, seem richer by comparison’. Half a century later, Daisy Bates’ opening sentence to her ‘Native Arts’ chapter would describe not an ‘utter absence’ of former art over the continent, nor find only craft, as Atkinson’s first attempts recognised. Rather, she began, ‘the multiplicity of drawings, paintings and carvings that are to be found all over the State give evidence of an artistic sense’, arguing that Indigenous people were no ‘strangers to the fine arts’. Indeed, Bates observed, ‘the manufacture of the colours used by the natives in their various paintings, shows much ingenuity and have excited great interest from their nature and variety’. A 1912 article by Bates in the Western Mail would even publicise ‘modern examples’ of Aboriginal art.
Part Two: Women in the Field

Atkinson’s first two novels, *Gertrude, the Emigrant* of 1857\(^{248}\) and *Cowanda: The Veteran’s Grant* of 1859,\(^{249}\) (see Figure 5.11) earned her accolades ‘particularly among the native-born’.\(^{250}\) Clarke noted that the perceived ‘Australianness’ of *Gertrude the Emigrant* was ‘regarded as its chief attribute’.\(^{251}\) Words and phrases of Indigenous English, such as ‘picaninnies’, ‘debble debble’ and ‘coooee’, as well as descriptions of events such as bushfires and floods, a fluid class structure and an independent and capable ‘Australian girl’ were featured. In *Gertrude the Emigrant*, the chief protagonist, Gertrude, worked as a domestic servant for a short while and in that role chose to work with an Indigenous woman rather than a convict woman, affirming Minnie Brewer’s cross-cultural experiences.\(^{252}\)

Atkinson also referred to a ‘corrupt and ignorant class, who chiefly mix among the natives’.\(^{253}\) She was probably referring to social outcasts, such as the cedar sawyers who in the early nineteenth century were recorded in the Shoalhaven area as rough men, able to consume huge quantities of rum. Feary wrote of them:

> in many ways they were as much social outcasts as were the Aborigines … the cedar getters had to develop some rapport with local Aborigines because they needed to learn how to obtain food from the land to feed their families … At the same time they lived in fear of reprisal from stealing their women and food. Rum was probably the means by which negotiations took place.\(^{254}\)

Atkinson’s journalism of the 1860s and 1870s included weekly columns in the *Sydney Mail* and *Sydney Morning Herald* and in September 1863 these newspapers published three articles, each titled ‘Recollections of the Aborigines’,\(^{255}\) and four serialised novels in the *Sydney Mail*.\(^{256}\)

Lawson’s fine critical analysis of the Aboriginal content of Atkinson’s writing exposed the contradictions and ambivalence at play. Lawson’s distinction between Atkinson’s scientific journalism and her fiction is particularly useful in critiquing the boundaries and tensions between the two. Lawson wrote that in Atkinson’s fiction, particularly her early novel *Gertrude, the Emigrant*, she was empathetic and adventurous, showing great commitment to intercultural relations. Lawson stated, ‘It is fair to say that almost no opportunity to instruct her readers on Christian piety and white–black relations is lost’, and that she is ‘preoccupied with white–black relations to the extent that she repeatedly contrives episodes … to push her moral conviction’.\(^{257}\)
Atkinson’s journalism, on the other hand, followed the rhetorical model of early Victorian writings on science. It was observant, informative and descriptive, adopting a ‘scientific voice’ suitable for British-bred readers, as was also true of her mother’s style. These ethnographical articles, ‘Recollections of the Aborigines’, Lawson wrote, were nonetheless honest and well intentioned, and provided significant records of place and people in the nineteenth-century history of the Sutton Forrest and Shoalhaven districts. In particular, their intermittent personal reminiscences lent the ‘fresh authenticity of her personal observation’ and family connection. They were, furthermore, invaluable for reporting the voices of particular Indigenous people from the mid-nineteenth century.

Lawson’s critique of Atkinson’s journalistic work also focused on Atkinson’s deference to her presumed audience, ‘with a sense of public expectation’ that seemed to emulate her mother’s writing – a concern for social and theoretical conventionality in
the public domain compared to the popular domain of women’s fiction. For example, in ‘Recollections of the Aborigines’ she wrote:

It is a matter of course to pronounce them the lowest scale in the human ladder; the last link between man and monkey; a degraded people incapable of improvement; beyond the pale of civilization, and destitute of religion, and recognizing only an evil spirit … For my own part I would be loath to come to any conclusion, and state it as a fact. 262

This concern for convention was vital for women in the public and scientific fields if they were to be successful. Moreover, like her mother, Atkinson sometimes made comments that appeared to be for the amusement of her readers. 263 As such, Lawson argued, Atkinson seemed to exploit ‘the protective screen of her journalistic style – taking refuge in the rhetoric of objective reporting’. 264 Though she was earnestly endeavouring to contribute to the factual education of her readers, Atkinson restricted her moral concern to a public lament for Indigenous decline, effectively endorsing this belief. Lawson argued that what was an insistent informing in Atkinson’s fiction was a more acceptable pious lament in her journalism. 265

Atkinson, nonetheless, also criticised both empire and evangelists, an outspoken and brave move for a woman of her day. For example, she commented on Indigenous men’s violence to their wives, a common indictment that was frequently put forward as proof of a lack of civilised values. She wrote: ‘I believe these cases were far less frequent when they had not lost virtues and acquired vices from the so-called Christian people who invaded them’. 266 On the shortcomings of some missionaries, she wrote:

The soul is unheeded and untaught, or it is said, that they are incapable of instruction. I must confess that in most instances I do not think that the ‘right person has been in the right place.’ Is it likely that one who cannot attract, or hold the attention of those whose countryman he is, and whose language he speaks, could arrest the attention of savages, or speak through the ear to the heart? 267

Further, and more significantly, Atkinson recorded Indigenous criticism. As Lucy Frost wrote in the introduction to her book No Place for a Nervous Lady: Voices from the Australian Bush, ‘it goes without saying that the voices of many women who lived in the bush during the nineteenth century could not write, and their voices are now
The Indigenous nineteenth-century voice suffered a far deadlier silence, hardly heard by the broad public except for the echo that continued through oral history and scant settler records. Hence Atkinson’s few records of Indigenous voices and their criticisms and opinions of white people and their institutions from the Illawarra region were, and continue to be, invaluable, as were her recollections of individuals and stories in which nineteenth-century Tharawal and Gundungarra worldviews reverberated.

In September 1863 Atkinson used her weekly column to record one Indigenous man pointing out ‘a stone placed in the forked branches of a tree, stating that some black man had put it there that the sun might sink no lower till his mother had crossed the mountain’. She also spoke of Mullich, a man ‘belonging to the vicinity of Picton … he was unusually tall, and supposed to walk on the tops of the trees, and perform other marvelous feats … [and had] cognizance of their [the initiates’] movements and notions.

In another passage, Atkinson documented three Indigenous songs, including the following verse:

‘Him gib 'backa, tea, and sugar,
Bail wheelbarrow come up yet,
Mr, —— break him neck.’

And so forth, the chorus being an aside comment of the disappointed claimants of the oft made and ever broken promises; the wheelbarrow – meaning the dray – not yet arrived from Sydney with supplies.

So too she documented the condemnation voiced by an Indigenous person who deplored the consequences of alcohol bartering. Her article read: ‘“They give us rum; and lots of blackfellows die every year,” one man sorrowfully said to the writer. In recording the even rarer voice of an Indigenous woman, the newspaper informed its readers that:

A ‘black school’ was established at Blacktown; the children returned to their tribes as soon as they could. ‘Liberty’s sweet’ … ‘I can work and read too; but it’s confined living with white people, and I get tired of it – these are inconveniences; but then I’m free –’ A gunyah and a scorched possum before a house and white bread, and the bowing to another’s will – ‘For Britons never will be slaves’, might have been the benighted creature’s catechism. ‘I was at black school, and can read’, was a decided boast; but there the scholar’s satisfaction ended.
From today’s perspective, it may seem but a small step for Atkinson to have gone from criticising empire and the scourge of whites to acknowledging her family’s own particular role in the destruction of the Tharawal and Gundungurra people. Her mother certainly did not question white inheritance and privilege, a widespread blindness that continues today.²⁷⁴ There was, however, a radical shift from mother to daughter. Atkinson repeatedly acknowledged Indigenous property and land resources, ‘tribal’ boundaries, a deep emotional bond and territorial belonging. Additionally, she wrote that ‘their names were frequently given in reference to some peculiarity of their birthplace – that place being their inheritance’ and that ‘a name emanating from landed possessions carried rank with it, as the Scotch lairds were called by the names of their estates. Some had more than one property’.²⁷⁵

Furthermore, Atkinson criticised colonisation and settler behaviour towards Indigenous people, writing: ‘[a] great sin lies on us as a people, for much has been done to injure, and little to benefit the poor original possessors of our farms and runs’.²⁷⁶ I argue that these views and passages reflected Atkinson’s Indigenous education, an education forged out of many years of close, regular and ongoing contact with Indigenous people that began from the moment of her birth. Indigenous people knew that key sympathetic white people could be ‘grown up’ and in turn ‘educate a wider audience’, and represent their interests and worldview to the outer world.²⁷⁷

Lawson wrote that ‘the Atkinson friendship always implied superiority … [and] sometimes meant ‘servitude’.²⁷⁸ She argued that in Atkinson’s reminiscences of Yarrawambie saving her father, she ‘is impressed by his sacrifice, [but] she makes no mention of “submissiveness or servitude”, rather singling out the qualities of affection and generosity – “wrapped about with the large comforting blanket of white vested interest”’.²⁷⁹

I do not agree with Lawson’s suggestion that Yarrawambie’s use of the term ‘Masser’ was a corrupting stain of servitude on the friendship. It was unlikely that a man of Yarrawambie’s high degree would consider himself submissive or in servitude to James Atkinson. Yarrawambie was the guide and thus leader, leading Atkinson safely and with due authority through country to which Yarrawambie was born. Yarrawambie was an intelligent man and made an intelligent alliance. He would have likely viewed the Atkinsons as allies who could serve local interests. Germaine Greer argued:
from first contact the leaders of many Aboriginal peoples saw that sharing of
the land would only be possible if the whitefellas could be drawn into the
Aboriginal system. They pursued a deliberate policy of co-option, hoping to
civilise the invaders who had no conception of a considerate and viable use
of country into abandoning their inappropriate concepts of ownership and
exclusivity.  

There is a case to be made that Yarrawambie invited and cultivated the Atkinsons
into his world and perhaps even developed a friendship of hearts and minds and
character, more powerful than unequal power structures. Yarrawambie’s gesture of
tightening his belt, when he and James Atkinson shared the predicament of weakness
from lack of sustenance after several days, was probably made with more than a
flicker of pride, and as a clear indication of his superior standing, in those Gundungurra
gullies, to any illusion of white authority. Did Atkinson, the foreigner, recognise this?
Yarrawambie was a powerful man who owned bountiful tracts of land, rivers and
mountains. He could, after all, have abandoned James Atkinson to a different fate.
Yarrawambie’s decision not to abandon James Atkinson was testimony to his good
character and heart, reflected by Atkinson’s similar qualities; each man benefited from
this alliance across the cultural divide.

Peter Sutton wrote of many similar observations in ‘frontier times … that once a
strong one-on-one relationship had developed between them, the Aboriginal person’s
devotion to looking after the needs and wellbeing of the newcomer often followed’.  
Even at a time when Atkinson’s widow had little with which to reciprocate,
Yarrawambie welcomed her, and she responded where she could. We must be careful,
when condemning unequal power relations in intercultural relations, of dimishing the
agency of Indigenous people.

Lawson pointed out the awful ‘insults of patronising English names’ given to
Indigenous people, which Louisa Atkinson politely called ‘English denominations’.  
But Atkinson also recorded that it was ‘common practice [for an Indigenous person] to
call [white] persons either by some corruption of their names, or a nickname, they all
like to disparage those above them’.  
Akinson’s only error here may have been in not understanding that Indigenous people considered this practice disparaging to those
below them, rather than above.

Waring Barton’s writings and the scientific writings of her daughter showed that
their ‘scientific’ representations of intercultural relations were attenuated and
circumscribed by the values of the societal attitudes in which they were created, and against which they balanced the realities of the lives they lived. Perhaps Waring Barton dared not write about the true entanglements, and one wonders how indeed she weighed the words and deeds of her deceased husband’s white friends, Berry and Coghill, against the words and deeds of his black friend, Yarrawambie.

What could be sensed in Atkinson’s writing was the vivid impression of bark canoes floating by, the lively Indigenous camps and the indelible print of the corroborees that ‘bore evidences of having been arranged with an eye to startling effectiveness; the painting, the sudden appearance from behind the trees, the fires, the extraordinary feats of muscle testified to the pains and time devoted to this sole amusement’. Atkinson acknowledged there was much kept from view: ‘To us they appear destitute of all systems of theology, all religious worship, but they so love to draw a veil of mystery round their beliefs and actions that it is not improbable that we are, and ever will be in the dark on these subjects’.

A perceived superiority permeated Atkinson’s work but she recognised and acknowledged people at home in their country, who were not excluding the white intruders but engaging in modernity, developing cross-cultural involvement where sometimes societal norms and power asymmetries wore thin and occasionally harmonised to an Aboriginal Australia.

The Atkinson family’s cross-cultural experiences grew less frequent over time, as the Indigenous population died or were moved to reserves in the late nineteenth century. Atkinson and her mother moved to the small settlement of Kurrajong in the Blue Mountains, where they remained for some years, and where Atkinson concentrated on her naturalist writing and botany. Her later novels gradually included less, and finally little, Indigenous content, although passages still appeared intermittently in her journalism, right up to her untimely death in 1872.

Clarke’s biography of Atkinson conveyed her love of Oldbury, where she returned to nurse her invalid mother of seventy-one years until she died (taking a great toll on Atkinson’s health). The following year, on 11 March 1869, aged thirty-five, Atkinson married James Calvert, who, she wrote in a letter to her former maid, ‘has as kind [and] thoughtful ways as a woman and I want for nothing’. After a short time the couple moved into the old overseer’s cottage on the Oldbury estate, from where Atkinson continued to write and to send specimens to William Woolls and Ferdinand von Mueller, the great botanists of the day. To Von Mueller she wrote:
During the 3rd week of May I forwarded a parcel of specimens to Dr Woolls which I hope have long since reached you – They were chiefly ruses, *sic* Reeds and grasses – The enclosed seeds are Oaks No 1. from the dry sandy ranges … I am surprised to hear from Dr Woolls that he is only acquainted with 3 species of Casuarina. I know of 6 if not seven and will endeavour to forward you specimens of all … Did Mr Woolls ever send you the cone of a Pine from Mt Tomah? I only had the one I gave him. 

Atkinson soon became pregnant and, despite her fragile health, survived pregnancy and childbirth. Her daughter, Louise, was born on 10 April 1872. Eighteen days later, on 28 April 1872, while Atkinson was awaiting her husband’s return from working on their new house, his distressed and riderless horse arrived home. Fearing the worst, Atkinson suffered a fatal heart attack. Calvert returned on foot and uninjured to find his wife dead at the age of thirty-eight.

Clarke wrote that the great success of Atkinson’s articles was ‘the number of readers who wrote letters to the editor concerning them’. This same general readership would have also read text influenced by Atkinson’s Indigenous education and her extolling of Indigenous intelligence (‘quick to learn’), their manners and misfortunes:

>A natural politeness is very general among them; the manner of the women is often graceful and modest, where they live retired from the contaminating influence of the dregs of society with whom alone they have the misfortune to mingle.

Had Atkinson lived and her large illustrated book on Australian plants and animals been published rather than lost, ‘it would have brought her international fame’. While the full extent of her botanical services for Woolls and von Mueller is unknown, there is much evidence of their praise and gratitude for her and she was commemorated by having six plant species named after her, an unusual recognition for a woman in the nineteenth century.

Lawson asserted: ‘It is possible to see Atkinson as our first true humanist-democrat in fiction since she addresses the same observant analysis and compassion to white and to black characters as well as to women and to men’. Miles Franklin claimed that in *Gertrude, the Emigrant*, ‘Australianism is defined, the idiom is
gathering’ and its people were ‘no longer merely sojourning here’.\textsuperscript{297} If this was true, it was an Australianism enriched, if not instigated, by intercultural relations and Indigenous worldviews. Atkinson passionately conveyed Indigenous people and their rich lands, full of resources and beauty, as an Aboriginal country. Her journalism and fiction did much to familiarise settlers with the facts of Indigenous belonging, ways and wealth. She was proud of being ‘native-born’ and believed that Indigenous people felt that the native-born whites were their countrymen – that they all shared some sense of belonging. It appears they still do; in 2000, Pamela Croft conveyed the same sense of interaction and belonging that the Tharawal had shown over one hundred years earlier:

\begin{quote}
what makes you Australian is in fact your interactions with us, the First Nation peoples of this land – in the past, now and in the future. It is what makes you different from your ancestors whose spirits lie in other lands. We are what helps to make you Australian. It is what gives you belonging on and to this land.\textsuperscript{298}
\end{quote}

Both Charlotte Waring Barton and her daughter Louisa Atkinson affirmed aspects of Indigenous lives and culture in their advocacy of an emerging new nationalism and their love and knowledge of native flora and fauna. In their time, their ethnographic writing challenged white prejudices and, despite possessing only limited insight into an Indigenous world, ‘exhibit[ed] the effects of the gentle but insistent and pervasive influence\textsuperscript{299} of the Tharawal and the Gundungurra on their lives. The personalising presence of Indigenous ‘informants’ and the observations and recorded opinions of Indigenous people in Waring Barton’s and Atkinson’s texts provided what Mills described as a form of writing to ‘disclose the nature of the dominant discourse and constitute a critique from its margin’.\textsuperscript{300}

Scepticism about sisterhood across cultures may at times be well founded, but it was nineteenth-century women like Atkinson who were among the first of few who recognised and recorded the spirited independence, landownership and agency of Indigenous women (see Figure 5.12). Rather than speaking of their commonly perceived subservience or victimhood as ‘the weaker vessel loaded with the chattels’,\textsuperscript{301} Atkinson related a vivid story of old Nelly, a ‘dethroned sovereign’ wife to Yarrawambie, and her blind companion. ‘It was but necessary to mention Nelly to the chief’ to send him into a fit of wild threats:
If these threats of [Yarrawambie] were repeated to Nelly, they produced the most extravagant laughter and enjoyment; she would beg again and again to have the piquant scene rehearsed, at each time clapping her hands, dancing, shrieking and laughing in all the extravagance of savage mirth. Her enjoyment was shared in a lesser degree by the little blind dame … The women were generally met with on the river, in a canoe formed of a sheet of bark tied together at either end, and appeared to support themselves by fishing.\textsuperscript{302}

Yarrawambie, Atkinson told her readers, was not the only Indigenous person who happily gifted the bounty of land to Waring Barton. So too did a similarly spirited and empowered older woman, whose ‘land … she used to say spinning round on one foot, with her arms extended, belonged to her, “all about, all about, all about”’.\textsuperscript{303}
Figure 5.12
Artist unknown, Aboriginal woman in a canoe fishing with a line, c. 1805.
Endnotes

1 For clarity, I use Charlotte’s given name until her second marriage, to George Barton, after which I identify her as Waring Barton.

2 Barton, *A Mother’s Offering to Her Children: By a Lady, Long Resident in New South Wales*.

3 The book was advertised in “Christmas Presents,” *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 23 December 1841.


5 Ibid. This was an ill-conceived example, as Barton was merely regurgitating newspaper reports in this case; in her writing based on personal experience there was a slight but interesting change of perspective and concerns.

6 “Christmas Presents.”


8 However, for at least part of his adult life Albert Waring did not practise as an artist, due to either his wealth or the injuries he sustained from a carriage accident soon after Charlotte’s mother’s death. Janet Louise Cosh and Louisa Atkinson, Notes by Louisa Calvert, MSS 3849/1, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales; Marcie Muir, *Charlotte Barton: Australia’s First Children’s Author* (Sydney: Wentworth Books, 1980), p. 19.


10 Cosh and Atkinson, “Notes by Louisa Calvert.”

11 Ibid. After her mother’s death, Charlotte’s aunt, Miss Charlotte Fisher, who evidently excelled as governess to all three girls, undertook their care.


15 The £100 salary was set high to lure a talented governess from English shores (even £70 was considered a high wage for a governess in Britain in those years). Nevertheless, twenty-four women withdrew their applications when they found the job was in the colonies.


18 Charlotte had in fact spent time with James Atkinson on a preparatory voyage to the main vessel but, according to Harriet King, they had only been acquainted for three weeks before their marriage. Patricia Clarke described Atkinson as ‘a most innovative farmer’. Clarke, *Pioneer Writer: The Life of Louisa Atkinson, Novelist, Journalist, Naturalist*.

19 By the 1830s, the journey from Sydney to Picton involved a reasonably well-used road, but from Picton to Sutton Forest there was only a cart track.
Endnotes (continued)

20 See Barton, *A Mother’s Offering to Her Children: By a Lady, Long Resident in New South Wales*, p. 89. Both were interested in writing and education. Mr Atkinson was described in an obituary as ‘a gentleman of great energy and considerable talent’, two qualities that Charlotte also shared. “Family Notices,” p. 3.

21 See King, quoted in Muir, *Charlotte Barton: Australia’s First Children’s Author*, pp. 21–23.


23 In a letter of 14 July 1842, Berry wrote that he was ‘originally totally averse to having any connection with such a notable she dragon …’ Clarke, *Pioneer Writer: The Life of Louisa Atkinson, Novelist, Journalist, Naturalist*, p. 43.

24 His obituary in the *Sydney Gazette* described him as ‘a gentleman of considerable literary attainments, and, as a practical agriculturalist, was, we believe, second to none in the colony. His death is deeply lamented by a circle of numerous relatives and friends’. “Family Notices.”


26 James Atkinson, *On the Expediency and Necessity of Encouraging Distilling and Brewing from Grain in New South Wales* (Sydney: R. Mansfield, 1829). This was published for the executors of R. Howe.

27 James Atkinson, *An Account of Agriculture and Grazing in New South Wales, and of Some of its Most Useful Natural Productions, with Other Information ...* (London: J. Cross, 1844 (1826)), p. 27.


31 Audit Office of New South Wales, Colonial Secretary Correspondence 4/2045, Letter 28/4074, in *Organ, Illawarra and South Coast Aborigines 1770–1900: Report to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Canberra, 1 December 1993*, n.p.

32 Compared, for example, to the detachment expressed by Broughton, Chief Constable of Shoalhaven, in a letter of 2 July 1827 (ibid., p. 71.) or the disdain in Edward Wollstonecraft’s letter dated 3 July 1827 (ibid., p. 72.)


Endnotes (continued)

37 Ibid., p. 21. Their properties included Oldbury, a cattle station at Budgong, outstations at Belanglo and land on the Wollondilly River.

38 On remarriage, Charlotte was to be given £1,000 (which did not eventuate) and an annual amount to raise the children until they came of age. Ibid., p. 37.


40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.


43 Forsyth, “‘A Mother’s Offering’: Australia’s First Children’s Book.” In the Supreme Court proceedings, Charlotte stated that both before and after her marriage to Barton she had been obliged to act for him, attending to the estate when he was intoxicated for great lengths of time (implying that she had married him in order to retain her honour, rather than for love), and to be ‘both Father and Mother’, both with reference to the ‘education’ and ‘provision’. Clarke, *Pioneer Writer: The Life of Louisa Atkinson, Novelist, Journalist, Naturalist*, p. 25.


46 It was a courageous undertaking for a women with a few servants and workers and her children, then aged five, seven, nine and eleven years, to go by drays and pack-bullocks down the treacherous Meryla Pass road into Kangaroo Valley to Budgong, a route first shown by an Aboriginal man named Timelong in 1818.

47 Barton, *A Mother’s Offering to Her Children: By a Lady, Long Resident in New South Wales*.


49 Tharawal is also spelt Dharrawal, Carawal and Turawal, among other variants.

50 Louisa Atkinson recorded this many years later, in “A Voice from the Country: Recollections of the Aborigines (From the *Sydney Mail*, September 12th),” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 September 1863. She also wrote: ‘The aborigines appear to pity the Europeans’. There is a notation on the *Sydney Morning Herald* article that it was taken from the *Sydney Mail*. See also Louisa Atkinson, “A Voice from the Country: Recollections of the Aborigines,” *Sydney Mail*, 12 September 1863, p. 3.

51 In court proceedings reported in 1841, the children had been assessed and found to have been ‘instructed with care and attention’, including ‘in some branches of education not generally taught’. See “Law Intelligence,” *Sydney Herald*, 10 July 1841. The quality of Waring Barton’s teaching was borne out by her children’s prizewinning achievements at Sydney College, hardly possible without an excellent foundation.


53 There are records of the two eldest children, James and Charlotte, attending College High School in 1842. Charlotte Atkinson was dux of the girls in 1842. Patricia Clarke stated that it was likely that Emily was there and possible that Louisa attended between 1842 and 1846. Ibid., pp. 49–50.

54 Ibid., p. 36.
Endnotes (continued)


59 Waring Barton, like Dexter, was forthright, outspoken and courageous, neither demure nor obliging. Berry and Coghill’s best opinion of her was ‘difficult’. The court described her petition to keep her children as ‘unnecessarily long’ and ‘impertinent and scandalous’ ibid., p. 41.


61 Clarke chronicled Waring Barton’s legal battles in innumerable court appearances over the following five years. Clarke, Pioneer Writer: The Life of Louisa Atkinson, Novelist, Journalist, Naturalist, pp. 37–43.

62 Waring Barton’s protracted battle was all the more admirable when one considers Saunders’ findings that physical violence against high-society women ‘was rejected as socially unacceptable behaviour’. Middle-class women were reluctant to prosecute husbands for violence because of shame and ‘a real fear of ostracism’ and social ridicule. Kay Saunders, “The Study of Domestic Violence in Colonial Queensland: Sources and Problems,” Australian Historical Studies, vol. 21, no. 82 (1984).

63 See discussions of the feminisation of religion during the nineteenth century, for example, Hancock, “A Not So Innocent Vision: Re-visited the Literary Works of Ellen Liston, Jane Sarah Doudy and Myrtle Rose White (1838–1961),” p. 8.


65 “Christmas Presents.”, also quoted in Muir, Charlotte Barton: Australia’s First Children’s Author.

66 Australian, 30 December 1841, p. 2.

67 Dinny Culican-Ward classified this tradition as the ‘English School of Rousseau’ in “Charlotte Barton: Australia’s First Writer for Children,” Margin, vol. 55 (2001), p. 12., and argued that Waring Barton combined the old ‘didacticism and delight’ formula in her dialogues, where the children were unusually both listeners, responders and instigators of the conversation. Ibid., p. 14.

68 The protagonists were clearly based on Waring Barton’s own family. She was Mrs Saville, while the four children were of a similar order of sex and age to Waring Barton’s, and had names starting with the same letter, for example Emma for Emily, Julius for James.


Endnotes (continued)

71 Barton, *A Mother’s Offering to Her Children: By a Lady, Long Resident in New South Wales*, pp. 6–7. The book’s ability to debunk superstition was one of the signs of superior Western knowledge and progress.


75 See, for example, ibid., p. 131.

76 Ibid., p. 138. At times they reiterated sexist gender distinctions, for example, ‘I know Gentlemen are brave, and do not indulge in fears like Ladies’. Ibid., p. 15.


78 Barton, *A Mother’s Offering to Her Children: By a Lady, Long Resident in New South Wales*, p. 4.

79 Ibid., p. 6.

80 For example, Sir John Herschel (ibid., p. 7.) and Mr Rankin of Bathurst (ibid., p. 15.)

81 Sturm, quoted in ibid., i.


84 “Christmas Presents.”


92 Ibid., p. 182.

93 Ibid., p. 34.

94 Ibid., ii. Waring Barton dedicated the book ‘by permission’ to Master Reginald Gipps, son of the Governor of New South Wales.
Endnotes (continued)

95 Charles Morgan Lewis was captain of an expedition from Sydney on the schooner Isabella to rescue survivors of the Charles Eaton. He reported that the Darnley Island natives told him that the murderers had eaten the eyes and cheeks of their victims to excite them and forced their children to join them in this, in order to make them brave. This was reported in the newspapers of the day; for example, “Literature and Science: Review: A Voyage to Torres Strait … by Phillip P. King,” Colonist, 9 March 1837, p. 6.

96 Barton, A Mother’s Offering to Her Children: By a Lady, Long Resident in New South Wales, pp. 69, 83.

97 Ibid., pp. 124–125.

98 Mills, Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women’s Travel Writing and Colonialism.

99 The ideal Victorian wife came to be phrased as the comforting and benign “Angel in the House”, a term derived from the title of a very popular poem by Coventry Patmore, originally published in 1854, about his obliging and devoted wife.

100 “Christmas Presents.”

101 Gates, “Shifting Continents, Shifting Species: Louisa Anne Meredith at ‘Home’ in Australia.”

102 Healy, From the Ruins of Colonialism: History as Social Memory, p. 178. Equally implicit as a structural basis was Western economics, or capitalism.

103 Pratt, Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation, p. 39.

104 Barton, A Mother’s Offering to Her Children: By a Lady, Long Resident in New South Wales, p. 197.

105 For example, ‘Jem Vaugh and his tribe were encamped on Oldbury’, in Atkinson, “A Voice from the Country: Recollections of the Aborigines,” p. 3.

106 Barton, A Mother’s Offering to Her Children: By a Lady, Long Resident in New South Wales, p. 211.

107 Ibid., p. 198.


109 Barton, A Mother’s Offering to Her Children: By a Lady, Long Resident in New South Wales, p. 209.

110 ‘We have inspected a grave … which resembled a large hillock some 100 feet long, and 50 in height, and apparently formed the burying place of many persons’. Louisa Atkinson, “The Native Arts, No. 1,” Illustrated Sydney News, 26 November 1853, p. 3.

111 Barton, A Mother’s Offering to Her Children: By a Lady, Long Resident in New South Wales, p. 208.


113 Ibid., p. 57.

114 This was in regard to whether Indigenous children lost their first teeth. Barton, A Mother’s Offering to Her Children: By a Lady, Long Resident in New South Wales, p. 211.

115 Ibid., pp. 212–213.

116 Ibid., p. 199.
Endnotes (continued)

117 Ibid., p. 207.
118 Ancestors in the Dreaming were notably ‘brilliant’, denoting power and vitality.
121 Ibid., p. 50.
122 Ibid.
123 Meredith, *Notes and Sketches of New South Wales: During a Residence in that Colony from 1839 to 1844*, p. 93.
130 Ibid., p. 199.
131 Ibid., p. 201. It should be borne in mind that later in the text she also portrayed her as a very civilised mother of Georgie.
132 Ibid.
137 Ibid., p. 203.
140 Ibid., p. 201.
141 Ibid., p. 211.
142 Ibid.
143 Ibid., p. 199.
144 Ibid., p. 200.
Part Two: Women in the Field

Endnotes (continued)

146 Ibid., p. 204.
147 Ibid., p. 205.
149 Ibid.
151 Meerkats are the comical and charismatic social mongooses of southern Africa.
152 John Mathew, Two Representative Tribes of Queensland with an Inquiry Concerning the Origin of the Australian Race (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1910).
153 Another example was a comparison of Nanny’s son, George, and Mrs Saville’s little girl, Clara: ‘One day she brought him for me to look at. I admired him very much; and gave her a few clothes for him. Clara was in long petticoats. Nanny asked me to let her see “piccaninnie’s” [sic] head: accordingly the cap was put back and the little golden locks exhibited. Nanny was in extasicies [sic]; she clapped her hands and exclaimed “All same Georgey Missus.” Emma.—How droll. I dare say the babies heads were not at all alike: most likely Clara looked like a wax doll beside Georgey’. Barton, A Mother’s Offering to Her Children: By a Lady, Long Resident in New South Wales, pp. 201–211.
154 Ibid., p. 212.
155 Louisa Atkinson, Waring Barton’s daughter, also wrote of a man named Cobbon Jack, whose wife ‘was given to the practice of infanticide which he objected to, and requested a lady [Waring Barton] to adopt his son should he die, and leave it to the heartless Jenny’s care. She promised to do so.’ Louisa Atkinson, “A Voice from the Country: Recollections of the Aborigines. (Continued from the Sydney Mail, September 19),” Sydney Morning Herald, 25 September 1863, p. 2.
156 Barton, A Mother’s Offering to Her Children: By a Lady, Long Resident in New South Wales, p. 209.
158 Ibid.
159 Ibid., pp. 210–211.
161 Ibid., p. 211.
162 Ibid. This sentence is another example of a critic taking the offensive part of a sentence and isolating it from the latter, positive, part. See Bradford, “The Wise Colonial Child: Imperial Discourse in A Mother’s Offering To Her Children,” p. 48.
163 McClintock, Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality and the Colonial Contest, p. 47.
164 Barton, A Mother’s Offering to Her Children: By a Lady, Long Resident in New South Wales, p. 213.
165 Ibid., pp. 213–214.
166 Diane Barwick argued, in reference to the 19th century, that ‘men were so weakened by pulmonary or liver infection that they could not work hard enough to satisfy officials and were constantly reproached for laziness’. Barwick, “And the Lubras are Ladies Now,” p. 55.
167 Waring Barton was, clearly, fully confident in the superiority of the European Christian perspective.
Within the Gundungurra region there were a number of bands of Indigenous people. The group that lived in the vicinity of Oldbury was known variously as the Bong Bong, Sutton Forest or Throsby’s Tribe.


In case the reader was too moved by this description, Barton-Waring followed it up with the comment: “In a savage state they bury the living infant with its deceased mother: sometimes when several months old!” Barton, *A Mother’s Offering to Her Children: By a Lady, Long Resident in New South Wales*, pp. 203–204.


The name ‘Zunica’ may have been a misprint of ‘Zamia’, as the plant’s scientific name is *Macrozamia*. *Macrozamia* is a genus containing about 40 species of cycads, in the Zamiaceae family.

Waring Barton called it the Zunica Palm, but gave its correct Indigenous name, *Burrawang*, from the Dharug (Sydney region) people. Its botanical name is *Macrozamia communis* or Australian Cycad: ‘They bear a beautiful fruit resembling the pine-apple in form, but composed of a cluster of nuts: these nuts have a husk, or covering of bright scarlet; they grow in pairs supported on a solid stem of a dark green color, which contrasts pleasingly with the red; the whole grow around a thick stalk, and hang drooping on either side of the palm’, Barton, *A Mother’s Offering to Her Children: By a Lady, Long Resident in New South Wales*, p. 11.

Ibid., p. 12.

Ibid., pp. 206–207.

For example, in describing a healing practice, she explained how the healer was (according to their ideas on the subject) ‘endeavouring to draw away the pain her friend felt’. Ibid., p. 208.

*Julius.— Only conceive, Lucy, an old fat creature, like one of our old black women, stuffed into a tight pair of trousers. It would make a Judge laugh*. Ibid., p. 57.

Ibid., p. 80.

‘They once gave a convincing proof of their friendly feeling towards the white people. One of the sailors rambled into the bush and could not find his way back. He was there four days; and was found by the natives in a dying state. They took him carefully to their encampment; washed his feet; gave him food; and then kindly and carefully took him to the settlement’. Ibid., p. 143.


‘Myra’ was serialised in the *Sydney Mail* in 1864; ‘Tom Hellicar’s Children’ in the *Sydney Mail* in 1864; and ‘Tressa Resolve’ in the *Sydney Mail* in 1872. Writing under the name of ‘A Voice from the Country’, she published monthly articles in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Sydney Mail* from March 1860 to May 1865 and from May 1870 to February 1872.
Part Two: Women in the Field

Endnotes (continued)

185 Atkinson’s friend, William Woolls, said her education ceased at the age of twelve. William A. Woolls, “Sermon Preached in St Peter’s Church, Richmond … April 12, 1874 … on the Occasion of a Tablet … Place … to the Memory of the Late Mrs. Calvert,” (Windsor, NSW: B. Isaacs, 1874).


187 Ibid., p. 68.

188 Clarke, “In the Steps of Rosa Praed and Tasma: Biographical Trails,” p. 69.

189 Atkinson’s fiction reflected a distrust of lawyers and trustees: see Louisa Atkinson, Cowanda: The Veteran’s Grant (Sydney: J.R. Clarke, 1859). Patricia Clarke suggested that, in addition to difficulties with the trustees and her second husband, Atkinson probably had a falling out with her mother’s brother-in-law (James Atkinson’s brother), who did not offer the widowed Charlotte any support.

190 Emily, Louisa’s favourite sister, died less than a year after marrying James Warren in 1853.


192 Quoted in ibid., p. 228.


194 These were “Ferns: Growing and Dried” (July 1864); “Ferns of the Kurrajong” (August 1864) and “Ferns of the Kurrajong” (October 1864).


196 Ibid., pp. 95–113, 175–183.


198 Ryan, “‘A very bad business’: Henry Dangar and the Myall Creek Massacre 1838,” p. 3.

199 The Merilie Pass is now spelt Meryla.

200 Ryan, “‘A very bad business’: Henry Dangar and the Myall Creek Massacre 1838,” p. 3.

201 Atkinson, “A Voice from the Country: Recollections of the Aborigines (From the Sydney Mail, September 12th),” p. 3.

202 Ibid.

203 Ibid.

204 It is likely that Coolangatta was the later European name for Coolondo, one of the three mountains to which, according to Atkinson, Yarrawambie laid claim.

205 In 1895, Yarrawambie was shown the site, recording details of the ceremony and the by now ‘faint indistinct forms of animals’, which had been sculpted into the ceremonial ground. R.H. Mathews, “The Bunan Ceremony of New South Wales,” American Anthropologist, vol. 9 (1896).

206 Atkinson, “A Voice from the Country: Recollections of the Aborigines (From the Sydney Mail, September 12th),” p. 3.


208 The column was reprinted in the Sydney Morning Herald.
Endnotes (continued)


210 Atkinson, “A Voice from the Country: Recollections of the Aborigines (From the Sydney Mail, September 12th),” p. 3.

211 Ibid.


213 Atkinson, “A Voice from the Country: Recollections of the Aborigines. (Continued from the Sydney Mail, September 19).”

214 Atkinson, “A Voice from the Country: Recollections of the Aborigines (From the Sydney Mail, September 12th).”


216 Atkinson, “A Voice from the Country: Recollections of the Aborigines. (Continued from the Sydney Mail, September 19).”


219 Atkinson, “A Voice from the Country: Recollections of the Aborigines (From the Sydney Mail, September 12th),” p. 3.

220 Ibid.

221 While Atkinson said that Yarrawambie had a large family, she did not provide details of exactly how many sons and daughters he had. Ibid.

222 Ibid.


225 Quoted from the Horticultural Magazine, February 1864 in ibid., p. 142.

226 Quoted in ibid., pp. 128–129.


228 Ibid.


Endnotes (continued)


234 Daisy Bates, Papers of Daisy Bates, Australian National Library. MS 365, Box 15, folio 29 contains this essay (Chapter IX) of 72 pages, titled ‘Native Art’.


236 Ibid.

237 Ibid.

238 Atkinson, “Louisa Atkinson: The Distant Sound of Native Voices.”

239 Atkinson later described the carvings ‘in forms suggesting the native shield and boomerang – weapons used chiefly in war’. Atkinson, “A Voice from the Country: Recollections of the Aborigines (From the *Sydney Mail*, September 12th),” p. 3.


241 For example, in *Gertrude, the Emigrant*, Atkinson wrote that Indigenous people, ‘when not corrupted by white people are by no means a disagreeable race’. Atkinson, *Gertrude, the Emigrant: A Tale of Colonial Life*, p. 34.


243 Ibid.

244 Ibid.


246 Bates’ 3,400-word article was titled “Native Decorative Art,” *Western Mail*, 30 March 1912.


248 Atkinson, *Cowanda: The Veteran’s Grant*.


251 Ibid.


253 Ibid., pp. 33–34.


Endnotes (continued)

258 Ibid., p. 11.
259 Atkinson, “A Voice from the Country: Recollections of the Aborigines (From the Sydney Mail, September 12th).”; ibid., p. 3.
261 Ibid., p. 11.
264 Ibid., p. 8.
265 Ibid., pp. 8–9.
266 Atkinson, “A Voice from the Country: Recollections of the Aborigines (From the Sydney Mail, September 12th),” p. 3.
267 Ibid.
268 Frost, No Place for a Nervous Lady: Voices from the Australian Bush, p. 6.
269 Atkinson, “A Voice from the Country: Recollections of the Aborigines (From the Sydney Mail, September 12th),” p. 3.
270 Atkinson, “A Voice from the Country: Recollections of the Aborigines. (Continued from the Sydney Mail, September 19),” p. 2. There was also a renowned ‘clever man’ or ‘Kooradgie’ recorded by William Cuneo (said to actually be the reminiscences of Ben Carlon, born 1841), who related his childhood memories of a Kooradgie named Murruin from around the Picton area in the mid-nineteenth century. Murruin was probably the same individual to whom Atkinson referred as Mullich, despite the differences in the spelling of the names. See Grimshaw and Evans, “Colonial Women on Intercultural Frontiers: Rosa Campbell Praed, Mary Bundock and Katie Langloh,” pp. 34–35.
272 Ibid.
273 Ibid.
276 Atkinson, “A Voice from the Country: Recollections of the Aborigines (From the Sydney Mail, September 12th),” p. 3.
Endnotes (continued)


279 Ibid., p. 16.


286 Atkinson, “A Voice from the Country: Recollections of the Aborigines (From the Sydney Mail, September 12th),” p. 3.

287 Tressa’s Resolve was serialised posthumously in the Sydney Mail, 31 August 1872 to 7 December 1872.

288 Calvert was also a botanist, gaining medals in international exhibitions, and he shared Atkinson’s love of native plants and animals and her concern for Indigenous people. He had been a member of the first and only successful Leichhardt Expedition, from Darling Downs to Port Essington, and which he miraculously survived, despite being badly bashed and speared in an Indigenous attack. Leichhardt wrote of Calvert as an exemplary team member, ‘being full of jokes and stories which, although old and sometimes quaint, are always pure’. He and Atkinson were very happy together. Clarke, Pioneer Writer: The Life of Louisa Atkinson, Novelist, Journalist, Naturalist, p. 172.

289 Louisa Calvert, letter to Mary Kelly, 8 May 1869, quoted in ibid., p. 187.


291 This young Louise would survive to have her own daughter, Janet, who in turn would become a well-known amateur botanist and active local historian: Janet Louise Cosh collected, described and illustrated many native species of flora. She was the only child of Dr John and Louise (née Calvert) Cosh, ‘the last of the pioneering Atkinson family who left their mark in Australia’. “Anti-Hypocrite”, “The Blacks: To the Editor of The Sydney Herald.”


293 Even in contrast to the amateur anthropologist John Mathew. He had lived among Indigenous people for many years longer than most anthropologists and protested against their unjust treatment; nevertheless, in 1910 he wrote, ‘The mental faculties of the people are not of a high order … they were unreflective and averse both to abstract reasoning and sustained mental effort. From my knowledge of their capacity, I would consider the mastering of the first book of Euclid an impossibility to the ablest of them’. Mathew, Two Representative Tribes of Queensland with an Inquiry Concerning the Origin of the Australian Race, p. 76.

294 Atkinson, “A Voice from the Country: Recollections of the Aborigines (From the Sydney Mail, September 12th),” p. 3.
Endnotes (continued)


297 Quoted in ibid., p. 77.


299 Ibid., p. 62.

300 Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women’s Travel Writing and Colonialism*, p. 23.

301 Mathew, *Two Representative Tribes of Queensland with an Inquiry Concerning the Origin of the Australian Race*, p. 84.


303 Ibid.
Chapter Six:

‘Relational’ Ethnography: Context and Participation

Chapter Six investigates the work of Ethel Hassell. It raises the importance of those early settler women’s ethnographical writings in which the asymmetry of power relations was revealed to be more elastic than was conveyed by many standard early ethnological texts, such as those by Edward Curr,1 Alfred Howitt2 and John Mathew,3 and the writings of Baldwin Spencer and Francis Gillen.4 Hassell’s ethnographic writings were set in the context of daily life, and depicted particular individuals, allowing their vivid personalities and worldviews to remain at the forefront of her ethnography. Her writings revealed asymmetrical intercultural power relations but, importantly, indicated that these were not as fixed as commonly perceived. Trained as an artist, she recognised the artistic talent of particular Indigenous individuals and did not make the generalised derogative comments – so prevalent in her time – calling Indigenous art crude and childish. Her research and documentation of the Wheelman people demonstrate that she deserves to be included in the canon of early Australian ethnologists.

Ethel Hassell (1857–1933)

Ethel Hassell (Figure 6.2) was among the first nineteenth-century ethnographers to compile lengthy documentation of the culture of one particular dialect of Noongar5 speakers, the Wheelman people, whose lands are located approximately 60 miles north-east of Bremer Bay, between Albany and Esperance. Few amateur ethnologists of the time lived for so many years in close contact with one particular Indigenous group who were continuing their traditional way of life, albeit adapting to modernity and aspects of the colonial culture. To date, Hassell’s life and work remain obscure and are rarely cited. Her manuscript was one of the few nineteenth-century scientific studies made of Indigenous people in this south-west region of Australia (Figure 6.1).
By the time anthropologists were conducting systematic research around Australia in the early twentieth century, the lives of Aboriginal people in the south-west region had been drastically altered. For this reason the researchers focused their interest on the inland and remote northern groups, where traditional life was more intact. Nineteenth-century studies of the south-west were limited to those written by a few explorers and settlers, and restricted to the places they visited or where they were living. In 1826, Isaac Scott Nind, the surgeon-assistant to the British garrison established at King George III Sound (renamed Albany in 1832) at the southern end of what is now known as Western Australia, conducted some initial research in the region. He wrote an
ethnographic sketch of the Indigenous people, which was read to the Royal Geographical Society of London in 1831. Alexander Collie, the resident magistrate, wrote an essay on ‘The Aborigines of King George Sound’, which was published in the *Perth Gazette* of July–August 1834, and Lieutenant George Grey, posted as Government Resident to Albany in 1839, conducted the first more extensive linguistic research. Hassell’s ethnographical records of the Wheelman people, north-east of Albany, which she made in the 1880s, are unique to the south-west region.

Figure 6.2
*Photographer unknown, Ethel Hassell, c. 1880s.*

**Family History**

Born in Middlesex County in England in 1857, Ethel Clifton was the third daughter of Sophia Harriet Clifton (née Adcock) and William Carmalt Clifton (1820–1885). A short account of Ethel’s father and father-in-law’s endeavours gives insight into the two family cultures that joined as a result of her later marriage.

William Clifton’s young family accompanied him first to Mauritius in 1859 and then to his posting in Albany in February 1861 as the agent for the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company (P&O). Responsible for a large staff of officers,
minor officials and labourers, this was a prestigious but challenging ‘outsider’ position. Donald Garden explained that the P&O Depot created an insular, parallel society: P&O personnel were ‘kept separate from the town to some extent by the resentment of some of the older settlers to the transient newcomers’.

Diplomacy may not have been Clifton’s strong point. In 1867 he encouraged his staff to establish a cooperative society, which set up business in town to break a local monopoly that led to high prices. This move was most unpopular with the established merchants, including an early settler magnate of the district named John Hassell, who was by then a near neighbour. Clifton was elected to the Albany Municipal Council in 1871 and was a talented manager, but his manner and vested company interests were unwelcome to the local townspeople. Envy of his social status probably had some bearing on his unpopularity; ‘he and his wife entertained lavishly’, assisted by ‘a staff of coloured servants from the West Indies and an extensive wine cellar’. Their children – four daughters and six sons – were raised in style. In 1878 Clifton was described as a ‘pompous, fussy, self-important old donkey’.

According to Garden, ‘The Hassell family were among the wealthiest and most powerful of the Albany people’. Hassell ran a trading post at his head station of Kendenup, just north of Albany, as well as a merchant’s business in Albany. He signed a petition complaining about Clifton and P&O, apparently brought about by ‘jealousy of the co-operative which had lessened their profits’. Albany’s elite were all associated with ‘trade’, Hassell representing the ‘old guard’ merchant and Clifton the ‘professional’ younger upstart. Victorian sentiments towards traders were condescending, and this hierarchy was reinforced visually when P&O built Clifton’s fourteen-room home, ‘The Mount’, two years after his arrival, for £1,800 (Figure 6.3). It was ‘the grandest most prominent house in town’ and superseded Hassell’s earlier purchase of an impressive house on the same road.
Hassell had arrived in Albany twenty years before Clifton, when the town had a population of fewer than 200 people. Born in 1788, Hassell was thirty-two years Clifton’s senior and had a colourful maritime background, which included serving with the mercantile marine, fighting in the Chilean Navy and being imprisoned for a year in Peru, followed by promotion in the Royal Navy. Hassell first arrived in Tasmania in 1822 as a ship’s captain and from 1825 to 1835 commanded ships trading out of Hobart Town, Launceston and Sydney. In 1837, while visiting Albany on his way back to London, he anticipated the region’s potential for growing wool and embarked on a plan to buy land and sheep. C.D. Rowley described this burgeoning industry’s implications for Indigenous people:

very early in the history of the frontier, the Australian grasslands were proved a major resource for the industrial technology of England. The sale of the first few bales of fine Merino wool from Sydney made more inevitable a rapid dispossession of the Aboriginal through wide areas of the colony, a brushing aside of the feeble gestures by governor and the British government at traditional colonial administration, and a relegation of Aboriginal resistance from the status of defence of tribal lands to that of wasteful depredation of the wealth of the colony.
In London, Hassell established a business partnership with Fredrick Boucher, a financier, and married his sister, Ellen Boucher. Upon Hassell’s return to Albany in 1840, commanding a trading voyage ‘stocked with merchandise’, he ‘secured all the good land in the valley’ from the profits and started a family. Their second son, Albert Young Hassell (1841–1918), who later married Ethel Clifton, would be one of six children: five boys and a girl. The Hassells’ head station of Kendenup was apparently established with little resistance from the ‘considerable numbers’ of local Indigenous people, who far outnumbered John Hassell and his workers (see Figure 6.4) and he was keen to remain on good terms with them.

Starting with 815 sheep, thirteen cattle and ten horses, Hassell soon established himself as an influential merchant and ‘builder of a pastoral empire’. In the 1840s, the south-west was quite isolated and, because settlement was very gradual compared to the eastern colonies and there was initially no shortage of native game, there were relatively few hostilities with Aboriginal people. One of Hassell’s white workers, however, was speared at the station in September 1840 and Hassell asked for assistance from the military barracks at Narpound, approximately 25 miles to the north. By 1841, only one heifer had been speared on Kendenup, which was considered a minor aberration to peaceable relations. Lieutenant George Warburton reported in November 1841 that ‘the natives had gathered at Kendenup again, and that one, Quabun, was shot by Private
Moon when he refused to surrender and attempted to throw a spear’. According to Hassell’s descendant, Cleve Hassell, ‘by 1850 John was using about 60,000 acres and was the largest grazier in the southern districts’. This included land to the north-east, on which was established an outstation called Jarramungup, Ethel’s future home. By 1864 the Hassell family and workers were overseeing 19,000 sheep, 420 cattle and 370 horses.

John Hassell’s main station at Kendenup ‘produced much of its own food in the way of mutton, beef, pork, fruit, vegetables, grain and dairy foods’ and operated as a trading post. Some of this produce may have also supplied his business in Albany where he imported merchandise and station supplies. His eldest son, John F.T. Hassell, later ran this business.

Albert Young Hassell was well educated and able, like his brothers. He is thought to have had an early start as a jackaroo on his father’s properties, taking charge of Jarramungup from 1860 at the age of nineteen, where he developed a keen interest in breeding and racing horses, winning several major races in the 1870s. In 1859 he was the first settler to explore overland to modern-day Esperance, looking for good pastures and gold.

An 1864 letter from John F.T. Hassell junior to his father hinted at the friction between these two powerful Albany families, the Hassells and the Cliftons. He wrote that the sons were ‘continuing in their efforts to secure more ships to provide ore but Clifton the local P&O Agent was continuing to be difficult!’ According to Garden, John junior ‘fell in love with one of Clifton’s daughters but had his proposal of marriage refused because he was a mere storekeeper’. Nonetheless, in 1878, despite the concerns of her parents, these two powerful families were united when Ethel, at the age of twenty-one, married Albert, sixteen years her senior. A day after they were married she joined her husband on the four-day bullock journey to Jarramungup. Ethel Hassell apparently claimed she brought blue blood to the Hassell line.

Although Ethel Hassell had been raised as a colonial girl, she had enjoyed a very privileged upbringing in the bustling settlement of Albany. Ethel’s granddaughter, Sara Marsland Ball (née Hassell), later lauded her grandmother Hassell’s training in ‘skills pertaining to entertaining and manners and etiquette’, passed down from Hassell’s mother and a clear indicator of their class. As a pioneering station bride, Hassell became a fine example of a devoted white ‘missus’, who from 1878 to 1886 lived at the family station at Jarramungup. Located far from societal supervision and having a permissive
Part Two: Women in the Field

husband, she was able to stretch the boundaries of colonial constraints of femininity. Living alongside her Indigenous friends for eight years, and with two brothers remaining at Jarramungup when she returned to Albany, Hassell stayed in touch with her friends there for many more years.

In remote areas, the arrival of a manager’s wife was often the Indigenous locals’ first encounter with a European woman, and this was probably the case with Hassell. Apart from the Indigenous employees, there was a nearby camp of the local clan, where presumably their families resided. Scholars established that many Indigenous women sympathised with European women, isolated from their own families. Diane Bell related that Aboriginal women were ‘often sympathetic with the lot of a white wife and mother: “Poor thing, shut up inside all day, like a prisoner”’. Despite obvious differences between them, Indigenous women in particular possessed an acute sense of mutually beneficial alliances. Similarly Hassell, living at ‘the other edge of nowhere’ with white visitors months or years apart, had to ‘fall back on them for most of [her] amusement’. With Hassell’s husband working away for long hours during the day and frequently for days or weeks at a time, ‘the customs and strange ways of the natives were an unfailing source of interest ... as their home life was daily spread before my view’.

At the beginning of her manuscript about her interactions with the Wheelman people in the late 1870s and 1880s, published much later as My Dusky Friends, Hassell stated that ‘the natives had never been troublesome in this part’. Like the Atkinsons and Dawsons, who emphasised friendly ‘natives’, this liberality, while seemingly innocuous, could also be interpreted as a device that served to keep the hostility of invasion at arm’s length, a history from which the next generation were exonerated. In the sentences preceding this claim, Hassell described the station house (see Figure 6.5), noting the ‘strong jarrah shutters fastened on the inside, also two strong jarrah doors which were securely bolted at night ... [The house, built] as a fort in the still earlier days was comfortable and well protected in case of a siege’. While it possible that Hassell was initially shielded from knowledge of the extent or details of ‘native’ troubles in the area in order to reassure her of her safety, it seems improbable that by the time she submitted her manuscript to the Mitchell Library in the early 1900s she was not more enlightened, as local history was to be one of her accomplishments. Before investigating Hassell’s text, it is useful to be aware of the history of intercultural
conflict and engagement on the Hassells’ stations and some details of Hassell’s childhood in Albany.

Figure 6.5

Jarramungup

Seven years after the Hassells moved back to Albany after living at Jarramungup, the station records documented that, on 25 September 1893, ‘the shepherds were attacked by natives’.67 If the young bride had been kept in the dark about earlier troubles, she would have been aware of the later incidents by the time she was writing her manuscript. Apart from the clue of the shutters, by the end of her book the reader would have no sense of hostilities or previous guerrilla warfare. Hassell was probably keen to emphasise amicable intercultural relations from the outset, not only to reflect well on the Hassells’ benevolent managerial proficiency, but also perhaps on the local Indigenous people. Hassell may have felt that their unpopularity among the general public could not have borne further negative publicity, such as news of Indigenous violence against settlers. It may have been a diplomatic intention on her part to keep prejudice at bay, or to reflect her actual personal experiences of eight peaceful years at Jarramungup, or perhaps to indicate that intercultural dealings around Jarramungup were relatively untroublesome in comparison to other areas.

Whatever the intention of Hassell’s statements, there was evidence of cross-cultural conflict. As early as April 1842, her father-in-law, John Hassell, wrote that
‘natives’ at his stations were committing ‘continual outrages’. In 1851 further trouble with Indigenous men shearing at Jarramungup was documented: ‘the natives had organized a regular system of plundering’ and seven ‘native troublemakers’ were arrested. In 1858 John Hassell and several other station owners made a complaint about ‘general trouble’ with ‘the natives’ and, by 1861, ‘the natives were getting out of hand spearing sheep openly, robbing huts and stating they were not afraid of police’.

In July 1861, seventeen years before Ethel Hassell took up residence, one of the shepherds on an outstation at Jarramungup, a ticket-of-leave holder named Charles Storey, was speared twelve times. After being left for dead, he made the difficult, three and a half day journey to the Jarramungup homestead, helped by his hut-keeper, Edward Ladbury, and then travelled another five-and-a-half days to Albany, where he died shortly after. The spearing was judged as yet another example of Indigenous treachery. Of the three Indigenous men involved, one was considered a ‘friend’ of Storey’s.  

Cleve Hassell reported: ‘this incident shows how unpredictable the natives were – their demeanour could change instantly and the change was often accompanied by a spear in the back’. More likely, the incident reflected unheeded reciprocity politics. After returning from the head station with tobacco for Storey, the Indigenous men asked for flour. It appeared from Cleve Hassell’s account that Storey set about rounding up the sheep first. The three men then began to scatter them. Upon being asked to stop they allegedly demanded mutton, claiming, ‘this is our ground’, and thus indicating a contest of rights rather than depredation. Either way, Hassell made no mention of such history.

Unlike Caroline Dexter, Eliza Dunlop and Louisa Atkinson, among other settler women writers who passionately criticised European disregard of Indigenous sovereignty and usurpation, Hassell elided her family’s exploitation of Indigenous lands and people, from which they so greatly benefited. Rather, she merely recalled, ‘they looked so happy and contented that I wondered if, after all, theirs was not the happiest existence. No care beyond a sufficiency of food and water which they could generally get’. Writing as an uncritical participant of colonisation, Hassell attributed Indigenous decimation to the inevitability of progress: ‘now, times have changed – nearly all my dusky friends are dead ... Everything is different – improved I suppose ... Will the old times ever come back I wonder, or have they gone with the natives and soon be legends like theirs’. A reader of Hassell’s text could easily construe no Indigenous resistance, conflict or cultural genocide, but rather a passive, inevitable passing.
It is however possible that, at a time when Indigenous people were feared and reviled, to minimise any conflict or resistance could indicate a strategy on Hassell’s part to educate the general public in an unthreatening way. Such tactical advocacy continued well into the twentieth century and was exemplified by A.P. Elkin, who achieved a great deal through his more conciliatory stance.79 Peter Sutton’s insights into Elkin’s work are also relevant to an earlier era:

To show in the pre-1950s that Indigenous people led lives that were culturally rich and socially complex, and to do so with the authority of the trained researcher backed by the kudos of academia ... was itself an activism that is seldom recognised properly during retrospection.80

The records suggest that Ethel Hassell’s father-in-law, John Hassell, and her husband, Albert Hassell, were generally on harmonious terms with Indigenous people, and that Ethel Hassell developed more than superficial ties with them. Cleve Hassell stated:

The family had in general a great interest in the natives and got on very well with them. Some were employed as shepherds, some helped at lambing and shearing and many stayed on the station for all their lives. They were good at stock handling and horse riding and were an important source of labour for the station. They also knew the country but their use was limited by their unpredictable nature.81

Indigenous ‘use’ – that is, labour – was an expectation of the colonial enterprise, and anthropology was implicated in supporting practical measures for working with the ‘natives’.82 The attribution of an ‘unpredictable nature’ in the above quotation, however, suggests that on the Hassells’ runs, Indigenous people claimed some autonomy and were not subservient to every whim of the white pastoralists. In turn, the Hassells did not try to dominate them completely.

In 1841, during John Hassell senior’s early years in the region, he harboured an Indigenous man named Maynard, who had escaped from jail in Albany: ‘John evidently liked Maynard and implored for his pardon from the Governor, which was refused’.83 Maynard was an influential man among the clan that lived at Kendenup. When he was on the station, there was little trouble. Hassell senior might have respected Maynard’s authority. During Albert Hassell’s management of Jarramungup, several recorded
incidents attested to harmonious intercultural relations. One reported that an Indigenous man named Mindum escaped from imprisonment on Rottnest Island near Perth, stole a blood stallion, rode nearly 400 miles to Jarramungup and ‘tidily left it in the horse yard’, remaining around Jarramungup ‘for years’.

It also appears that Albert Hassell displayed respect for Indigenous law. When a man named Johnny was killed as punishment for breaking tribal law, Hassell, to protect the perpetrators from police retribution, told the police that Johnny simply ‘went mad and ran his head into a tree’. At least one Indigenous woman, named Mondkey, was recorded as being protected by Hassell. Obviously Jarramungup was a place of refuge as well as employment and conflict. Cleve Hassell intimated that it was only ‘a certain few [in the district] who caused [the] continual trouble, many of the natives being friendly and easy to get on with’. Further, he recorded that the Hassells ‘treated the natives as individuals and all of the family who lived on the station became very knowledgeable about their customs, laws, habits, language and abilities’.

While there is no Indigenous written history to attest to Cleve Hassell’s words, it is possible to draw some deductions based on the Indigenous people’s recorded actions and words. This is why Ethel Hassell’s manuscripts are so significant, even though she carefully omitted the longstanding ‘troublesome’ incidents involving Indigenous people from the beginning of the Hassell enterprises. Her comment that they had ‘never been troublesome’ was followed by ‘but my husband went on the principle “never trust a native”, and though they were friendly, they were never allowed to camp close to the station or to be near the premises after dark’. Although the intercultural relationships in Ethel Hassell’s time on the station were amicable, consequential decisions were made on the basis of earlier history and it was clear that a racial boundary existed between the Indigenous camp and the homestead.

**Early Life**

Hassell’s privileged upbringing with a private governess led to her becoming an avid reader and, like many of the women discussed in previous chapters, she used her spare time to study the empirical interests of the day: ethnology, natural history and botany. Hassell did allude to Darwinist ideas, but she did not let tropes of Social Darwinism deflect her engagement with Indigenous people. Aspects of her background probably had some influence on her openness to other cultures. Her mother, Sophia Harriet Adcock, had Jewish origins. The family also spent two years in Mauritius before
arriving at Albany, so Hassell might have had Indian nurses; there were south Indian servants in their home in Albany with whom the Clifton children interacted.

When Hassell was a young girl in the 1850s and 1860s, visitors to Albany made a point of visiting a reputable Albany school for Aboriginal children – instituted by the Government Resident, Henry Camfield, at his own expense (Figure 6.6).  

![Figure 6.6](image)

Figure 6.6

Although the school had been proposed, at first no one was willing or qualified to run it, until ‘eventually Anne Camfield agreed to take the children into her own home (Figure 6.7) and to superintend the school until better arrangements could be made’.

![Figure 6.7](image)

Figure 6.7
The school commenced in 1852, when Hassell was only five; its young Indigenous pupils were ‘trained in the attitudes and behaviour of British civilization’.

These efforts won the school a reputation around the Australian colonies and even in England. Visitors could ‘admire clean Aboriginal girls being taught domestic work, repeating prayers, and carefully writing out religious tracts’.

It is probable that the Camfields attended social functions with Hassell’s parents and that they all attended Saint John’s church together. In Hassell’s 1910 historical booklet on the founding of Albany, apart from drawing attention to the ‘peaceable disposition’ of the natives and the fact that conflict only occurred after ‘aggressive and cruel conduct of fur sealers’, she also included an early account of one of the Camfields’ star pupils, Bessie Flowers (see Figure 6.8) as a significant Indigenous individual among a mostly white history, quite unusual for the time. Hassell wrote that ‘a native mission girl called Bessie Flowers’ played the church harmonium and that Bessie wore ‘red ribbons in her hat, to the distraction of the congregation’ as she moved her head in time with the music. It appeared that the Hassells also had ongoing connections with Bessie, as ‘her brother lived and died on our station’.

Figure 6.8
Photographer unknown, Bessie Flowers, c. 1860. Photograph, 30.0 × 45.5 cm.
Chapter Six: ‘Relational’ Ethnography: Context and Participation

Induction to Country

Hassell’s writing indicated that, at least as a young woman, she was not averse to affiliating with Indigenous attributes and skills. As an enthusiastic amateur naturalist, this instruction into a deeper knowledge of the environment and the habits of its creatures must have come as a revelation. Hassell’s husband, Albert, had already spent nearly thirty years working closely alongside Indigenous people, so was a good sounding board on Indigenous matters; it is clear that she deferred to his knowledge in many things. Like Atkinson and Calvert, Hassell and her husband were particularly interested in flora. In her history of Albany she wrote: ‘Albany has always ... been beloved by scientists ... Botanically, there are plants found in no other part of the world’. Hassell’s husband later became, among his other impressive community contributions, one of Ferdinand von Mueller’s specimen suppliers.

Judging from later accounts, Hassell was a confident nineteen-year-old wife, despite being the only white woman at Jarramungup. She wrote that she increasingly sought ‘the really interesting walks and talks’ with the local Indigenous inhabitants, who warmed to her non-judgemental nature and the interest that she showed in their country’s flora and fauna, of which she ‘wanted to explore every distant part’.

Hassell commented that the local children were soon displaying their expertise, showing her bush ‘treasures’ and bestowing on her specimens of birds’ nests and other treasures such as honeycomb. It is obvious from Hassell’s writing that Indigenous people were not intimidated by the position of the boss’s missus. Within months of moving onto the Wheelman lands, Hassell proudly noted that she had ‘made many friends amongst the natives, gained their confidence to a great extent, and always went fearlessly among them’. Indigenous women accompanied her on long walks and taught her the habits of local wildlife and how to track animals. Hassell boasted that she ‘soon learnt to track’. This contrasted with Jeannie Gunn, of We of the Never-Never (1908) fame, who lamented she could not learn Indigenous skills such as tracking: ‘They were very patient teachers, and I tried my very best; but I suppose I had not the sight for tiny differences, and I failed dismally. I could not even learn the tracks of my own lubras’.

Hassell’s anecdotes revealed rare details that could only be learnt and observed from full participation in cultural exploits. Hassell explained that what she learnt in ‘the true art of tracking’ was ‘taking notice of the small things’, like the marks of a possum ascending or descending a tree. While it was common among early
ethnographical reports to describe how Indigenous people climbed trees to get possums, Hassell described how they knew whether a possum was actually at home: the Wheelman women showed her that descending tracks left ‘marks [that] did not go down to the root but left off about four feet from the bottom, where the *coomal* [possum] had jumped to the ground’.

Hassell was impressed with her Indigenous friends’ eye: ‘for a native is observant – it is part of their life to watch and notice’. From the beginning of her text, Hassell conceded that European skills were limited and overshadowed, allowing that ‘the women used to derive great amusement at my blindness’. Hassell proved to be a dedicated student; ‘thus I learnt bush craft and found it more interesting than books. I developed the sixth sense of a native and could not easily get lost, always instinctively turning homeward’. Such comments might have seemed arrogant but it was clear that Hassell had good teachers and was dexterous, intelligent and a good student.

Far from her family of origin and the constraints of societal propriety, the taste of new freedom and the empowerment of bush skills were probably inspiring. As Hassell developed an eye for the country and its intimate signs, she was able to read her environment with an illuminating local insight, denied to most Europeans. This new, generously shared Indigenous knowledge enriched her days and surpassed the formalities and restrictions of a well-to-do ‘white missus’ identity. Increasingly, the rigours and rewards of her Indigenous education increased her respect for an Indigenous worldview and positioned her a little closer to the local ‘inside’ rather than at the far end of the black–white divide.

Hassell’s chapter on ‘native food’, which included medicinal flora, is fascinating. ‘I often went out with the women, and learnt a good deal about their methods of collecting their foods’, she wrote. Hassell was shown, and given gifts of, bush tucker, liked the delicious honeycomb and a root growing further afield named *mungah*, ‘tasting very like sugar-candy’, which ‘the women used to occasionally bring me pieces to chew’. Unlike many other well-to-do settlers, Hassell reasoned that ‘what was good for the natives was good for us’. Of bush medicine, she recorded a tonic made from dry twigs, for treating colds and coughs: ‘we frequently used it ourselves in small quantities and found it very beneficial’. There were also descriptions of longer-term storage methods, for example, of a particularly poisonous quinine or *Macrozamia* palm fruit, which were buried:
in great heaps about three or four feet deep in the ground. There they are left through the summer and early part of the winter for about eight or nine months; when they are dug up, the fruit is now soft and resembles a date but tastes very like an olive. For trading, the natives take the stones out, which are never eaten, as they retain the poison, and string the fruit on rushes ... and keep good for quite a long time.126

Relating and Reciprocity

It is evident from Hassell’s writing that she developed an intuitive grasp of Indigenous manners and the custom of reciprocity, based both on her own experiences and the education she received from local Aborigines. She established a meeting place outside her kitchen, where she sat by the woodheap and received guests around a fire, keeping up with the latest camp gossip. In this process, she revealed information that was seldom mentioned in the more detached writings of her male contemporaries, for instance, how you ‘can’t talk without a “tittly bit fire”’ and the simple subjects of everyday conversation of the women and youth:

we discussed affairs in general. Tupin has seen a snake, Gratin had found a lark’s nest with one egg, Beenup had seen two blue cranes down the river, so summer must be coming. Gnablich and Taigon were going for a bush walk (getting married) ... we were deep in a discussion.127

The appearance of Hassell’s brother halted this discussion about the ‘promised’ relationship, again a telling recording of protocol and gender distinctions.

While Hassell’s description of the outdoor meeting place might have suggested a lack of hospitality on her part, the Wheelman people may have approved or even instigated this arrangement. She showed adherence to Indigenous formalities of approach – not being direct but awaiting invitation. She wrote that the Wheelman more often came to her camp than she to theirs, indicating that they sought Hassell’s engagement of their own accord: ‘Occasionally I went to visit the native camp where I always had a hearty welcome ... I never entered one of their mias (Figure 6.9)128 though I often peeped into them. Indeed they are only built to sleep in and are not lived in as our idea of a tent’.129

Meeting and conversing outside around a fire, at a distance from sleeping quarters, complied with Indigenous protocols. Hassell would heed these even when:
my head was aching badly, therefore, I did not feel particularly happy when I saw Tupin and Waymen with their babies on their backs wending their way to the wood heap. Still I felt I must go to them for they would sit there patiently all the afternoon until I did appear. Therefore, I went out shortly after I knew they had arrived. 130

On another occasion, when the tribe left suddenly after a funeral and returned after some time to set up camp on a different site, Hassell intuitively, and in keeping with Indigenous etiquette, decided: ‘I would not visit them until they came to see me’. 131

When discussing significant partnerships between ethnographic researchers and Indigenous informants in remote frontier cases, Peter Sutton remarked that such relationships were not undesirable to Indigenous people. This was not just because of the privileges or prestige that such partnerships might entail, ‘or even tapping into a new form of political go-betweening with the wider-polity’, 132 but also in some cases for simply having a boss man or missus, as Indigenous people perceived the relationship. That is, Sutton explained, bearing overtones of nurturance, being responsive to requests, taking responsibility for collective affairs and being dependable and supportive – qualities that Hassell appeared to have at least partly and increasingly displayed. And, as Sutton pointed out, these were reciprocated with Indigenous devotion and care ‘when considering the typical dependency of the researcher on the local person for their well being and safety’. 133 Sutton asserted that these partnerships were considered to be of
such importance ‘as to warrant the involvement of elders’ and inevitably the Indigenous participant was of local political eminence, with ‘an ability to move at some level between the two cultures and act as an interpreter’, along with possessing a knowledgeable interest in tradition.

Hassell’s closest friendships conformed to Sutton’s elucidation of significant intercultural/intellectual partnerships. These were with her teachers Yilgar and Gimbuck, the two most senior women of the Wheelman clan, who also became her most valued informants. Yilgar ‘was about the oldest woman in the tribe and well versed in all the tribal lore and traditions and a great stickler for their being kept up’. Gimbuck enjoyed added prestige as the wife of the mulgar, the ‘sorcerer’ and healer of the tribe, and was a powerful woman in her own right. These deepening friendships, as well as Hassell’s intuitive ethnological methodology of participant observation, attested to the ethnological value of long-term partnerships with Indigenous people and demonstrated Hassell to be a serious early ethnographer.

The native women got more friendly with me as they got to know me better, and every stranger that came to the camp was brought to see me, and thus I learnt many curious things. Nothing was told me at once but, during conversations, I would get ideas which I used to follow up at different times, and thus pieced out various legends.

Gossip from both camps was shared. Wood-chopping and revelatory gifts of ‘native law’ were informally exchanged for homestead-baked cakes and sweets, with distribution to kin and younger workers managed by Yilgar and Gimbuck. These two-way exchanges were not between equals in the broader structural scheme of colonisation, or even perhaps in the Wheelman worldview, but could be mutually enjoyable and beneficial despite different vantage points and interests.

Hassell noted the various dynamics of Indigenous hospitality. For the local Noongar people, her friendship was not only novel but also a rare symbol of prestige, shown off to their Noongar visitors. Early in her text, Hassell foregrounded cultural boundaries but also demonstrated, at times, their flexible nature. One day, while in her bedroom, Hassell heard some Indigenous voices in the kitchen, which annoyed her:

I always received my dusky friends at the wood-heap and never allowed them in the house; but before I had time to express my annoyance, Yilgar
hastily explained they had been waiting for me for some time at the wood-heap, but I had not appeared and she wished to introduce me to Juganna, a visitor from a neighbouring tribe. ¹⁴⁰

After this explanation, Hassell ‘hurriedly’¹⁴¹ joined them, for ‘I could see Yilgar and Gimbuck were anxious to impress the stranger with the terms of friendship they were on with the big master’s *york* [wife], also how fluently they could talk her language’.¹⁴²

The visitors from a neighbouring tribe, Tooting and Juganna,¹⁴³ had brought a gift to the camp. Hassell wrote of Juganna:

She could not speak English and my knowledge of the native tongue is not very great ... Gimbuk said – Tooting, one of the visitors, had brought to the camp a new song and dance ... Juganna knew the song and could sing it very well. I was instantly seized with a strong desire to hear the song and endeavoured to throw as much expression as I could in my face and gestures to show my desire, but the lady was shy.¹⁴⁴

Juganna was persuaded to sing and although Hassell found the song’s repetition rather monotonous, she continued:

then it dawned upon me I was also expected to contribute to the afternoon’s entertainment. I nobly rose to the occasion and said: ‘that is a very good song indeed. Juganna sings it very well; tell her so from me, Gimbuck. Now do you think she would like some toffee?’ In a moment I saw I had done the right thing, though toffee is only made on wood-chopping days ... this was such a special occasion.¹⁴⁵

After they shared toffee, Hassell wrapped the remainder as a gift for Tooting, ‘to express my great pleasure at his song’.¹⁴⁶ In renumerating the actual ‘owner’ of the song as well as Juganna, Hassell demonstrated an instinctive diplomacy and keenness for culture, which would have given Yilgar and Gimbuck greater confidence to exhibit their alliance with her. Such records, although arising from a limited white perspective, were windows on evolving dynamics of interactive intercultural relationships and gave some idea of Wheelman protocols and sensibilities. The account was not screened to present a so-called ‘objective’ ethnographical portrait of manners and customs, whereby
Chapter Six: ‘Relational’ Ethnography: Context and Participation

Indigenous people were portrayed as passive objects of the ethnographic gaze, but as participants in an intersubjective exchange. The dynamics described in this passage conformed to Anne Keary’s observation that both Indigenous and settler could turn their ‘knowledge of the other’s culture into a claim for authority in [their] own.’

Ethics and the Ethnological Quest

For settler men, the imperialist theatrics of modelling masculinity often involved asserting ‘muscular’ competency and demonstrating knowledge and authority, and were thus susceptible to reinforcing distance and formalities. For example, describing the ‘self-contained’ amateur ethnologist turned anthropologist R.H. Mathews, who worked around the turn of the century, Martin Thomas told of his:

> deep reluctance to ‘philosophise’ ... [His] archival record is lacking in inner dialogue, a trait that says much about the scientism of this formative phase in anthropological history, just as it reflects how white masculinity was moulded and constructed during the Victorian and Edwardian periods ...
> there are very few descriptions of his human interactions.

As Pratt explained, the expected scientific blueprint was the common ethnological use of collective homogenising pronouns and verbs, such as “‘they” and mostly ‘the iconic “he” (the standardised adult male specimen) ... in a timeless present tense, which [effectively] characterises anything “he” is or does not as a particular historical event but as an instance of a pregiven custom or trait’. In the nineteenth century, trade between cultures, in which items such as axes, rum, tobacco or blankets were exchanged for services or artefacts, was frequently recorded, but such exchanges were frequently portrayed impersonally. It was less common for nineteenth-century ethnologists to record themselves as inclusive, ongoing participants; rather, the scientific position was one of ‘observer fixed on the edge of a space, looking in and/or down upon what is other’. While also relying on exchanges with local labour and guides, scientific investigators were more constrained by their own methodologies and distance.

For a confident ‘colonial girl’ like Hassell, who was comfortable with Indigenous company and subject to minimal societal surveillance, keeping an appropriate distance was not a priority. The personal, anecdotal form of feminine writing was conventional for women and, given Hassell’s self-confidence, served to reveal her interrelationships. Hassell’s husband and brother were obviously not threatened by blurred boundaries, nor
concerned to impose the censorship such as that experienced by Queensland pastoral wife Jane Bardsley, who complained about the ‘continual lectures I get daily about not playing with the wild gins’ and her degree of involvement with Aboriginal culture. In both Bardsley’s and Hassell’s accounts, one personal, one public, the reader had access to their more inclusive, inside perspectives.

According to her memoir, Hassell soon picked up basic vocabulary in the local dialect and a gradual insight into Indigenous customs, which fast developed into a burgeoning ethnographical passion. In time, she began working more seriously, earnestly researching the mythology and culture of the Wheelman people. In parts of Hassell’s account she exhibited an understanding of mythic structures of Indigenous knowledge, responding appropriately to stories involving transgressions of Indigenous law, but conversely also her sense of difference, explaining: ‘I had to express the proper degree of horror or else I would never have got the story told’.

The arrogance of the ethnological project was plain in an incident where Hassell breached trust as she prioritised her great desire for recording knowledge over respecting Indigenous privacy. During Hassell’s early years at Jarramungup, Winmar, the husband of Hassell’s mentor Yilgar, became very ill, ‘so much so that I went over to the homestead to tell my husband, and hurried home to make some broth and cough mixture, telling three of the women to come up later on for it’. A day later, Hassell went to see how Winmar was and to administer more medicine. Hassell’s medicine and broth had little effect and Winmar died a week later. In the name of science and curiosity and ‘armoured in a scientific discourse that justified [her] actions’, Hassell admitted without shame that she ‘hid in some bushes to watch the [funeral] ceremony’. There followed a detailed and quite moving account of the ceremony for Winmar’s burial.

Hassell concluded this episode by recording that she questioned ‘a good many of the women about the ceremonies I had seen and they readily told me many of the reasons’; why, for example, the bones were broken and what was behind various gestures and placements of food and fires. Ironically, accounts like this provided rare details of south-west practices, which are valued today by Noongar people and anthropological scholars alike. Such behaviour and what followed highlighted the complexities and contradictions that arose in cross-cultural relations. During Yilgar’s ensuing months of grief, Hassell wrote:
Yilgar used to visit me at all times of the day ... I broke my usual rule and allowed her to come into the kitchen and squat down by the fire. We had many quiet talks and I gathered from her the reasons for the various ceremonies that I had seen, but I never would satisfy her curiosity as to where I had hidden.160

Likewise, Yilgar would not always satisfy Hassell on many subjects of her own enquiry; sometimes, like other Indigenous members of the group, who could be ‘uncommonly frank in their remarks when pressed on any subject they do not wish to discuss’.161

During this same period, on a bitterly cold morning, Yilgar arrived as soon as Hassell’s husband, Albert, had left the station. Hassell welcomed her, invited her to sit inside and made her a sweet, hot drink. ‘As soon as I had finished my household duties I got my low chair and sat down with work by the fire. Old Yilgar who had been dozing brightened up and began to talk and tell me of her childhood days before the white men came’.162 Hassell was writing with a readership in mind but one sensed that while intercultural boundaries were enforced, they were also flexible and shifting. Hassell asserted her friendships and her obvious enjoyment of Noongar company, confidently positioning herself against the constraints of an aloof or oppositional feminine European identity; in this she was at odds with nineteenth-century Western norms. Sutton explained that this European concept of friendship ‘has parallels but no precise equivalent in classical Aboriginal thinking or relating’,163 rather, for early Indigenous people, their experience of such relationships was primarily in terms of kinship. Thus we must be mindful of a European perspective of such companionship, notwithstanding descriptions by contemporary Indigenous women, like Topsy Nelson Naparrula, of her relationship with Bell as ‘like a sister; best friend ... women to women; it doesn’t matter black or white’.164

A modern reader might find Hassell’s breach of privacy at Winmar’s funerary rites unacceptable, likewise her deception of Gimbuck on one occasion when she gave her a marble and said it was a woman’s Booliah (wizard stone), and it subsequently became highly prized and allegedly powerful.165 Ironically, it is possible to imagine that some Wheelman people were similarly capable of undetected surveillance of a white performance considered private, or of deception, and sharing that information. Indeed, in a different chapter Hassell wrote: ‘I have frequently thought I had got hold of a really
interesting custom and on questioning another lot of natives, been told with a smile that so and so was only talking, i.e. humbugging me’.166 It seemed too that the Wheelman people were forgiving or at least accommodating of her trespass, as it appeared she was not scolded and went unpunished over her misdemeanours. Further, in her later letters to the anthropologist Daniel Davidson she revealed intimate details of secret information about both men’s and women’s ritual practices that she did not include in her manuscript, obviously deeming them too private or ‘secret’ to publish.167

An Alternative View

Despite power inequities and differing cultural concepts of relating, cross-cultural ‘exchange relationships’ were successful and Hassell was inculcated, at least in an elementary sense, to Wheelman modus vivendi. She was able to bestow the boss’s favour, medicine, tins of food, and additional meat. In turn, she was protected, was taught culture and bush skills, was buoyed up by Wheelman humour, companionship and gifts, acquired a collection of artefacts, and gained an accommodation, however limited, into an Indigenous world. Care between the parties seemed to have developed as Hassell grew more familiar with the everyday concerns and social movements of the group: births of babies, deaths of friends, marriages and warfare.

Relationships between Hassell and the Wheelman were not idealised. Irritations, deceptions, spiteful retaliations and scoldings on both sides were recorded alongside care and concern, upsetting the usual power dichotomies and humanising them. Hassell admitted to the common shameful European habit of bestowing disparaging names on Indigenous people, naming ‘the ugliest baby boy I have ever seen … “Goblin”, [as] the natives were delighted with the name’.168 This contrasted, however, with many occasions when Hassell recorded confident Indigenous superiority. Once she ‘affronted [Yilgar] terribly’ by saying that the daughter of a white shepherd and his Indigenous partner would make a good wife for her grandson. ‘[Yilgar] retorted, “when Goblin takes a york, it will be his own tribe and colour, a proper york for him, none of your no colour for my boy”’.169 This was not the only ‘scornful’ retort she received. Another time, when Hassell wrongly assumed her husband to be coming back to the station from a certain direction, Yilgar, who had ascertained mysteriously his contrary approach, replied, ‘“Oh Missus,” … with contempt in her tone’.170

Alongside such comments were also occasions of protective concern and instruction:
'Don’t stop night at Twertup Master. Missus don’t let him. Twertup very bad place. Nunghar [sic] never stop at Twertup ... ’ The old women gazed after him very solemnly ... one of the younger women, saying ‘Young Master white man, he’ll be alright’. I could clearly see this was to comfort and reassure me.'\footnote{171}

Barbara Dawson argued that writings of nineteenth-century settler women ‘evoked a sphere of female affinity which crossed the boundaries of race’.\footnote{172} For Hassell, ‘it was always with a feeling of pleasure I heard the cheerful “Missus have wongie (talk) today,” and we would adjourn to the woodheap and discuss every subject under the sun’.\footnote{173} This regular engagement and acknowledgement of shared concerns, needs, conflicts and delights across cultural differences forged an intimacy that connected their worlds. Everyday, intimate, cross-cultural interactions, while a feature of station life, were rare experiences for white people in more settled areas in those times, irrespective of gender.

Such lengthy informal dialogue was of a different approach and tone, for example, from the interviews conducted by A.W. Howitt with William Barak in Victoria at the same time as Hassell was well into her ‘field work’ at Jarramungup in the early 1880s.\footnote{174} This is not to judge that Howitt lacked meaningful cross-cultural relations; in fact Sutton singled out Howitt’s acknowledgement of his ‘chief informant Tulaba ... tribal brother ... foreman in Howitt’s hop fields’,\footnote{175} in discussing cross-cultural partnership. However I am mindful of W.E.H. Stanner’s evaluation that ‘[Howitt’s] attitude appears always to have been that of the dispassionate scientist ... His dealings with Aboriginals were cordial and appreciative, if somewhat calculated ... he saw them as a people doomed to extinction by an extraordinary primitivity’.\footnote{176} Various ethnographers and anthropologists kept a more formal distance, in some cases right through to the 1950s, as was evident in Ronald Berndt’s approach.\footnote{177}

If better-recognised men such as Howitt (1830–1908), Edward Stirling (1838–1919), R.H. Mathews (1841–1918), Henry Roth (1855–1925) and Baldwin Spencer (1860–1929) ever engaged with Indigenous people in such a relaxed way, they were careful not to record it. And for good reason: personal feelings and exchanges were acceptable in popular fiction but incompatible with important, manly works.\footnote{178} The same went for many amateur antiquarians. According to Tom Griffiths, most stone tool collectors of the era ‘disdained’ their Aboriginal informants: ‘Their collection work..."
assumed extinction, often of the people, and certainly of their useful knowledge’; this attitude manifested itself in vast amounts of anonymous, untitled, English-labelled objects.\textsuperscript{179} While the assumption of impending Aboriginal ‘extinction’ was a common view among both European men and women, including Hassell, at that time, appreciation and respect for Indigenous individuality, intelligence and intimate friendship were not.

There were of course many male amateur ethnologists who were somewhat less detached: James Dawson, Francis James Gillen (1855–1912), Carl Strehlow (1871–1922) and Phillip Chauncy were just a few examples. Gillen worked in Alice Springs from 1892, living closely with the local Arrernte people, and became Spencer’s main informant and collaborator. Strehlow lived even more closely with the Arrernte. Chauncy, an Assistant Surveyor in Western Australia from 1841 to 1853, worked in areas north of where Hassell later researched. Chauncy was genuinely appreciative of Indigenous culture and associated with Indigenous Australians in both west and east Australia. His observations were published in 1878 in R.B. Smyth’s compilation \textit{The Aborigines of Victoria}\textsuperscript{180} at about the same time as Hassell began her relationship with the Wheelman tribe.\textsuperscript{181}

Chauncy’s observations were made up of noteworthy incidents and memories in a more subjective style than many of the other contributors.\textsuperscript{182} Nonetheless, his writings did not portray as vividly as Hassell’s the individuality of his informants, nor did they convey the same respect for cultural mythology. For example, when relating the meaning behind some cave paintings, Chauncy remarked, ‘on my questioning the natives about these markers ... one of them amused me with the following absurd story,’\textsuperscript{183} going on to elaborate an ancestral belief.\textsuperscript{184} Hassell, by comparison, seemed more open to the significance of Wheelman stories, despite her outsider status and the differences between their worldviews. When a baby disappeared soon after her mother, Yuillen’s, death, Hassell wrote:

\begin{quote}
The natives themselves were quite satisfied. The baby was under a year old, dependent on her mother for her nourishment and what was more natural than for the mother to want her baby and for her to pine for the mother. It really was a good thing ... Yuillen’s spirit [had] take[n] her, for the spirit would have undoubtedly haunted the tribe until she had got her heart’s desire.\textsuperscript{185}
\end{quote}
Hassell seemed to have accepted that Indigenous people had their own perspective and also judged many white men’s views and habits as absurd. The strange habits of white men included asking inappropriate questions, being blind to the country’s signs, staying alone with few relatives, working through the heat of the day, and attempting to travel through country little known or understood.

Hassell, like Atkinson before her, recorded unique south-west Indigenous responses to the settlers and their alternative worldviews. When Yilgar told her of hiding from the first white men her group had seen, ‘I asked her why did not some of them go and talk to the white men, there was nothing to be frightened about, she retorted, “What would Missus do if she saw a red man come down from the sky?”’.186 On another occasion, Hassell reproached Wynne for letting his pregnant wife, Waymen, carry a heavy load while he was carrying only his spears – a common settler perception of Indigenous men’s laziness. Remarking on Wynne’s intelligence, she recorded his reply:

‘Oh yes Missus, suppose I carry *coot* and *cooning* and Waymen carry *geize* and *meera* and you [were] not Missus but *pardoak* (strange native), by the time I drop *cooning* and *coot* and get *geize* and *meera* from Waymen, his *geize* would be through me and Waymen his *york*. No, no Missus, I walk in front and throw *geize* first or directly after, Waymen walk behind, so if I killed, she can run away and hide and get back to the tribe before *pardoak* catch her.’187

Hassell also recorded the response of some girls whom she had asked whether they believed the Earth was square or round:

‘Oh Missus just look all around you, see sky touching the earth all round. Wherever you stand and look, it is all round, put baby down to walk he soon run round, not always straight like fence. See sheep get lost they run round and round’ ... ‘Missus, white man know it’ cried Waymen excitedly ‘when that white man got lost in the mallee and Wynne tracked him he go round and round.’ ‘Yes Missus’ chimed in Tupin ‘All trees are round all bushes grow round. Oh Missus why do you ask us?’ Here in the primitive native was the question of the problem of the roundness of the earth solved in the simplest manner, and I did not know what to reply. The answer and
reasoning to my question was so unexpected and the girls were so sure of their facts.188

Although Hassell commented on the ‘curious’189 local customs, she showed insight into their causes and reasonableness; for example: “‘It had always been the custom”, was the only answer I usually got, though it was easy to see a sound sanitary plan was at the root of many of their customs’.190

Rather than idealising the autonomy of pristine tradition, Hassell also revealed a two-way appreciation of skills, at times simply as an alternative way, at times as something highly desirable. Gimbuck explained the message stick referred to earlier as ‘That yump letter stick, same as paper talk’.191 Hassell wrote a description of a corroboree that served to dignify and not exoticise: ‘in this dance the figures and time was as perfect as in any ball room, each man knew his place and where to move to the revolving round the circles, and winding from one circle to another ... it was done without a flaw’.192 While acknowledging local expertise and resourcefulness, Hassell recorded that the Wheelman women were impressed by her toffee making, and approved of her efforts when she arrived in camp with a bundle of yams she had dug or some medicine plant leaves she had harvested. Indigenous people admired modern ‘magical’ technology, and ‘talents’ of steel and medicine were sought after. Likewise, for most ethnologists, amateur or professional, fascination with magic and ceremony was foremost and prestigious in comparison to the everyday. Hassell was clearly delighted at the honour of being shown the precious contents of a magic bag and being gifted a rain stone by the local clever man, Bukerup – a privilege brought about, she acknowledged, by her close relationship with Gimbuk.

The account of this incident illustrated the various symbolic designations of the stones and the diverse cultural and personal values or positions of each party.193 For Hassell, the stones were prized natural and anthropological specimens of enhanced mystical value. Paradoxically, for her husband they were of great interest as clues to the whereabouts of mineral wealth, such as gold, copper and iron ore. For Bukerup, they were prestigious signs of his esoteric higher education and skills, his tools and the bodily evidence of ancestral beings. For locals, they were the mainstay for procreation of the population, cures of illness and sorcery, and controllers of natural elements, such as rain. Hassell’s writing encouraged recognition of each party’s values, without demonisation.
This rhetorical device served to qualify the more usual subordinated classifications and ‘monologic voice of domination’ used to define difference between ‘us’ and ‘other’. Early ethnology often served to image the other as a negative standard against which white people judged themselves, with the obvious self-serving affirmations of superiority or, conversely, as their noble ghosts unsullied by modernisation – humankind’s Adam before the fall. Hassell’s approach, however, avoided these polarities, seeing differences as something akin to an alternative view. In this instance it served to make visible the positioning of ‘whiteness’ and gendered perspectives, rather than identifying difference against an assumed authority or privilege of the white heterosexual male human norm.

**Agency**

A personal relationship with the *mulgar*, first with Winmar and later with his successor Bukerup, also signalled how generously Hassell was accepted. This kind of longstanding, everyday relationship with ‘men of high degree’ or ‘clever men’ was not common in the lives of many of her professional male contemporaries like Stirling, John Mathew or Baldwin Spencer. Indeed, she boasted that her brother and husband were not so favoured. The acceptance and trust it implied ran counter to the colonial dynamics of the day and were greatly valued by Hassell, who knew well their fragile nature and privilege. While seemingly neither overawed by Bukerup’s sorcerer status nor romanticising his person, Hassell did defer to his superior negotiation skills. ‘He was a shrewd old fellow and often used to come for a quiet talk with me, and I fancy used to make good use of many hints he used to pick up from me, but I could never find out where he got his copper specimens from’. Moreover, she was able to reciprocate his gifts with a particularly valuable privilege:

> After he found out I could tell if rain was coming by tapping the barometer he would come up in the morning and say ‘Missus make talk rain come’ and if I said ‘Yes in a day or two’, he would go down to the camp and get his stones which were the meteorites, and stand at midday looking at the sun and showing it the stones and begin his extensive ritual.

Despite this seeming ‘contrivance’, however, it would be misleading to assume that Hassell did not respect Bukerup’s abilities, or dismissed the power of his talent as superstition. On the contrary, showing empathy and respect for his agency, she
remarked on his intelligent use of new technology in order to make best use of his energies, thus confirming his initiative. This again contrasted with the prevalent ‘salvage anthropology’ view, which in its discourse of ‘othering’ reified the ‘authentic’, uncontaminated purity of Aboriginal culture. Furthermore, Hassell’s reciprocity demonstrated once more her compliance with Indigenous protocol – recognising that a gift of ritual material was both a gift and obligation. It is tempting to read Hassell’s actions through the traditional lens of what Francoise Dussart called ‘engendering’, an exchange of ritual material between women and men. Bukerup’s engagement with Hassell and his letting her witness his rain making (this openness on his part was itself a gift to her), was exchanged for Hassell’s barometer readings. Thus there were reciprocity, respect and exchange of culturally specific ‘currency of knowledge’ to do with weather; that is, both parties respected the other’s meteorological instruments as supernatural and efficacious. Hassell declared her acceptance of local explanations of phenomena as well as European explanations, thus affirming her shifting insider/outsider status. Both were valued at various times. She was well integrated into a unique, broader, inclusive social model. Having insider credibility was important to Hassell, and she would regularly stifle her curiosity to maintain it and keep within the boundaries of Indigenous protocols: ‘I knew the matter was closed, and I would only lose caste by endeavouring to probe into it’. On the other hand, she also appeared to enjoy deceiving Gimbuck on the occasion when she gave Gimbuck the marble.

Hassell’s texts revealed complications and little reversals of power dynamics, for example: ‘having got my “boys” (ten and eleven years old), to help her chop wood, she described how she could coax them to work harder, by:

- remarking that Quarron is a better worker than Beenup or vice versa. All natives are vain and by judicious flattery it is wonderful what a quantity of work can be got out of them. I also get a lot of natural history from the boys for they are very observant little fellows and bring me in all sorts of treasures from the wild bush. Very often half the camp come to assist in the work.

One day she asked the boys, ‘her favourites’, to help her chop wood, and admitted that she could not persuade them. That the Wheelman boys were able to refuse such requests, even when pressured, showed they enjoyed a degree of autonomy. Hassell proceeded to the camp to see if she could entreat anyone else. She was successful, but complained of the size of the group who followed her back to the woodpile, as, she
wrote, they would want to spend half the day with her, requiring ‘a good deal of
toffee’. Hassell admitted there was no use protesting: ‘it was no use saying anything
for when a native intends to do a thing he or she just does it’. Again, when business
camps were being held, at times for ‘nearly two months’, Hassell reported, ‘during that
time it was impossible to get a native to do any work on the station’. Such passages
gave a more complex picture of the missus–servant dynamic and the reciprocity
expected, for although Hassell was able to ask the Wheelman families to help her with
chores, they at times refused and also expected her to work for them in return.

Despite Hassell’s occasional paternalism, her deference to local Indigenous
authority on various matters transgressed the standard ethnocentric views of Europeans.
On several occasions, she and her husband complied immediately with Indigenous
commands and rebukes, and their compliance with local protocols sometimes took
precedence over Western etiquette. Hassell allowed herself to be exhibited to the
Wheelman’s Indigenous visitors:

> I had to be shown to the strangers. Apparently my dress interested them
> more than my colour, for most of the natives had seen white men but not a
> white woman ... After I had been examined and various remarks made,
> which I did not understand, some I fear were not quite complimentary
> judging from the looks from my friends.

Such deference was the Hassells’ reciprocation for the Indigenous hospitality they
received. At other times, the Hassells’ actions, such as maintaining the racial boundary
around their sleeping quarters, could be read as a strong assertion of power or fear, and
an inhospitable act of claiming ground. Nonetheless, when considering this time of
shameless usurpation of Indigenous lands, it is important for us not to fix Indigenous
people as victims and miss the signs of Indigenous agency involved in everyday life,
albeit in a challenging and rapidly changing period.

One of the great strengths of Hassell’s writing was her recording of Wheelman
authority and boundaries, set in the context of cross-cultural relating. One time, Gimbuk
showed Hassell ‘a long piece of thickly spun wool mixed with human hair’, telling her
‘she could direct a storm and make the rain fall where she wished ... but how she used it
I do not know. I asked her many times but she would put on a very cunning look and
say she could not tell or she would lose her power with it’.
During one visit to the camp, Hassell recorded ‘the women seemed depressed and the men so evidently showed me I was not wanted that I pretended that I had just stopped to enquire whether my brother was in the south-east field with my husband, or had he gone after the sheep, I received the information given with great alacrity, and briskly walked away’. On another visit she unwittingly picked up a message stick by the fire:

suddenly Yilgar gave a sort of howl and I dropped the stick with a jump; both the women burst out laughing at my fright, and when I recovered myself and looked down for the stick it was gone, I then saw the plot, yet the man who had recovered the stick had been so quick that I never noticed him move.

Hassell recorded Indigenous confidence and empowerment: ‘A native only tells what he or she thinks is good for you to know, and if a question is probed too deeply will often tell some wild story to the huge amusement of his fellows, who are delighted to think the white man is so easily gulled’.

In Daughters of the Dreaming, Bell discussed how age, sex, marital status and length of stay influenced the reception and level of information a researcher might garner. Young, married or single childless women could not expect to receive information about certain things that were only appropriate knowledge for older mothers. One senses that the Wheelman allowed for Hassell’s changing status as she learnt more language, had children, matured and stayed longer. In the years before the birth of her first child, Hassell was regarded as a child by Indigenous people and, despite Gimbuk’s generous teaching role, Hassell was rebuked if she overstepped her position. She wrote: ‘I am certain many ceremonies took place about which I was not told. For the natives always have a certain amount of reticence about the yardies [business camp], and seemed to dislike being questioned about what went on’. Although treating her with a certain amount of deference as the master’s wife, Yilgar ‘had no hesitation in speaking the plain truth should she consider it necessary’, Hassell wrote, including at times ‘politely [telling] me to mind my own business’. In her account, Hassell demonstrated that both she and her husband had great respect for Yilgar’s abilities:
To tell the truth I was half afraid of her, for she was an uncanny old creature. She seemed in some mysterious way to know everything that went on everywhere ... when my husband came home she always was there to open the gate and walk to the homestead beside his horse, telling him of everything that had gone on during his absence. All the men disliked her, and my husband always used to say he would make her his overseer, for she could tell him how the sheep were looking at the outstations and where the horses were running, thus saving him many a wary and fruitless ride. Yet she rarely stirred away from the camp and her information was invariably correct.

Gimbuk was similarly respected. Once Hassell asked after the ‘woolgrum york’:

‘I can still hear her sharp tones of enquiry “where you hear of woolgrum, that blackguard, Missus?”’ On admitting her husband had made mention of the term, Gimbuk had no hesitation in chastising Hassell’s husband; she ‘waited for him as he was coming home ... and told him I was still a young girl and he had no right to tell me of blackguard things’.  

On one occasion Hassell took some young girls on an excursion into a gorge, and led one of them, Greton, further up the gorge to the head of the gully, against Yilgar’s wishes. On their return, summoned by smoke signals by Yilgar, Hassell called out, resulting in reverberating echoes to which Greton fled in terror. As severe a scolding ‘as I have ever had in my life’ by anxious Yilgar ensued, to which Hassell was quickly submissive, deeply shamed by her mentor. ‘It was no fit place for young girls. She was an old woman so no harm could come to her, but I ought to know better than to disregard her advice ... there was no knowing what harm might accrue from my folly’. After a time, ‘she seemed mollified to see I took her so seriously’.

A few weeks later, however, when Hassell realised that the girls were being kept from her house as punishment for her misdemeanour, she brought her own power into play. Hassell began to withhold her presence, feigning that she was too busy for talks, which had been regularly accompanied by sweet cakes, so it was punishment ‘to smell the freshly baked cakes and find the kitchen door closed and bolted’. With no further discussion, equilibrium was soon restored by the appearance of the girls and the recommencement of cordial relations. Although European managers had the greater power in the management of station economy, domestic relationships were negotiable.
Trust

Hassell’s novitiate evolved, with trust seemingly nurtured on both sides. Some myths she recorded took years to piece together, such as the ‘dangerous’ blackguard legend. ‘Their legends are few and hard to trace’, Hassell wrote, claiming it took her over two years to research them from various sources across several far-ranging clan groups, an almost impossible task unless she were trusted and located within an Indigenous kinship system. In her later years Hassell appeared to earn a certain communal respect, writing that she was sought after to settle quarrels and was asked to ‘give judgement’ on various matters. Her writings showed evidence of her growing confidence in her own understanding of Wheelman traditions. For example she wrote of how Gimbuck showed her the contents of her coot, which contained a rain stone she had yet to give to the mulgar: ‘I scolded her, and drew a terrible picture of what might be the consequence of her action – how the young grass might spring up, then wither away for want of rain and no more grass come’. Another time Yilgar dropped some bush tucker, saying, “can’t eat it, it couburne” (totem). “Rubbish Yilgar,” [Hassell] exclaimed, “I know your couburne is towran” (a beautiful green parrot).

After the birth of her first son, Hassell wrote that there was great rejoicing among the local Wheelman community. She was paid the ultimate Indigenous compliment: being honoured as a powerful and respected matriarch by the performance of a ‘grand corroboree’, with participants including members of neighbouring tribes. If this was true, it was an unusual Indigenous initiative for that time. Dancing for a white audience by the end of the nineteenth century was usually a white initiative, occurred only rarely, involved far fewer participants and required significant payment. In contrast, this performance was apparently a gift and tribute to a relationship of high standing.

A Contribution

Hassell’s memoirs provided an ethnography very different from the early efforts of her male contemporaries. Social Darwinists, such as Albert Huxley, John Lubbock and Edward Tylor, inspired the first systematic ethnographic endeavours in Australia but, according to Mulvaney, ‘there is no hint in the writings of the founding fathers of
anthropology that they felt any humanitarian concern for the savage, particularly the primeval Australians. It is doubtful whether Lubbock ever regarded the savage as anything more than an animate fossil'.

Hassell, however, began her research from a position of engagement and concern, influenced by relating and sentiment. Her ethnography was based on ‘long-term direct contact with the people of one region’, where the ethics of hospitality and reciprocity were inevitable. Despite power inequities and the injustice of sovereignty, their personal interaction across cultural boundaries, occurring regularly over many years, inevitably led to the individualising and humanising found in their work. Further, as Susan Lowish stated, most written material on Indigenous people sat firmly within the Western tradition of archaeology, anthropology and ethnology. Very little seemed to incorporate Indigenous worldviews in an active sense (as opposed to the passive subject) or took an historical approach that would contextualise it within colonial history.

One of the great merits of Hassell’s texts, also seen in the work of other early female ethnographers, was its historiography, which was a personal record of the ways, beliefs and individuals of the Wheelman people living on Jarramungup in the late 1870s and the 1880s. It was a humanising ethnography that framed information within an intercultural history of everyday events and political happenings. She employed a strategy of narrating an everyday occurrence to reveal certain cultural customs. For example, when relating the death of Winmar, the *mulgar*, she was able to discuss cures and medicines employed, and the death and burial customs of the Wheelman people, as well as citing their beliefs in an afterlife. While not ignoring their extraordinary faculties, these clever men and women were not othered as exotic sharmans, but portrayed as individuals with their own idiosyncracies, power and foibles. In her early chapter on ‘Native Dress and Weapons’, she recorded the marriage and dress of Wynne and Waymen (Figure 6.10) and ‘though they told me they would be back before the snakes went to sleep, I knew when a native starts on a *wander* it is often two or three years before they return’.
Nine chapters later, Hassell narrated the return of the couple, after an eighteen-month trip, for the birth of Waymen’s baby on home ground: ‘there was a big corroboree that night. Waymen came to see me with her twenty-four-hour-old child’. Surely Waymen’s prompt visit to Hassell was an act of special regard. Another such tribute was referred to in Lois Tilbrook’s research into Noongar families, in which she reproduced a photograph of an Indigenous woman called Ethel ‘Wayung’, born in around 1890 and raised and employed at Jarramungup, who was probably named after Hassell by her Indigenous mother.

In the late nineteenth century, folklore was a burgeoning field of scholarly investigation. A large portion of Hassell’s book comprised records of Wheelman myths, and although her writing might not elaborate on how each myth was related to ceremony, dance, song or artefact, its strength was the contextual historical setting of the stories. The earlier reference to the gorge of echoes was a case in point and we can speculate that the gorge may have been too close to an area restricted for men’s business; approaching such a place was an extremely dangerous predicament for women and required redress from Yilgar, regardless of Hassell’s colour or position. When Hassell documented this incident, she first set the scene by narrating the ancestral story.
behind the girls’ terror of echoes, and concluded with the ensuing intercultural politics back on the station.237

Another chapter, titled ‘Twertup’,238 opened with a description of ‘a glorious morning in September’.239 Hassell’s brother called in to the station on his way to Twertup, to lay baits for dingoes coming in from that direction. As previously mentioned, Gimbuck warned him of the dangers of the place, insisting he take precautionary measures: ‘Master if you must camp at Twertup, don’t camp near water and mind you make um two fires’.240 After he left, Hassell asked, ‘Why is Twertup such a bad place? ... what’s the matter with it?’241 Gimbuck subsequently told a foreboding Noongar ancestral story explaining an abundance of wild dogs near Twertup. Later that evening, Hassell asked her husband about this and he shared a plausible alternative view. Hassell ended the chapter by commenting: ‘I prefer to think that Yilgar and Gimbuck’s tale was the true one’.242 Hassell’s comment served to voice Indigenous knowledge as an alternative, rather than irreconcilable, view: ‘I never tried to Christianise the natives’, she said,243 contrary to the civilising expectations of her time.

One of Hassell’s motivations in recording such stories was her conviction that Indigenous people and their beliefs were in danger of being lost, a generally accepted view at the time, and one supported empirically by the drastically declining numbers of Wheelman and other clans in the south-west. Her reiterations, however, were not isolated dreamtime stories of an ancient people, frozen in time. Each story was anchored in the contemporary world that Hassell inhabited, one in which Indigenous people had agency and pride in their way of life, talents and knowledge. Written in this way, they enabled the reader to become familiar with people as individuals; the reader could empathise with the Indigenous people’s predicaments and outlooks, rather than being distanced by a scientific convention.

In a comparable publication of stories from the Gundungurra people of New South Wales, gathered by R.H. Mathews at around the same time, the editor, Jim Smith, observed in 2003 that the Gundungurra stories ‘are told without any references to the cultural context in which they were embedded’,244 and that Mathews ‘seems to lack the imaginative sympathy that would have allowed him some deeper insights into the Aboriginal world view’.245 Smith noted that Mathews’ papers and monographs were disappointing because of the ‘lack of integration between the topics covered. His work on Language, art, kinship and myth are catalogued and categorised as distinct subjects’.246
It was precisely Hassell’s innovative approach that prevented her work from being published, until the American anthropologist Daniel Sutherland Davidson (1900–1952) came to Australia in 1930–31. On this trip, as well as undertaking field work, Davidson examined private and museum collections. Upon discovering Hassell’s manuscript, he was keen to see it published. As an American coming from the Boasian tradition and familiar with his compatriot Ruth Benedict’s writings on myths, Davidson recognised the importance of Hassell’s work and her capacity to observe, and realised that the timing of her observations made it particularly valuable as research.

Thus began a six-month correspondence between Hassell and Davidson. Davidson endeavoured to edit the work. Macmillan & Co. in Melbourne had a prior interest in publishing some of the legends for schoolchildren, as Hassell informed him, explaining: ‘I would like to publish it as a book but cant [sic] get any publishers to take it up but you are very welcome to any extracts provided they do not interfere with [Macmillan & Co] plans’. On 30 September 1930 Hassell wrote that the editor of Oceania ‘is anxious to publish many of the legends, but points out (just as you do) that they need editing for this purpose’. On 2 October 1930 she wrote again:

Professor Radcliffe Brown has seen the MSS and spoke of my rewriting it but I simply could not do it. I have no idea what to cut out and when one has taken out from the lifes [sic] of the natives one does not care about the MSS being altered.

Objectivity remained a touchstone for those for whom, as Pratt explained, ‘the professional text to result from such an encounter is supposed to conform to the norms of a scientific discourse whose authority resides in the absolute effacement of the speaking and experiencing subject’. Davidson edited Hassell’s writing and published it in Anthropos and Folklore, providing a sanitised, more scientific version, one carefully scrutinised for any personal reference to people and pared back to standard categorised knowledge, shrouding informants through the use of the third person, and following a methodology of analytical objectification and description more acceptable to anthropologists of the time. This provides us with a rich comparison between Hassell’s popular, yet untrustworthy due to its amateur status, scientific knowledge production and Davidson’s academic anthropological version. In Davidson’s version, the text lost the overarching cross-cultural engagement and politics and the Wheelman agency of Hassell’s version which, despite its occasional racism, was relatively
Chapter Six: ‘Relational’ Ethnography: Context and Participation

perceptive and sensitive to an Indigenous worldview for its time. Further, Hassell’s text, as I have shown, often broke down signifiers of difference, conveying an intimacy and specificity earned by mutuality, patience and engagement.

We now know that Hassell’s approach provided an expanded understanding and knowledge of culture and prefigured post-structuralist ethnography, which focused ‘on ethnographic particulars and incorporated a pastiche of contextualised observation, informant narration, descriptive vignettes concerning individuals, and the question/answer interrogation of consultants’. But this was not known until much later in the twentieth century.

Another significant contribution that Hassell, in common with the other women of this study, made, was to contest early disparagement of, or lack of attention to, the Indigenous women’s world. This lack of scientific knowledge about women was partly because it was inappropriate for non-Indigenous men to spend much research time with Indigenous women. As previously mentioned, an ethnographical specimen was male, and the coveted ‘business’ world of Indigenous initiations, ceremony and magic was perceived to be a solely male domain. Aboriginal women were prized as sexual objects by many white male settlers, but they were not prized scientifically, except as evidence of the primitive standing of their ‘race’. For example, as late as 1928, Baldwin Spencer wrote, ‘the women, seated on the ground with their arms round one another, looked like nothing so much as a number of ancient apes, crouching close together’. Even the teacher of Albany’s Aboriginal school, Anne Camfield, who taught many young Aboriginal girls, wrote to Florence Nightingale, ‘There is not in nature, I think, a more filthy, loathsome, revolting creature than a native woman in her wild state. Every animal has something to recommend it, but a native woman is altogether unlovable’. Hassell’s comments, on the other hand, would probably have been seen as somewhat controversial: ‘I never heard a native woman say, or saw her do anything that could offend the most delicate or sensitive woman’.

In Hassell’s text, the Wheelman women were depicted as being central, empowered and influential in their clans; this was amazingly precient for late nineteenth-century ethnography. There was no sense that they were pawns, relegated to a marginal and profane position. Rather, as Hassell made clear, while ‘their mulgar had a good deal of influence, so had their wise women, and to them was entrusted the power to find out and report if any of the laws had been broken’. Hassell also wrote admiringly of Wheelman women’s skills: ‘I have seen a woman skin a kangaroo with
one of these knives as rapidly as a man with one of our knives’. Hassell also praises ‘the rapidity’ of their spinning and their deft sewing, so ‘very quick over her work, and I so heartily admired her skill’. Women’s knowledge of bush medicines and food gathering was well featured, as was their participation in the man carls, or firing of the country. Hassell described the young women as being personable. In depicting the young bride, Waymen, Hassell used the couple’s departure as a context for giving details of native dress, adornments and weapons. The social context firmly located the couple in a shared intercultural historical time:

Early one morning Wynne and Waymen came to bid me farewell. They had been married the night before, and well I knew it for the noise of the corroboree at the camp had kept me awake nearly all night. Now they were off for their bushwalk, and had their party clothes on. I think they wanted me to see how fine they looked, and ... I admired them greatly ... At the back of his head he had some of the pale grey wing-feathers of the blue crane or white-fronted heron, his ‘Totem’ and the black wing-feathers of the wild duck, her ‘Totem’. On his right arm near the shoulder he wore about three or four strands of wool called a barllee; with a few strands of her hair twisted in, he had all his household goods in his noolburn.

Hassell described their dress and ornaments, their weapons, tools and goods:

Waymen, who was about fifteen ... pointed proudly to Wynn’s Barllee, for in this he wore his marriage ring ... The man plucks a few hairs from the woman’s head, she binds them through his armlet, and he wears them until they drop off. After the plucking and binding, which is done before several members of the tribe, she accompanies him to his mia and after a day or two they generally go away together.

While Hassell categorised the couple as primitive and portrayed the young bride as submissive, she also assigned them the humanising qualities of joy and care, and did not conform to the nineteenth-century trope of Indigenous women as ‘beasts of burden’. Herbert Spencer, for example, wrote that Indigenous husbands ‘devolve on women all exertions which, unaccompanied by the pleasures of achievement, are monotonous and wearisome. “The lord and master” does what he likes; and he likes to make the woman ... do all the dull and hard work. Proofs of this are multitudinous’. In contrast, Hassell wrote of the young couple:
There they stood, that bright summer morning, primitive man, primitive woman, perfectly equipped for their journey; their needs were few, and they had all they wanted to gratify these needs. I felt I must give them something to farewell them on their journey ... I had johnny cakes and hurriedly brought them out ... Now she had a man to provide for her, feed and protect her from enemies, while she made his mia, kept his fires burning, oiled and massaged him when tired from hunting, spun on his noolburns, made his quarks and helped to make his spears and various implements of the chase ... They looked so happy and contented that I wondered if, after all, theirs was not the happiest existence. No care beyond a sufficiency of food and water which they could generally get. I watched them walking down the hill, he a few steps ahead ready to defend her from all dangers in their path, she following behind in full confidence of his ability to do so.268

**Controversy**

While some of Hassell’s text displayed empathy and sensitivity to the Wheelman people, Hassell also included a narrative towards the end of the book evidencing terrible inhumanity about the ‘capture’ of a pardook, a ‘curious tribe’ from the interior. The section began with some Wheelman men bringing back ‘disquieting stories’ of strange tracks that they had seen at the boundaries of their tribal land. A small party, which included Hassell’s brother, went on an expedition to investigate. When they returned they had a man ‘chained to the stirrup of my brother’s horse so he could run alongside’.269

He was an elderly man and a most miserable specimen, standing below five feet, low forehead, small eyes, flat nose ... a large heavy lower jaw ... It seemed a question whether he was a man or an animal. Still more when on looking at him closely I found he had five fingers and a thumb on each hand ... The women were just the same.270

Hassell was adamant in her 1930 letters, when referring to her manuscript, that ‘I have written what I saw and heard as faithfully as I could’.271 Although she initially used the term ‘chained’, she then explained that the old man had been tied by a rope to a band around his waist and was accompanied by two women. This was one of two places in her text where she wrote that an Indigenous person was ‘run down’, presumably captured by a white man on horseback:
My brother brought them on to the station to satisfy the other natives about the strange tracks, and to see if anyone knew their language but no one did. We told the natives to take them a day’s journey and let them go but they refused and evidently did not want to have anything to do with them. So the next day after giving them a hearty meal and some meat to carry ... rode out several miles with them, then let the old man go.\textsuperscript{272}

While the whole section is distasteful by present-day moral standards, parts of it could be interpreted as evidence of transculturation – even of Hassell’s acculturation to Wheelman beliefs. The story of these six-fingered desert people exhibited a strong confluence of both white racist evolutionary theories of the day and Wheelman ones.\textsuperscript{273} Implicit in the search for primal civilisation in Australia during the nineteenth century was the expectation of verifying the ‘missing link or the rudest’ of men. So, too, was it a well-documented phenomenon for Indigenous people to exaggerate the wild traits of distant tribes or strangers, for example, calling them ‘wild’, accusing them of cannibalism or of having ferocious natures. Indeed, Hassell went on to say that ‘[t]he \textit{pardooks} furnished conversation at the station for a long time. The natives had many a fairy tale to tell about them’\textsuperscript{274} Hassell’s alienating portrayal of the pardooks was most likely influenced by both white and black tropes.
Art

Hassell collected artefacts, customs and legends. She gave brief but interesting descriptions of some ornaments, artefacts and ceremonial dances and provided drawings of cultural objects, although she did not single out the decorative arts as a separate study. One distinctive characteristic of Hassell’s ethnography was that she did not censor out all new technologies or modern influences from her stories. While ‘armchair’ authorities like Charles Wake, Alfred Wallace, Augustus Pitt-Rivers and Otto Schoetensack all stressed ‘the essentially uncreative and imitative nature of Aboriginal art’, implying a lack of artistic imagination and talent, Hassell dedicated a section of a chapter to conjecture about the artistic talents of a ‘stranger’ woman named Yerriban, who married into the Wheelman tribe. Furthermore, she wrote that the Wheelman girls also ‘were delighted with her talent’:
Part Two: Women in the Field

She often drew me pictures of places in the sand, with her finger or a pointed piece of stick, and my husband who had been to Esperance Bay, recognised many of the spots. Her perspective was fairly good, she drew animals in their various attitudes with wonderful accuracy, and seemed to catch the spirit of the pose. At scenery she was also good, but faces and figures she could not manage. I have often regretted I did not make her draw things on paper, but paper and pencils were valuable things in those days ... we used to have some most amusing drawing competitions, of the trees, rocks and animals, but no one could manage the house. Shading also was of the crudest. Yerriban could tell when the pictures were wrong ... but she did not seem to be able to show the girls where they had gone wrong, though often she would rub out parts of a picture and put it right herself.276

Like many nineteenth-century women, Hassell was an amateur artist, and she similarly attributed artistic talent to some of her Indigenous friends. Of little prominence in her writing was the ‘commitment to the idea of pure “primitive art”’ that Andrew Sayers found characterised the attitudes of ethnographers to Aboriginal artists ‘working in European modes’.277

Contiguous Lives

At times, critics of white women’s unequal power relationships with black women, such as Jane Haggis,278 Tanya Dalziell279 and Ann Standish,280 were so careful to avoid speaking for Indigenous experience that they missed the transculturation at the heart of these early works. This served to straitjacket any normal warmth and affiliation over differences. The danger of this self-conscious caution or guilt was that it led to just the sort of detachment or distance found in early scientific studies. It denied the generous intent of inclusiveness, the patient work and transformation of transculturation. Even using the word ‘friend’ in these historical contexts, as Sutton contended, was ‘a form of courage that ha[s] become, in recent decades, easy to miss’.281

For people who have grown up in cross-cultural environments, or worked for many years alongside Indigenous people, who have enjoyed a depth of feeling and affection between women across cultures, and whose worldview and identity have been altered by the porosity of boundaries, daily events and dialogue, such feminist critiques seem wide of the mark. Modern historiography needs to find a balance between ‘owning’ the racism and terror of the past, and the inequality of white
privilege, without denying the willingness and initiative of women to form relationships of care, trust and enjoyment with one another across cultures.

The recognition of racism, and the sense of superiority in which these settler women were complicit, should not exclude the intricacies of context. Cross-cultural relationships in unequal circumstances are not straightforward. They contain particular tensions and complexities, which do not detract from genuineness of affection or bonds. Denying the agency of women to form such friendships is patronising and ignores the integrity, gifts and hours of companionship, by assuming all white women have selfish motivations and are only seeking material gain. All relationships can be reduced to exchange and reciprocity dynamics. To deny the complexities and relational agencies of such exchanges risks short-changing real experiences, some of which reached a high degree of intimacy during the extensive times that many of these Indigenous and settler women spent together.

For women working at the cultural interface, a flexible performance of identity and political allegiance had pragmatic virtues. Hassell’s writing conveyed the fluid and ambivalent nature of hierarchy, agency and domestic power politics, providing a complex heterogeneity rather than a homogenous, objectifying or stable reading. Women like Atkinson and Hassell, and Bates, Olive Pink and Sandra Holmes who followed them, embodied this ambiguity as they negotiated the tensions of being both inside and outside. In this way their engagement and accommodation of difference undid the stereotypical boundaries of race.

The relationships achieved by such women not only troubled fixed Eurocentric structures, but also drew attention to the artifice of whiteness, racial hierarchies and the limits of scientific objectivity. Neither Hassell, Bates, Pink nor Holmes wished to objectify, educate, convert or assimilate the Indigenous people with whom they worked. Rather, I would argue, they themselves were partly assimilated into an Indigenous world; they honoured the otherness of their Indigenous teachers, allowing a rare (for its time) Indigenous voice to emerge through their writings.
Endnotes


5 Traditional owners of the south-west region of Western Australia have a variety of different spellings for the Noongar, which include Ngungar.

6 In 1832 the settlement at King George III Sound was renamed Albany by Captain James Stirling, Governor of Western Australia, but the surrounding area continued to be known as King George Sound for many years afterwards.

7 Isaac Scott Nind, “Description of the Natives of King George’s Sound (Swan Colony) and Adjoining Country,” *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, vol. 1 (1831).


9 A vocabulary of the dialects of south-western Australia by Lieutenant George Grey was published during August and October 1839 in the *Perth Gazette* and then republished in England as: George Grey, *Vocabulary of the Dialects of South Western Australia* (London: T. & W. Boone, 1940 (1839)). This work informed Moore’s more extensive vocabulary of Western Australian Aboriginal groups. See George Fletcher Moore, *Diary of Ten Years of Eventful Life of an Early Settler in Western Australia and also a Descriptive Vocabulary of the Language of the Aborigines* (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 1978 (1884)).

10 Sophia Adcock’s date of birth is not known.

11 Clifton had been the agent for P&O in Mauritius since 1859. When the depot was removed to Point de Galle he was appointed to King George Sound, arriving on the *Jeddo* in February 1861. See Donald S. Garden, *Albany: A Panorama of the Sound from 1827* (West Melbourne: Thomas Nelson, 1977), p. 139.

12 From 1852 steamers carried mail every two months between Singapore and Sydney. As King George Sound was the first port in Western Australia, considerable business took place there, with coal ships supplying provisions by steamer from Sydney.


14 According to Dora Bulbeck, Clifton was a ‘forceful man … [leaving] no stone unturned to further the company’s interests’. Dora Bulbeck, “The P&O Company’s Establishment at King George’s Sound 1852–1880,” *Early Days (Journal of the Royal Western Albany Historical Society)*, vol. 7, no. 1 (1969), p. 56. Clifton’s establishment of a savings bank within the first year of his arrival, ‘to encourage [the coalers] to save their money rather than spending it in the town, particularly on drink’, was a move that
Endnotes (continued)

proved unpopular with the town merchants. Garden, *Albany: A Panorama of the Sound from 1827*, p. 171. Clifton was soon an agent and correspondent for Adelaide and Melbourne newspapers the *Register* and the *Argus*, and was then elected to the Albany Municipal Council. It was said that Clifton ‘took advantage of the apathy of local people to bolster his civic aspirations by setting his staff to vote for him in a block … His career on the Council was a stormy one … despite all his public work’. In 1872 the chairman of the council stated: ‘Mr Clifton only served his own purposes and those of his Company; he cares nothing for the town and he was not even a permanent resident.’ See Bulbeck, “The P&O Company’s Establishment at King George’s Sound 1852–1880,” p. 56.

15 ‘The capital was used to purchase all goods needed by the P&O employees, and to retail them at the lowest practical price.’ Garden, *Albany: A Panorama of the Sound from 1827*, p. 110.

16 John Hassell had moved from his station into town in 1865, leaving his sons to manage his properties.

17 ‘Clifton soon rose to prominence in the town, though sometimes he was to find himself torn between his dual role as P&O agent and one of Albany’s leading private citizens, for the interests of the town and the company did not always coincide. Consequently, Clifton was not always popular with the townspeople.’ Alan Hardy, *The Changing Face of Albany* (Lower King, WA: Nutshell Books, 2010), p. 139.

18 Ibid., p. 94.


22 Further, in mid-1869, another petition was sent by the storekeepers, including Albert Hassell, ‘ostensibly to complain of the police behaviour. The real aim was to dislodge William Finlay, the local sergeant in charge of the police, who had become chairman of the Co-Operative’. See ibid., p. 173.

23 Ibid., p. 171.

24 A trader’s livelihood was judged menial, and their honour somewhat demeaned by being overly concerned with the pursuit of money.


26 Hardy, *The Changing Face of Albany*, p. 95.

27 In 1865 John Hassell purchased Belle Vue House from the previous Government Resident, Mr Cheyne, after passing control of his enterprises to his sons. He lived there from 1866 to 1883. Garden, *Albany: A Panorama of the Sound from 1827*, p. 167. In 2014, the house is a bed and breakfast establishment named Norman House.
Endnotes (continued)

28 Brunswick Road, Albany.


33 On first docking at Albany, Hassell sold some goods and took up 20,000 acres (8,094 ha) (Kendenup station). He sailed to Tasmania, sold the *Dawson*, the remaining cargo and his Tamar grant [land and cattle he had in Tasmania]. In Sydney he bought sheep, cattle and farming equipment and chartered the *China* to carry the stock to Albany where he arrived on 6 March 1840. Hassell, “Hassell, John Frederick Tasman (1839–1919).”


35 Ibid., p. 36.


38 But this was only relative. According to Garden, ‘While the European community at Albany was increasing and consolidating its hold on the region, the native inhabitants were declining, almost to extinction. The 1850s had largely been a repeat of the previous decade, with a continued clash between the settlers and Aboriginals in the hinterlands, spearing of sheep, thefts and revenge. The kangaroo hunters contributed to the decimation by killing the native food supply, by cruelty and spread of disease’. Garden, *Albany: A Panorama of the Sound from 1827*, pp. 177–178.


41 Quoted in ibid., p. 37. Lieutenant George Warburton married Augusta Spencer, the daughter of the previous Government Resident, Richard Spencer, in Albany, and was a pioneer of the Mount Barker region. Spencer had arrived in Albany in 1833, when there were only seventeen civilians and a few soldiers. He bought farming land in the area and north-west of Albany. When he died in 1839, his wife, Lady Ann Spencer, continued to operate the farm and was well known for her gracious hospitality, until her death in 1855. Another of her daughters married Captain George Grey in 1839.

42 According to Hardy, ‘John Hassell owned or leased over 63,000 acres of land of which 25,000 acres were freehold, mainly at Kendenup, Hay River, Kojonup and Jarramungup. Hardy, *The Changing Face of Albany*, p. 121.
Endnotes (continued)


44 Ibid., p. 31.

45 The Kendenup store had ‘facilities of purchase of provisions, clothes, hardware and liquor, providing horses for purchase, a blacksmith and taking kangaroo skins, sandalwood and other items for export as a barter’. Ibid., pp. 31, 58.

46 ‘With Saxon rams imported by J.F. and careful breeding, Albert improved their flocks and in 1889 at the Paris Universal Exposition was awarded a grand prix for twenty-five fleeces and in later exhibitions in France and Western Australia won gold medals for his wool displays.’ Hassell, “Hassell, John Frederick Tasman (1839–1919).”

47 Albert’s dedication to breeding paid off with many wins: ‘the Plantagenet Cup in 1877 and 1879 and the Metropolitan (Perth) Cup with Corisande in 1879. He bred Satyr which won two Onkaparinga Cups in South Australia, and Bas Blanc which won many races in Western Australia.’ ibid.


49 Ibid., p. 45.

50 ‘A few days later, however, Hassell proposed to the Clifton’s governess and was accepted because she wanted to escape her position. The marriage took place in 1868 at the height of the controversy over the Co-operatives.’ Garden, Albany: A Panorama of the Sound from 1827, p. 175.

51 According to Ethel, her parents ‘did not like the idea of my going so far away from civilisation’. Her brother, however, had begun working with Albert so was able to assure them it was quite safe (‘the natives were quiet and the climate was excellent’) and that Albert was well able to take care of her. Hassell, My Dusky Friends: Aboriginal Life, Customs and Legends and Glimpses of Station Life at Jarramungup in the 1880s, p. 1.

52 Garden suggested that ‘Albert’s profession as a pastoralist helped overcome the trade barrier’. Garden, Albany: A Panorama of the Sound from 1827, p. 176. While Garden did not mention Alfred, Albert’s younger brother, Clevé Hassell, wrote that Alfred married Agnes Harriet Clifton about the same time and it may have been a double wedding. Hassell, The Hassells of Albany: A History of the ‘Hassells of Albany’ Covering Primarily their Activity as Settlers in the 19th Century [long version], p. 51.

53 Garden, Albany: A Panorama of the Sound from 1827, p. 174.

54 Interview with Sara Ethel Marsland Ball; Interviewer Mrs Waverley Ladyman, OH2496/10 A/M, Tape 2, side A, 6.50 (State Library of Western Australia Archives).

55 Hassell’s youngest brother, Alfred Hassell, and Arthur Clifton, her brother-in-law.

56 Some Indigenous workers were employed on a permanent basis, while others came in for lambing, shearing or horse work. There were also ticket-of-leave men and a significant number of Chinese on the Hassell books, ranging in age from ten to forty years, who remained with the family for long periods, suggesting that the Hassells were good managers. Hassell, The Hassells of Albany: A History of the ‘Hassells of Albany’ Covering Primarily their Activity as Settlers in the 19th Century [long version], pp. 54–55.

Endnotes (continued)


59 This is a quote from a wry comment by Hassell’s brother. Hassell, My Dusky Friends: Aboriginal Life, Customs and Legends and Glimpses of Station Life at Jarramungup in the 1880s, p. 8.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid., p. 7.

63 The original roofing for this building was thatch made of rushes that grew along the river and in swamps. The stone homestead was thought to have been built between 1858 and 1861. Ibid., p. 34.

64 Ibid., p. 7.

65 The exact year is not known, though it was before 1910.

66 Ethel wrote a twenty-six-page booklet on the early history of Albany: Mrs A.Y. Hassell, Early Memories of Albany (Albany, WA: Advr. Print, c. 1910). It was well researched, and recorded interesting details of botanical information, such as how the willow trees in Albany were sourced from cuttings from the trees on Napoleon’s grave at St Helena, brought by Sir Richard Spencer. She also commented on the changing contours and features of King George Sound by looking at early sketches.

67 Hassell, The Hassells of Albany: A History of the ‘Hassells of Albany’ Covering Primarily their Activity as Settlers in the 19th Century [long version], p. 80. Peter Sutton alerted me to how unfortunate it is that the origins of these ‘natives’ were not recorded, because if they were recent migrants from inland this would have altered the nature of the relationship.

68 Ibid., p. 37.

69 A report by Phillips, the Government Resident, also noted that the drought had made the native game scarce and the sheep were ‘easy meat’. Ibid., p. 38.

70 Ibid., p. 39.

71 Storey was on one of three outstations of Jarramungup. It is almost certain that his outstation was specifically targeted, as ticket-of-leave men were not allowed to bear arms and armed men staffed the other two outstations.

72 ‘Three natives were near and others were about. One of the three had been to Jarramungup for tobacco for Storey and was friendly. The native asked Storey for flour and Storey said he would get him some, and began rounding up the sheep to return to the hut … He turned around and got a spear in the back and as he turned he got a second spear through the hand. They surrounded him and threw two more spears in his back and he fell unconscious.’ Hassell, The Hassells of Albany: A History of the ‘Hassells of Albany’ Covering Primarily their Activity as Settlers in the 19th Century [long version], pp. 38–39.

73 Ibid., p. 38.

74 An alternative reason for contention may have been a more typical dispute over Indigenous women, because most, if not all, the Jarramungup shepherds had Indigenous partners. Cleve Hassell reported that ‘[t]he shepherds were of mixed origin with European, Chinese and Aboriginal both pure and mixed bloods. The native women lived with the shepherds and calmly moved in with another shepherd if one died or went away’. Ibid., p. 67. Hassell mentioned a specific case: ‘Rogerson alias Friday was a shepherd with the family for years. He had a native wife’. Ibid., p. 76.


Endnotes (continued)

75 Ibid., p. 38.

76 Such as Rosa Praed and Alice Monkton Duncan-Kemp.

77 Ethel Hassell’s use of the term ‘generally’ probably indicates her awareness of environmental influences on the availability of food and water, rather than colonisation, such as the drought in the early 1850s that exacerbated ‘plundering’ through lack of game. Hassell, *My Dusky Friends: Aboriginal Life, Customs and Legends and Glimpses of Station Life at Jarramungup in the 1880s*, p. 18.

78 Ibid., p. 11.

79 Geoffrey Gray argued that Elkin placed his research program above the welfare of Aborigines by providing researchers who would not be critical of government policy and practice. Geoffrey Gray, “‘The Natives are Happy’: A.P. Elkin, A.O. Neville and Anthropological Research in Northwest Western Australia,” *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol. 20, no. 50–51 (1996). But his more conciliatory approach was, according to Ruth Fink, also a successful diplomatic strategy. Elkin, she said, ‘achieved a lot by taking this stand. He would never have had the influence he had without this diplomatic approach. He was an outstanding advocate’. (Ruth Fink, conversation with the author on 1 August 2014.) This advocacy went further than books and academic publishing. According to Tigger Wise, ‘Elkin wrote a stream of letters and articles for the popular press on race relations and the problem of prejudice. He was an indefatigable speaker who fought throughout New South Wales for justice and citizenship for Aborigines’. Tigger Wise, “Elkin, Adolphus Peter (1891–1979),” in *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Melbourne University Press, 1996).


82 This is discussed in Chapter Eight.


84 Apparently ‘in a large box which they floated to the mainland’. Ibid., p. 77.

85 Ibid., pp. 77–87.

86 Ibid., p. 79.

87 Ibid.


89 Ibid., p. 80.


91 See Hassell’s aberrant section on pardooks (ibid., pp. 150–152.) and her early speculations on racial origins: ‘Some of them were of a decided Jewish type of countenance, which I never could understand, for they were away from any chance of a Malay strain’. (ibid., p. 12.)

92 After their years at Jarramungup, Albert built a house in Albany, which he called Hillside. It had a Star of David design on the front gable and on the original front door, apparently in honour of the Jewish heritage of Ethel’s mother, Sophia Harriet Adcock.
Endnotes (continued)

93 Camfield House is a colonial building of brick and corrugated iron (originally shingles), constructed in 1858 as a residence and attached schoolhouse for Albany Resident Magistrate Henry Camfield and his wife. The Camfields were very interested in the welfare of Aboriginal children; various European diseases, such as measles and smallpox, had decimated the local tribe. Henry and Anne at first took the children into their own home, but when numbers increased they built another two-storey house, Annesfield, on the corner of the block. The house was occupied by the Albany Native Institution, run by Anne Camfield, from the time of construction until 1871. “Featured Articles: Henry and Anne Camfield,” www.historicalalbany.com.au/featuredarticles/camfield.pdf.


95 Garden, Albany: A Panorama of the Sound from 1827, p. 69.

96 Ibid., p. 148.

97 Ibid., p. 149.

98 Hassell, Early Memories of Albany, p. 12.

99 Bessie Flowers (sometimes referred to as Bessy Flower), left Albany in 1867 for Gippsland, where she worked as a teacher and as a domestic servant.

100 Hassell, Early Memories of Albany, p. 18. In March 1871 the school closed and the children were moved to Perth, where Bishop Hale was fostering a new native school.

101 Ibid.

102 Ibid., p. 19. Hassell’s son also visited Bessie when she moved to Victoria to marry.


104 Hassell, Early Memories of Albany, p. 15.

105 Les Johnson summarised this well: “‘A Y’ the teenage jackaroo and youthful explorer of the country between Jarramungup and Esperance, had graduated to become the protean figure of the region. He was the Kendenup-Jarramungup pastoralist, the mining entrepreneur, the Albany merchant, the M.L.C. for Albany and then the M.L.A. for Plantagenet, the member of first the Plantagenet and then the Albany Roads Boards, and the West Australian representative at the Federal Convention which, in the last years of the old century helped to shape the Commonwealth formed in the new’. Johnson, Love Thy Land, p. 113.


107 Hassell, My Dusky Friends: Aboriginal Life, Customs and Legends and Glimpses of Station Life at Jarramungup in the 1880s, p. 9.

108 Ibid. Richard Broome and Diane Bell argued that, in general, traditional owners felt culturally superior to the early settlers, with their limited knowledge of the Australian bush, impoverished sensory perceptions and inferior tracking and hunting skills. Broome, Aboriginal Australians: Black Responses to White Dominance 1788–2001, p. 70; Bell, Daughters of the Dreaming, p. 26.
Chapter Six: ‘Relational’ Ethnography: Context and Participation

Endnotes (continued)


110 Ibid., p. 10.


113 Ibid., p. 9.

114 Ibid., p. 10.

115 Ibid., p. 9.

116 Ibid.

117 Ibid., p. 10.

118 It is possible that Hassell was inspired to write up her ventures by the visit from the famous English artist and travel writer Marianne North, who met up with the Australian botanist-artist Ellis Rowan in Albany, just two years after Hassell went to live at Jarramungup in 1880. North and Rowan ‘spent some weeks together painting the marvellous variety of wildflowers in the southern corner of the State, then travelled together as far as Perth’. Hazzard, *Australia’s Brilliant Daughter, Ellis Rowan: Artist, Naturalist, Explorer, 1848–1922*, p. 1. North shared ideas with Rowan about writing up her adventures and also of how to house and promote her works for posterity. Hels, “Amazing Botanical Artist II: Marian Ellis Rowan,” *Art and Architecture, Mainly*, 25 December, 2009, http://melbourneblogger.blogspot.com.au/2009/12/amazing-botanical-artist-ii-marian.html

119 Hassell learnt to identify signs such as possum tracks and parrot hollows. Hassell, *My Dusky Friends: Aboriginal Life, Customs and Legends and Glimpses of Station Life at Jarramungup in the 1880s*, pp. 9–10.

120 Ibid., pp. 19–28.

121 Ibid., p. 19.


123 Ibid.

124 Ibid., p. 22.

125 Ibid., p. 24.

126 Ibid., p. 25.

127 Ibid., p. 31.

128 These huts were thought to have been drawn as an illustration for Ethel’s manuscript. Ibid., p. 147.

129 Ibid., p. 29.

130 Ibid., p. 68.

131 Ibid.
Endnotes (continued)


134 Ibid., p. 5.

135 Ibid.

136 Hassell, My Dusky Friends: Aboriginal Life, Customs and Legends and Glimpses of Station Life at Jarramungup in the 1880s, p. 120.

137 Not only for anthropologists and people interested in Indigenous cultures, but also for the descendants of south-west Australian Indigenous people.

138 Hassell, My Dusky Friends: Aboriginal Life, Customs and Legends and Glimpses of Station Life at Jarramungup in the 1880s, p. 28.

139 For an example of different viewpoints and expectations, and respectful or resigned acceptance of such, see discussion between Hassell and Yilgar and Gimbuck about their sudden departure to go on a revenge killing. ‘It was no use questioning [them] … However they seemed to think they had a perfect right to know all the gossip of the station, and I was questioned minutely on all the doings during their absence’. Ibid., p. 58.

140 Ibid., p. 36.

141 Ibid.

142 Ibid.

143 Ibid.

144 Ibid., pp. 36–37.

145 Ibid., p. 37.

146 Ibid.


148 See, for example, Myra Rutherdale, “‘It Is No Soft Job to be Performed’: Missionaries and Imperial Manhood in Canada, 1880–1920,” in Missionaries, Indigenous Peoples and Cultural Exchange, ed. Patricia Grimshaw and Andrew May (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2010). Peter Sutton alerted me to the interesting contrast between these men and sensitive aesthetes of later decades, such as Finlayson, Donald Thomson and Charles Mountford, who were appalled by frontier oafism.


150 Pratt, “Scratches on the Face of the Country; or, What Mr. Barrow Saw in the Land of the Bushmen,” p. 139.

Endnotes (continued)


153 Hassell, My Dusky Friends: Aboriginal Life, Customs and Legends and Glimpses of Station Life at Jarramungup in the 1880s, p. 32.

154 Ibid., p. 50.

155 Ibid., p. 51.


157 Hassell, My Dusky Friends: Aboriginal Life, Customs and Legends and Glimpses of Station Life at Jarramungup in the 1880s, p. 51.

158 Ibid., p. 54.

159 Hassell was evidently proud of accessing this information, pointing specifically to it in a letter to Davidson of 18 September 1930: ‘I should particularly like you to note the death and burial rites’. Hassell, “Letters to Professor D.S. Davidson, Sep. 1930 – Feb. 1931.”

160 Hassell, My Dusky Friends: Aboriginal Life, Customs and Legends and Glimpses of Station Life at Jarramungup in the 1880s, p. 55.

161 Ibid., p. 78.

162 Ibid., p. 55.


164 Naparrula, quoted in Sutton, “Unusual Couples: Relationships and Research on the Knowledge Frontier,” p. 188.

165 Hassell, My Dusky Friends: Aboriginal Life, Customs and Legends and Glimpses of Station Life at Jarramungup in the 1880s, p. 42.

166 Ibid., p. 157.


168 Hassell, My Dusky Friends: Aboriginal Life, Customs and Legends and Glimpses of Station Life at Jarramungup in the 1880s, p. 44.

169 Ibid., pp. 120–121.

170 Ibid., p. 88.

171 Ibid., p. 31.


173 Hassell, My Dusky Friends: Aboriginal Life, Customs and Legends and Glimpses of Station Life at Jarramungup in the 1880s, p. 149.

174 Alfred William Howitt, Notes by Howitt on the Kulin Nation from Information provided by William Barak, Papers HP Box 1053/2 (b/c), Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria.

Endnotes (continued)


178 See reviewers’ complaints about inappropriate sentiments for scientific work, in Ryan, “Dexter, Caroline (1819–1884),” p. 41.


183 Ibid., p. 222.

184 This story was about the ‘Painted Caves’ that Chauncy visited in 1849. The people ‘believed that the Moon once dwelt in that cave, but becoming tired of the confinement he ran up the roof of the cave, leaving his imprint at the top as he jumped up into the sky, where he has been wandering about ever since’. Ibid.


186 Ibid., p. 121.

187 For example, see ibid., pp. 93–94.

188 Ibid., p. 70.

189 Ibid., p. 9.

190 Ibid.

191 Ibid., p. 57.

192 Ibid., p. 113.

193 Ibid., pp. 95–98.


Endnotes (continued)

197 Ibid. Hassell was influenced by her husband’s and father-in-law’s mining interests. John Hassell had found minerals on Kendenup, which pre-empted the Plantagenet Mining Company he and his partner set up. There was mention of ‘Maxwell’s Copper Mine’ in a letter in 1864 from John, so copper was already prized. See Hassell, *The Hassells of Albany: A History of the ‘Hassells of Albany’ Covering Primarily their Activity as Settlers in the 19th Century* [long version], p. 45.


202 Ibid., p. 30.

203 Ibid.

204 Ibid.

205 Ibid., p. 75.

206 Another example: ‘My dusky friends were a great resource. Indeed, I often wonder how I would have got on without them, their unfailing humour and child-like ways’. Ibid., p. 149.

207 For example: ‘we took their advice … The natives rejoiced that we had seen the wisdom of their advice and tried to extract a promise from us all never again to go near that spot’. Ibid., p. 67.

208 Ibid., p. 38.

209 For example, when Yarrabil arrived drenched and cold because their *mia* had blown down in a storm and she ‘wanted to make one close to the house. This could not be allowed, but my husband told her to put up a shelter in another clump of woolly bushes, with some bags he gave her until the weather cleared sufficiently for her to make a proper one again’. Ibid., p. 170.

210 Ibid., p. 179.

211 Ibid., p. 57.

212 Ibid.

213 Ibid., p. 157.


216 Ibid., p. 179.

217 Ibid., p. 120.

218 ‘Blackguard things’ referred to evil omens and malevolent entities. Ibid., p. 197.

219 Ibid., p. 122.

220 Ibid., p. 123.
Endnotes (continued)

221 Ibid.
222 Ibid., p. 124.
223 Ibid., p. 11.
224 Ibid., pp. 124, 187.
225 Ibid., p. 124.
226 Ibid., p. 86.
227 Ibid., p. 189.
228 Ibid., pp. 139–140.
233 Ibid., p. 18.
234 Ibid., p. 94.
235 Ethel ‘Wayung’ was employed as a shepherd and met her husband, James McGlade, when he came to work for the Hassell family as a stockman and general farmhand. Attesting to good cross-cultural relations on Jarramungup, Tilbrook wrote that ‘he [McGlade] would frequently go on hunting expeditions with Aborigines living on the property, whose tribal lands extended through the area, while Ethel “Wayung” remained behind to look after her children and to mind the sheep’. Lois Tilbrook, *Nyungar Tradition: Glimpses of Aborigines of South-Western Australia 1829–1914* (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press), p. 129. Ethel Wayung’s mother was recorded as being Mary Bateman from Jarramungup, who had a family with a Chinese man named Ah Lee from Kojonup. Given the similarity of names it is possible that the woman Hassell called Waymen and described as a young married bride was family to, or could even have been, Ethel Wayung’s mother, if her Indigenous husband Wynne had died young and she then married Ah Lee.
236 Ruth Fink raised this possibility in a conversation with the author.
238 Ibid., pp. 29–25.
239 Ibid., p. 29.
240 Ibid., p. 31.
241 Ibid.
242 Ibid., p. 35.
243 Ibid., p. 150.
Endnotes (continued)


245 Ibid.

246 Mathews collected language lists, separate from kinship and myth. Thomas, “R.H. Mathews and Anthropological Warfare: On Writing the Biography of a ‘Self-Contained Man’,” p. 11. When describing some drawings for an article in 1893, he stated ‘unashamedly that he has confined himself as much as possible to descriptions only of these drawings, and … not attempted to connect them with the myths and superstitions of the Australian aborigines’. Ibid., p. 15.

247 In 1931, Ruth Benedict wrote that myths were ‘a native comment on native life’, and folklore, ‘the clearest mirror on their lives … [that] tends to crystallize and perpetuate the forms of culture that it has made articulate’. Quoted in Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon, *Women Writing Culture* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1995), p. 113.


249 Hassell, letter to Davidson, 18 September 1930, in ibid.

250 Hassell, letter to Davidson, 30 September 1930, in ibid.

251 Hassell, letter to Davidson, 2 October 1930, in ibid.


253 Ethel Hassell, “Notes on the Ethnology of the Wheelman Tribe of Southwestern Australia,” in *Anthropos*, ed. D.S. Davidson (Cleveland: Arthur Clarke Company, 1936). This work included words for food, and a song, mostly information that was contained in Hassell, *My Dusky Friends: Aboriginal Life, Customs and Legends and Glimpses of Station Life at Jarramungup in the 1880s*.

254 Ethel Hassell and Daniel Sutherland Davidson, *Myths and Folktales of the Wheelman Tribe of Southwestern Australia*, ed. Daniel Sutherland Davidson, Vol. 45, No. 4; Vol. 46, Nos 2 and 3, Folklore (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1934–1935). This included stories and legends, followed by a vocabulary of about 200 words, selected and revised by Davidson.


257 Quoted in Florence Nightingale, *Note on the Aboriginal Races of Australia: A Paper Read at the Annual Meeting of the National Promotion of Social Science, Held at York, September, 1864* (London: National Promotion of Social Science, 1864).


259 Ibid., pp. 140–141.

260 Ibid., p. 41.

261 Ibid., p. 88.

262 Ibid., p. 42.

263 Hassell recorded: ‘the women all came to bid me farewell as they were going to make man carls all over the country and would not be back for some time’. Ibid., p. 113.

264 Ibid., p. 13.
Endnotes (continued)

265 Ibid., p. 16.


269 Ibid., pp. 150–151.

270 Ibid.


273 Hassell, letter to Davidson, 2 October 1930, in Hassell, “Letters to Professor D.S. Davidson, Sep. 1930 – Feb. 1931.” Note: According to Peter Sutton six digits was quite common in the Carnarvon Gorge region of Queensland


278 Haggis, “The Social Memory of a Colonial Frontier.”

279 Dalziell, “‘We Should Try, While There is Yet Time, to Gather All the Information Possible of a Race Fast Dying Out’: Unsettling Sympathetic Women.”

280 Standish, *Australia through Women’s Eyes*.


282 Nevertheless, there were still many women who did, including Katie Langloh Parker.
PART THREE

Postscript and Conclusion
Chapter Seven:

The Genre of Nineteenth-Century Women’s Ethnography

Although I am reluctant to generalise about the large variety of ways in which nineteenth-century women worked with ethnological material, it is possible for their work to be identified as a distinctive, gender-based genre, shaped by their ethnographic experiences as women. These experiences were, as analysed in previous chapters: good education; socially situated contact zone experiences as women; and the social and professional limits of gender. There were two other features of this genre. The first was the intergenerational thread,¹ evident, for example, in the writings of the mother-and-daughter pair, Charlotte Waring Barton and Louisa Atkinson, discussed in Chapter Five. While, as McBryde wrote, each generation of settlers responded differently to the challenges of the contact zone in ‘facing the responsibilities of being disposessors’,² women ethnographers often had family mentors – a parent, husband, uncle or other relation. In part, this was an obvious outcome of family custom and values, but it was particularly evident among women, because their precarious social life beyond the family meant that family values, example and patronage were of great consequence to them, even more than for men, who had many more independent, social and vocational choices.

The second feature is what James Clifford called the ‘salvage paradigm’:³ the desire to record Indigenous knowledge in the belief that it was rapidly disappearing. While this was a general feature of ethnography at this time, in women’s ethnography it was often (but not always) explicitly shaped by close personal relationships with Indigenous people, who asked these women to preserve Indigenous knowledge.⁴ Anecdotal recollections of personal engagement, many of which paid attention to Indigenous opinion – especially to Indigenous women’s practices and words – were a feature of women’s ethnographic writing.

However, some caution is necessary in drawing general conclusions about nineteenth-century women’s ethnography. Firstly, research into it is so recent that more will likely be uncovered. Secondly, so little is known about some of these women that it is premature to draw too many conclusions about their ethnography. For example, there is very little in the way of information on Mary Everitt – a school teacher at Parramatta – who wrote a joint paper with the anthropologist R.H. Mathews on the social organisation, grammar and initiation ceremonies of the Gundungarra people.⁵
There is even less information about Elizabeth Minns, who was a serious joint collector of Indigenous material culture in the 1850s to early 1870s. We only know of Minns because she unsuccessfully sued her ‘husband’, Mr Pain, for rights over their collection. In the court case in London, far from witnesses to their background, Mr Pain received great praise for the collection and claimed Minns had never been more than an assistant, although in Australia it was believed that ‘the larger portion of the collection had been got together by the lady’. McBryde asked: ‘How many women who put their energies into the work of others as organizers, collectors, discussants and illustrators were then treated, not as colleagues, but as the ‘dear little wife’ whose pursuits must ultimately be trivial unless guided by another?’

Thirdly, not all women’s ethnography was gender-specific – as in the example of Koncordie Amalie Dietrich (née Nelle, 1821–1891). Probably the first woman paid professionally to collect ethnographically in Australia, she was responsible for a significant and extensive collection of Indigenous material culture made over a period of ten years between 1863 and 1872. This included some of the earliest known artefacts from northern Queensland. Dietrich’s method of ethnographic labelling apparently followed the sobriety, and the scientific and theoretical aspirations, evident in the ‘gentlemanly’ scientific anthropological approach of the late nineteenth century, exemplified by the work of Baldwin Spencer and John Mathew.

Nevertheless, the gender-specificity of most women’s ethnography is difficult to ignore, precisely because their sensibility was considered inappropriate to male anthropologists keen to prove the scientific credentials of their discipline. For example, when in 1874 the British Association for the Advancement of Science published its Notes and Queries on Anthropology, For the Use of Travellers and Residents in Uncivilized Lands, it lamented the prevalence of information ‘distorted’ by way of preconceptions, contending that ‘the imperfections of the anthropological record surpass those of other sciences, and false theories are often built upon imperfect bases of induction’. Their advice and lists of questions for potential field workers with amateur ethnological leanings addressed how to ‘collect information without prejudice arising from his individual bias’. Women and travel writers were considered particularly susceptible to such bias, and since they were among those who undertook field work for male anthropologists, it was essential that the questionnaires be scientifically rigorous. Among Alfred W. Howitt’s informants, for example, were May Benson and Christina Smith.
Women were not considered to conform to the scientific mold that remained in place well into the twentieth century, as can be seen Herbert Basedow’s contribution to *Practical Hints to Scientific Travellers*, first published in 1922, and titled ‘How Should the Visiting Scientist Approach the Primitive Australian Aboriginal?’ Basedow recommended he should ‘be firm but considerate’, at ‘all times act in a superior and masterly way’ and ‘not omit to carry a revolver on his belt’ as ‘they’ were ‘unpredictable’.

Male anthropologists were generally dismissive of missionaries also. Ethel Shaw was one writer who contested the limitations of scientific methodology. A missionary’s daughter and so-called ‘station-ethnographer’, in 1940 she wrote a small book titled *Early Days Among the Aborigines: The Story of Yelta and Corranderrk Missions*. Her book included biographical information about the Indigenous artist and statesman William Barak and others, along with some ethnography and mythology and the obligatory defence of Christian values and work. It was not until ‘Christian people roused public opinion’, she wrote, that things began to change. Moreover, she said, it was only the missionaries who really understood Aboriginal people:

> The man who really understands the complex nature of the Aborigines, and knows the true cause of his decline, is not the man who goes among them just for a year or two, asking questions of one and another, and putting his own interpretation on the answers, be he anthropologist or ordinary bushman. It is the man who has lived among them for years, winning their confidence by kindness and consideration, and helping them to a better way of living. Only by getting past the outward man deep down into the recesses of the Aboriginal mind, can anyone hope to understand the complex nature with which he is dealing.

Living among one group of Aboriginal people for a great many years was a feature of almost all nineteenth-century women’s – as opposed to men’s – ethnography. The other marked distinction, raised in the previous chapter, common among the work of amateur women ethnographers, was their attention to Indigenous women’s practices, which were of less interest and access to male scientists.

In order to elucidate the features of nineteenth-century women’s ethnography as a genre, I discuss five very different experiences by early amateur women ethnographers – Christina Smith, Eliza Hamilton Dunlop, Mary Ellen Bundock, Isabella Taylor (née Dawson) and Katie Langloh Parker – who worked in a range of diverse circumstances.
and who (apart from Dunlop) did not feature in previous chapters. Their locations and language groups are shown in Figure 7.1. I follow this with a concluding comparison between their ethnography and that of some of their better-known male peers, such as Spencer and Stirling.

![Figure 7.1](image-url)

**Figure 7.1**
Locations and Language Groups for Christina Smith (South Australia), Mary Ellen Bundock, Isabella Dawson (Victoria) and Katie Langloh Parker (New South Wales).

**Christina Smith (1809–1893)**

The South Australian missionary Christina Smith (Figure 7.2) lived closely with ‘Booandik’ (Buandig) people, about whom she wrote in her ethnography and account of her evangelical endeavours, *The Booandik Tribe of South Australian Aborigines: A Sketch of their Habits, Customs, Legends and Language.* She wrote the book, she said, from a ‘strong sense of duty’ to preserve a record of ‘Boonandik characteristics, customs, habits, language and legends’, lest they be forgotten due to ‘the new mode of life forced upon them by the advent of European colonists in their midst, assisted too often by the cruelties practised upon them by the early settlers’. The Booandik (Buandig) people themselves, she claimed, ‘are fully conscious of the decline of their
race and lament it bitterly, and many … have often requested the authoress not to allow them to be entirely forgotten.\textsuperscript{29}

Figure 7.2
Photographer unknown, Christina Smith, c. 1865.

Smith migrated to Victoria from Scotland in 1839 as a widow with a young son and, from the year of her arrival until 1854, she kept a journal. It was edited and transcribed by her eldest son, Duncan Stewart, who grew up with Indigenous playmates and teachers and learnt their language.\textsuperscript{30} Duncan Stewart went on to work as an official interpreter in the South Australian courts, inheriting his parents’ concern for Indigenous people and their souls. Unlike George McCrae’s edited version of his mother’s journal, in Smith’s case there is no original with which to compare it.

Smith’s journal recorded her years as the ‘first white woman’ in the outlying contact zone of Rivoli Bay, South Australia, where she lived among the Buandig people,\textsuperscript{31} after moving there in 1845 with her second husband, John Smith. Employed initially as an agent for his brother-in-law’s district store, John Smith shared his wife’s Christian zeal ‘to benefit the natives in a spiritual way’\textsuperscript{32} and won converts (Figure 7.3) despite initially being in ‘continual dread of them coming upon us in the night and murdering us’.\textsuperscript{33}
Although Smith’s text on the ‘Booandik tribe’ lacked the more sophisticated tone of Waring Barton’s and Atkinson’s writing, her journal and ethnography recorded her everyday closeness, shared humour, and ambivalent power dynamics, along with valuable Buandig opinion. Like Waring Barton, Smith mitigated stories of Buandig cruelty and inhumanity with accounts of their kindesses. By far the most remarkable feature of *The Booandik Tribe of South Australian Aborigines* was Smith’s elegiac sketches, which comprised fourteen stories of individuals and some Buandig families, who, she said, came to know Christ. These stories were illustrated with five dignified, etched portraits of her family’s closest intercultural associates (Figure 7.4). As a group of illustrated biographies of Indigenous individuals in the nineteenth century, they were most unusual.

The significant individualism of Smith’s Buandig portraits are at odds with the nameless, homogenous portrayals of ‘natives’ found in many scholarly journals and ethnologies – such as various appendices concluding the Robert Brough Smyth compilation. Like the writings of the Atkinson women, Smith’s nuanced perspectives were gained only from longstanding intercultural experience. She claimed that she was invited to share in significant rites of passage like birth, parting, grief and parenting.
Without apparent self-critique, Smith, like Atkinson, also clearly identified the Buandig and their ancestors as rightful ‘loving’ landowners and did not spare her criticism of settler atrocities. The overriding trope of the good, white, and in this case ‘redeeming’, missus was paramount, and binaries of civilised and savage defined the terrain, but such binaries were also resisted, stretched and transgressed. On one occasion, Smith entrusted herself to Buandig care for a four-day journey through the bush to Mt Schank, guided by Pendwr and Calluin, her Indigenous companions. Smith proudly recorded the praise of a hunting group who joined them for a time: ‘they asked me how I liked to sleep in a wurla, and said I was not like other white women, afraid of the drual [‘the blacks’]. I trusted them, and they would never forget it. They promised to visit me at Willijam (Rivoli Bay)’.

On various occasions, Smith documented the Buandig’s confidently perceived superiority, such as when an old Buandig man chastised her for allowing boys and girls to play together: “he was,” he said “an old man, and knew better than me. The whites were “stupid”; and he would like me to take care of my daughters”. Whatever the motive for recording this sort of criticism, such passages challenged simplistic readings of Indigenous people as victims, and remained valuable records of not only Indigenous worldviews but of their confidence and resistance. One imagines that aspiring anthropologists such as Edward Stirling, Herbert Basedow and Baldwin Spencer were also told off on occasion, but the constraints on male scientific writing meant that we
Part Three: Postscript and Conclusion

have few records of such conversations, and then mostly confined to their private correspondence.44

In Smith’s and other nineteenth-century women’s writings are traces of an intertwining of lives that trouble the detachment and stricter boundaries of standard male ethnographies. When Rebekah Crow researched colonial women’s writings, she found that ‘it would appear that there was as much co-operation and negotiation on a daily basis between black and white as there was violent conflict’.45 Nonetheless Smith’s text recorded her mission as a bringer of knowledge, as Haggis identified, ‘not gaining it’.46

In the smaller, ethnographical, section of her book, Smith recorded Indigenous women’s worlds as rather oppressive and grim. In this she was following conventional ethnography, which represented Indigenous women as victims of violence and sexual exploitation; for example, ‘[h]e showed her no kindness or sympathy, but raised his hand and struck her to the ground and kicked her. Poor creature, she merited no such cruel treatment’.47 Smith also referred to various vices of infanticide, cannibalism, adultery and drinking, which were presumably the ‘savage habits of their gloomy lives’ from which she wished to free them.48 However, in other sections of her texts, she conveyed a sense of women’s empowerment and pride, and the sensibility of their thinking:

Mary Ann asked me what I thought of her ‘m’rado’ (land), and said with a smile of pleasure, ‘... here is the country where I followed my husband when I was a “burrich burrich” (a girl). There are my good swans, “lapps lapps” (small fish), “gnarps” (apples), “nroite” (honey), “carlie paron marton” (plenty plenty good)’.49

Such passages were garnered through time spent alongside Indigenous women, ‘out pleasuring’,50 through day-to-day conversation, taking heed and, in Smith’s case, fulfilling her professed duty to prevent the Buandig and their symbiosis with country from being entirely forgotten.

In arguing that the ‘Buandig people produced in Christina Smith a more flexible and accommodating world view than the one with which she arrived in Rivoli Bay’,51 Nettelbeck acknowledged the sorts of transculturation that occurred in contact zones. In this case Smith’s developing attitudes also had continuity and further repercussions through the work of her Buandig-speaking son as a court translator. In line with Indigenous protocol, the continuity of obligations and reciprocity passed down the
generations. Despite Smith’s biographies purpose of attesting to Indigenous conversion, she also introduces them as sensitive human beings, often from a caring family, with an emotional depth and aspiration not normally bestowed to them. When we give due weight to historical forces, the perspectives of society and thought at the time, and listen to Indigenous voices (even if in these texts they were reported by white scribes) there is another story yet to be fully appreciated.

Eliza Hamilton Dunlop (1796–1880)

Along with Caroline Dexter, Eliza Hamilton Dunlop was a very early woman settler who contributed linguistic and ethnographical detail in her writings. Her poetry is discussed in Chapter Three, but she was also one of the earliest female ethnographers. As a poet, Dunlop’s artistic and political sensibilities influenced the tone and presentation of her ethnography and her recognition of Indigenous art, in the form of poetry. Unfortunately, only fragments of Dunlop’s ethnography survive: primarily linguistic material, lists of Indigenous words or items and their meanings, and some remaining examples of the transliteration of Indigenous songs. Attesting to nineteenth-century interest in the antiquity of human existence and the origins of religion, Dunlop recorded various cultural information; for instance, in the 1840s, naming and describing various spirit beings of the Arkinung (and likely the neighbouring Awabakal people), who lived near her home at Wollombi, north of Sydney (Figure 7.1).

A paucity of material makes it difficult to assess the extent or nuance of Dunlop’s ethnography. We do know, however, that she recorded information about named Indigenous individuals, along with their material culture. An example of her scientific approach was her short explanation for the word *cooleman* [sic]:

The coole-man is a bowl, hollowed with great ingenuity by the aborigines, from an excrecent substance of a semi-circular form, found growing on the iron-bark, apple, and other gumiferous trees; the inner wood is rather more porous and fibrous than that on which it grows; but the bark (which is the cooleman) is hard and smooth, one or two inches in thickness, and containing from a pint to two gallons. On a first examination I was inclined to the opinion of an author (Professor Rennie) on ‘Insect Architecture,’ who believes that ‘such growths may be caused by the juncture of the *lynips,*’ but admitting, with that authority, that these excrescences are ‘pseudo-galls,’ I rather infer them to be like wens on animals, ‘produced by too much nourishment.’
This extract at least attested to Dunlop’s respect for Indigenous craftsmanship, her own scholarly reading and her interest in natural science. Furthermore, it implied that her pursuit was not simply a pastime but, in accordance with Valerie Wheeler’s definition of an ethnographer, she was contributing to a branch of knowledge.\textsuperscript{53} She did not merely appraise the object out of curiosity, but conducted ‘examinations’.

As with all of the women in this study, personal experience played a role in Dunlop’s ethnographic interests. Dunlop had, through her father, two Indian half-sisters, whom her brothers refused to acknowledge. (Hamilton had left equal shares in his estate to all his children and his second, Indian, wife.) Surely this personal experience went some way towards sensitising Dunlop to the anomalies of ‘sameness and difference’, the injustice of racism, and culture clashes. Exposure to the inequalities of poverty and privilege and to the stark contrasts between them would also have been significant. Dunlop became ‘very fond’ of her stepsisters, inviting one of them to accompany her back to Ireland and offering to adopt a child of the other.\textsuperscript{54}

Dunlop not only experienced the loss of her wealth and the early death of her mother, the departure of her father and her move to her grandmother’s care, but also the death of her first husband and one of her children. Along with personal grief, Dunlop carried her own strong sense of dispossession: the loss of her country, and her life as an immigrant in Australia. She called herself a ‘friendless stranger’ in the poem ‘Songs of an Exile (No. 1), The Dream’, which she wrote on 18 October 1838 after ‘exile’ from her beloved Ireland: ‘What thoughts within this bosom swell. What tears an Exile’s eyes are filling’.\textsuperscript{55} Dunlop could thus relate to Indigenous exile and the significance of their own language, as she used words of Gaelic in her own poems.\textsuperscript{56}

O’Leary suggested that Dunlop’s Irish background, a characteristic she shared with Daisy Bates,\textsuperscript{57} ‘not only made her sympathetic to displaced Indigenous peoples … but also predisposed her to be curious about their languages and oral traditions’.\textsuperscript{58} From the mid-1840s, Dunlop began recording Indigenous vocabularies and songs of the Hunter Valley region, ‘translating them into English prose and sometimes versifying them’;\textsuperscript{59} and it is these that remain priceless cultural heritage today. For example, the following section of a poem by Wallatu, ‘highly esteemed by his tribe’, translated by Dunlop, was published in the \textit{Sydney Morning Herald} in 1848. ““Wollaje” as white folks used to call him’, Dunlop wrote, ‘favoured me several times with his company, and perhaps thought it an honor when he made proposals to me for a matrimonial alliance with one of the members of my family”’.\textsuperscript{60} Passages such as this one reflect the
quality of colonial women’s ethnography that includes the intercultural interactivity and mutuality of their everyday lives.

Our home is the gibber-gunyah [cave in the rock], Where hill joins hill on high;
Where the turruma and berrambo [war arms], Like sleeping serpents lie;
—And the rushing of wings, as the wangas [pigeons] pass,
Sweeps the wallaby’s print from the glistening grass.
Ours are the makoro [eels] gliding, Deep in the shady pool;
For our spear is sure, and the prey secure … Kanin, [white-fellow] or the bright gherool [mullet].
And the glances are bright, and the footsteps are free,
When we dance in the shade of the karakon tree.

While most of her work that remains is only to be found in snippets published in newspapers, Dunlop did have that vital male supporter who published her work in his texts: Isaac Nathan, who is often regarded as Australia’s first composer. Nathan took an avid interest in the music of Indigenous Australians and was one of the first to transcribe Indigenous melodies and set to music a number of Aboriginal airs.

In his 1849 book *The Southern Euphrosyne and Australian Miscellany: Containing Oriental Moral Tales, Original Anecdote, Poetry and Music*, Nathan reproduced at least two of Dunlop’s poems. The first, ‘Phalla Wollombi’, had a fairly extensive translation with some ethnographic notations. Nathan set Dunlop’s work to music, and without this we would have but little evidence of her fragmentary but pioneering work. Even her poem ‘The Aboriginal Mother’ was set to music, subtitled *An Australian Melody Respectfully Inscribed to Lady Gipps*. Nathan’s great-granddaughter Catherine Mackerras wrote of Dunlop ‘that her chief interest was in the aborigines, her chief poetic achievement a transmission of their poetry into English verse’.

**Mary Ellen Bundock (1845–1924)**

Raised on her family’s pastoral property at Wyangarie Station on the Richmond River in New South Wales, Mary Ellen Bundock (Figure 7.5) was, despite her isolation, well educated and well connected. As with many wives in remote areas, the lack of opportunity for social contact with other Europeans led her to establish friendly relations with local Aboriginal workers and family groups. Bundock recalled that her mother, Ellen, never saw a white woman friend in her lifetime on the station, and only
away from it ‘on the very rare occasions when she went to see Mrs Wilson at Lismore’.67

Mary Bundock, her sister Alice and their siblings grew up on the north-east coast of New South Wales, in a small station community that was surrounded by a predominantly Indigenous population, both local and transient. The empirical ideology of collecting and categorising was fundamental to the idea of empire, and Mary and Alice would have been aware of their uncle Edward Ogilvie’s ethnographical enterprises.68 Isabel McBryde drew attention to an ‘inheritance of concern’69 as having a profound influence on the Bundock sisters’ contribution and, indeed, this seems to be a distinctive feature shared by those other early female collectors and ethnographers discussed in this thesis.

The Bundock family was known for its friendly relations with local Indigenous people on whose land it lived. Bundock enjoyed regular visits to Edward Ogilvie at Yulgilbar Station (Figure 7.6). He had pioneered the inland route to the Clarence River in 1840 with the help of an Aboriginal guide and established the Yulgilbar Station, surprising the local people there with his ability to speak in ‘language’. Initially,

[t]he Aborigines were hostile but Edward became fluent in the local dialect and at a parley explained that he only wanted the grass and gave them complete hunting rights on his run including honey. They soon joined with Aborigines in wrestling matches and races and found their ‘sable friends no mean antagonists’.70
Chapter Seven: The Genre of Nineteenth-Century Women’s Ethnography

Figure 7.6

At first, Ogilvie named the property Swanlea, but soon after changed it to Yulgilbar, an Aboriginal word meaning ‘place of platypuses’.71 While there is no doubt that Ogilvie illegally usurped Indigenous lands, the change of name perhaps reflected a certain level of respect for Indigenous traditions, presumably the ‘Dreaming’ of the area. His nephew claimed there were hundreds of platypuses in the river along the station banks and that Ogilvie was strictly protective of them.72 One suspects he may have been influenced by Indigenous law, which might explain why many of the traditional owners stayed on, living and working on the Ogilvie property for generations. According to his nephew, Ogilvie’s ‘old employees had a strong affection and respect for him … [while] he, on his part, was always keenly interested in the welfare of his old hands’.73 No doubt the Bundock sisters were greatly influenced by both their grandmother’s legacy74 and her son’s intercultural relations. Like many of the other women in this study, such as McCrae, Waring Barton, Smith, Hassell and Parker, Bundock recorded the deeply significant intercultural interaction of providing European medicines to Indigenous people. Equally significant was the presence of Indigenous midwives and Indigenous medicinal knowledge for isolated white families.
Ogilvie was not only a very well connected and successful pastoralist but he was also an author and seasoned traveller, and became a magistrate and politician in his later life. He would have been interested in the collections of his nieces, and probably encouraged Mary’s efforts in ethnology. He had studied the Clarence River dialect systematically and ‘wrote himself a grammar of it’.75 He was also the grandfather of socialist and women’s activist Jessie Street, who was second cousin to Mary, grew up on Yulgilbar from the age of seven, and in her later years was outspoken about Aboriginal rights.76 In her autobiography, Street recalled that, apart from mustering, one of her favourite occupations was ‘swimming in the river with the Aboriginal women. I loved doing this and admired immensely their ability to swim long distances underwater coming up in unexpected places’.77

The two Bundock sisters, Miss Mary and her sister Alice, became significant collectors of Wyangarie artefacts. As McBryde’s research revealed, Mary Bundock’s collecting was not a trivial pastime but ‘directed to scientific institutions’.78 Of the approximately 100 Richmond River items in major European and Australian collections, Bundock collected well over half:

The significance of her collections, however, is not a matter of numbers. It derives from their comprehensive and regional character, and the professional quality of their documentation and preparation ... Her work does much to redress the [gender] imbalance in other sources, both written and artefactual.79

While achieving neither publication nor scholarly status, Bundock corresponded with Robert Etheridge, Director of the Australian Museum (in Sydney), and with the Leiden Museum after trips overseas in the 1880s. Her letters provided a wealth of contextual information that was used to confirm distribution and data for papers.80 For example, in relation to a paper on the Lil-lil or Woggara, Etheridge was able to confirm through ‘Miss Bundock that the work was known to aborigines of the upper Clarence River’.81 Detailed documentation accompanied each item from her collection that she donated or that was exhibited, in both Australian and European museums.82 In her descriptions she drew from local knowledge, for instance of a dilly bag (since bequeathed to the British Museum) referred to in a letter dated 8 October 1879.83 From Wyangarie Station, Bundock wrote to Professor Archibald Liversidge at Sydney University: ‘The largest bag of the stiffer grass is a “dilly bag” & the native name of the plant is “boombi”. The plant grows on the ridges round here & is not uncommon’.84
In her professional archiving of items in the later decades of the nineteenth century, Bundock recorded various aspects of New South Wales coastal culture, in particular providing information about women and their activities, which had been mostly ignored by her male contemporaries. Bundock wrote two unpublished manuscripts, including an ethnographic memoir, but gained little acknowledgement from museum staff. She did not seem to have had scientific patrons to support her into publication. On the other hand, as McBryde pointed out, Bundock did not seem to be assertive in seeking support from museum professionals. Her work left behind some important scientific records and collections but, like Dietrich’s collection, was overlooked until the last decade of the twentieth century, when McBryde’s research brought her to light.

**Isabella Park Taylor (née Dawson, 1843–1929)**

In contrast to Mary Bundock’s late recognition, Isabella Taylor (née Dawson) has remained all but invisible in the history of Australian ethnography. The documents that attest to her achievements are just two photographs, a letter, a newspaper article and her veiled contribution to an important nineteenth-century work of ethnology.

Isabella was the only child of James Dawson (Figure 7.7), an amateur ethnographer, taxidermist and activist for Indigenous interests. Raymond Madden wrote of James Dawson as a ‘moral relativist’ and ‘colonial hero’, and of both Dawson and his daughter as outstanding for their grasp of an Indigenous worldview, and for respecting that ‘Aboriginal culture had its own internal logic and value systems’.

![Figure 7.7](Johnstone, O’Shannessy & Co., Photographers, *James Dawson*, 1892.)
Both of Taylor’s parents were well-read Presbyterians with liberal values. Her mother, Joan Anderson Dawson (née Park), enjoyed some prestige as the niece of Mungo Park, a surgeon and botanist famous for his exploration into the interior of Africa; she is said to have ‘possessed much of the originality of that remarkable man’. Mrs Dawson’s obituary stood out for attesting to her popularity and ‘unremitting kindness’ to both black and white. Fulfilling the stereotype of the sympathetic maternal good woman, she was praised in the article for administering ‘to sick and poor, to white and black, her heart poured out streams of sympathy, and many a worn heart blesses her memory’. On her funeral day, 24 October 1879, all the shops and businesses of Camperdown closed. Mrs Dawson’s funeral cortège was the ‘largest ever witnessed in Camperdown, consisting of forty to fifty well-filled carriages, buggies and other vehicles, and also twenty to thirty men on horseback and some on foot’.

Isabella Taylor inherited a Presbyterian tradition of valuing education and science, and an interest in other cultures, from both sides of her family. She would have listened to exciting tales of her great-uncle’s travels to Sumatra and Africa. Mungo Park had become a celebrity in London’s scientific and literary circles, and his book *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa: Performed Under the Direction and Patronage of the African Association, in the Years 1795, 1796 and 1797* remains in print today. Taylor likely heard of the serious illness that would have claimed Park’s life, but for the help of a Kalmalian family who took him into their home for seven months and nursed him back to health. It is probable too that, as Taylor’s own skills at linguistics emerged, her mother told her of her uncle’s experiences of perfecting Arabic under the tutorship of Sidi Ambak Bubi, a native of Mogador, and of his friendship with Isaaco, a Mandingo guide.

With such famous intercultural precedents in the family, it is little wonder that many Dawson family members, with their Presbyterian convictions of lifelong learning, hospitality, social justice and reform, became devoted to Indigenous welfare and preservation of culture. Migrating from Scotland in 1840, the family embarked on a pastoral line of work and went into partnership for the Kangatong Station near Port Fairy, 10 miles east of Macarthur, from 1844, a year after Taylor was born. They lived at Kangatong until Taylor was twenty-three, then moved to Melbourne, staying at the home of the editor of the *Argus*, William Kerr, for several years. With the *Scotsman* newspaper as a significant feature of their family tradition, it is not surprising that James Dawson wrote numerous letters to the newspapers and that his daughter likewise contributed an important letter. The family finally settled at Wuurung Farm, not far
from their original station on the edge of Lake Bullen Merri, a deep volcanic crater lake near Camperdown, on the lands of the Djarurd Wurrung people.

Dawson was appointed Guardian of the Aborigines in 1876 and became an outspoken critic of the maltreatment of Indigenous people by government, settlers and missions. His views no doubt shaped, and were shared by, his daughter. Together they researched various matters relating to Indigenous people. In 1881 Dawson published their significant work *Australian Aborigines: The Languages and Customs of Several Tribes of Aborigines in the Western District of Victoria, Australia,*96 (Figure 7.8) which R.M.W. Dixon credited as being ‘perhaps the fullest and most sympathetic account of any tribe in southern Australia’.97 Madden likewise acknowledged the book as ‘one of the most useful tools for reconstructing knowledge of the original cultures and customs of Aboriginal western Victoria’.98

Dawson sent copies of their book to Charles Darwin, who wrote back on 3 June 1881, thanking him for his research.99 In a response of 30 July Dawson attributed most of the research to his daughter:

As regards the maths in the book, I may state that it was collected chiefly by my daughter Mrs Taylor, who I may mention is a grand-niece of Mungo
Park the African Traveller. Mrs Taylor enjoyed the singular advantage of having been amongst the Aborigines from the age of three till fifteen years, and consequently was thoroughly qualified to undertake such an arduous task, a task undertaken I may say without due consideration of the labour and anxiety; for had these been anticipated, I fear much of ‘Australian Aborigines’ would never have seen the light.100

A second edition followed in 1900. While the book was credited to her father, anthropologist Madden stated that Taylor’s contribution formed ‘a significant proportion of the work’ and that it was her father who assisted her, rather than the other way round.101

In the preface to *Australian Aborigines*, Dawson stated that his and Taylor’s work was undertaken when Taylor responded to an Indigenous request, a request made specifically to her and evidencing their trust. In another *Australasian* article, Dawson noted that his daughter’s bilingualism was formed from the ‘very close intimacy of upwards of 25 years with the aborigines’ and he drew attention to Taylor’s ability to ‘understand and freely converse in the language of the tribes of the western districts’.102 Without Taylor’s fluency, it is clear that *Australian Aborigines* could not have been written in such a comprehensive form, as one must deduce that Dawson did not share her language skills.

John Strehlow argued that almost all anthropologists, apart from missionaries, even those who conducted regular field trips, ‘rarely established any kind of in-depth rapport with the people themselves, for they were always in far too much of a hurry’.103 This was clearly not the case with Taylor. Growing up with Indigenous neighbours and speaking their language presented her with a wonderful opportunity to appreciate a different worldview – an insight many anthropologists, particularly armchair anthropologists who wrote from second-hand or limited contact, had no real chance to acquire (Figure 7.9).
Another clue to Taylor’s central role lay with her informants. Unlike many professional ethnographies (until well into the mid-twentieth century), she acknowledged and named four Aboriginal informants: Yaruun Parpur Tarneen, Wombeet Tuulawarn, Kaawirn Kuunawarn and Weeratt Kuyutt, as well as others referred to in the body of the text. Not only were they acknowledged, but their portraits were included as a frontispiece to the book and after the preface respectively: Kaawirn Kuunawarn (Hissing Swan), Chief of the Kirrae Wuurong, and Yarruun Parpur Tarneen (Victorious) Chiefess of the Morporr Tribe (Figure 7.10). ‘All the information contained in this book’, Dawson said, ‘has been obtained from the united testimony of several very intelligent aborigines, and every word was approved of by them [my emphasis] before being written down’.104 This was an extraordinary allocation of Indigenous agency for late nineteenth-century Australian literature. Dawson expressed gratitude, ‘especially to the very intelligent chiefess, Yaruun Parpur Tarneen’.105
It should be noted that Dawson was probably less likely than his daughter to have the appropriate relationship needed to facilitate long hours of detailed communication with an Aboriginal woman, given the cultural requirements for gender separation, and the language skills needed to understand cultural details. It is more likely that a close relationship between Taylor and Tarneen facilitated the garnering of much of this valuable resource, especially if Taylor had been assigned a close kinship relationship with Tarneen, which we can conjecture is probable.

In common with other early women’s work, *Australian Aborigines* was also notable for its documentation of a historical Indigenous woman’s voice. Not only was it perhaps the first to record the name of one of William Buckley’s (1780–1856) Indigenous wives, Purranmurnin Tallarwurnin, but it also related her perspective of this legendary intercultural moment.

Although this information was garnered from another settler in the region, Mr M. William Goodall, the attribution of an Indigenous source was noteworthy. For Dawson to document the views of Tallarwurnin and credit her native name, albeit on account of her alleged relationship to a white man, is an unusual empowerment and individualising of an Indigenous woman’s voice. Further, Tallarwurnin’s version of events contested some aspects of the Buckley/John Morgan account; she stated that
Buckley made no attempt to make himself known to the ships that visited the coast for wood and water, implying that, after thirty-two years, he was (controversially) content with his circumstances.109 Conveying a white man’s tale – Buckley’s adventures – from an Indigenous perspective was extremely rare, let alone from a female Indigenous perspective. More usual accounts of European men’s rendition of intercultural events negated any Indigenous perspective and would rarely acknowledge any specific Indigenous voice. These additions, along with the insertions of Indigenous language, suggest that Taylor’s influence was a factor in this choice of representation.

Tallarwurnin’s account also reversed the usual power dynamics by showing the European as ‘other’ and, like Dunlop’s ‘Aboriginal Mother’, brought to light a contemporary Indigenous voice or perspective. It was another rare, early example of Indigenous subjectivity, particularly that of a woman, and one that, I believe, reinforced the possibility that its inclusion was encouraged by Taylor’s involvement in the book. Despite Taylor not being named in Australian Aborigines, her ‘arduous task’ was published and, but for a proud father’s endorsement, we may not have had any inkling of her collaboration. As with both Dunlop and Taylor, the support of a man was more than an endorsement: it was on that basis that much of their work survived.

**Katie Langloh Parker (née Field, 1856–1940)**

Katie Langloh Parker (Figure 7.11), born Catherine Field (and becoming Catherine Stow upon her second marriage), presented a slightly different case from the women discussed above, as she attained ambiguous acclaim in her own right,110 though still with the essential support of a man.
Parker broke new ground with her collection of ‘Legends’, and was taken seriously as an ethnographer of note in a distinctly masculine discipline. Although Parker’s work bridged the turn of the century, she provided a particularly strong example of many features common to a great many early women ethnographers: middle-class background, entwined intercultural family heritage, male patronage, motivation by both close Indigenous relationships and by aspiring to an ethnographical vocation. But she was one of the few to be well recognised. Parker was Bundock’s and Taylor’s junior by a decade but the three women grew up on pastoral properties and in time managed station homesteads. Parker was also well educated and raised in a highly intellectual and privileged family. A distinguishing feature setting Parker apart from the other two women was that Parker enjoyed the patronage of the renowned anthropologist and folklorist Andrew Lang; as Evans, Grimshaw and Standish indicated, Parker stood apart from the other early female ethnographers by her engagement with theory and the ‘anthropological debates of the day’.  

Born to pastoral parents, Parker had three main residences: Encounter Bay in South Australia (see Figure 3.2 in Chapter Three) and Marra Station and Bangate Station in New South Wales (see Figure 7.1). All three were on the front line of settlement and had a lasting influence on Parker’s writing. Evans wrote that ‘the family claims to have fostered close relationships between their children and the Ramindjeri’ of Encounter Bay. At Marra Station, Katie and her sisters were cared for by an
Indigenous ‘nurse maid’ named Miola. Often referenced is the family tragedy, and a pivotal intercultural moment, which occurred when Parker was six years old (in 1862). Muir conjectured that it was probably Miola who was in charge of the children’s swimming excursion when the younger girls got into trouble. Miola saved Catherine but her two sisters, Jane and Henrietta, drowned.

Bangate Station, where Parker’s ethnographic work originated, was a challenging enterprise, with over 100,000 sheep and cattle on its 215,000 acres. Operating in the post-conflict years, it was supported by the efforts and expertise of Indigenous stockmen and domestic labour. At this time the Indigenous owners of the land, the Yuvalaraay or Noongahburrah people, led a relatively peaceful co-existence alongside, and working for, the white station bosses. In her memoirs, My Bush Book, Parker described how, four years after her marriage in 1879 to the pastoralist, magistrate and horseman Langloh Parker, the couple journeyed up to establish their station in the northern rivers region of New South Wales. She was the only white woman in the district, although in time Bangate Station boasted an extraordinary garden and became a gathering ‘hub’, offering the finest hospitality to its infrequent white visitors (Figure 7.12).

Parker’s husband was running two outlying stations as well as their home station, so he was frequently away from home. Indigenous people were often Parker’s only company for weeks at a time. She soon took in three Indigenous girls, and set about learning their language and training them as domestic workers; others followed (Figure 7.13). The power relation between the ‘boss woman’ of the house and her domestic servants was clear; nonetheless, the intertwining and reciprocal dynamics remained. The aftermath of the disease and violence of European invasion in northern New South Wales created vast disruption and suffering for Indigenous people, but to characterise Parker’s three domestic workers or her other informants as hapless victims would short-change the lives of these individuals. They were domestic servants but also housemates, workers and neighbours on the Narran River for twenty years and endured good and bad times together. Parker maintained that she ‘was on friendly terms with them, before I began a regular attempt to inquire into their folk-lore and customary laws’.
Parker’s recollections of her housemaids evidenced an affectionate, but often offensive, condescension in her articulation of the ‘taming process’, finding ‘all three clever willing and grateful’. Parker recorded that the girls enjoyed dressing up, though to us today their uniforms of domestic service seem oppressive. For example, Alison Ravenscroft argued that this type of dressing up and making Indigenous people perform as spectacles for white pleasure was not a well-intentioned mistake. Quoting Ruth Hegarty’s memoir, *Is that you Ruthie?*, Ravenscroft noted that such practices were,
rather, systematically sadistic, and indicated an enjoyment of Indigenous subjugation and captivity.\footnote{123}

No doubt Indigenous workers were indeed humiliated and treated like ‘playthings’ on some stations, as Ravenscroft argued.\footnote{124} But Parker’s background, character and vocation suggest that she did not take enjoyment in Indigenous subjugation. It is also worth considering whether her housemaids might have interpreted their situation slightly differently from what we may conclude looking back from the twenty-first century. The first girl, Barahguree,\footnote{125} Parker recorded, was a so-called orphan as her mother had died and her white father had left the scene. The second, Bogginbinnia, was, according to Parker, nearly strangled by her drunken mother, who thereafter consented to Parker’s guardianship. The third girl, Nimmaylee, herself apparently asked Parker if she could come and live with her.\footnote{126} Diane Barwick’s research on Indigenous women in Victoria suggested that the ‘wives and daughters of the missionaries and teachers were the first European women to treat them as friends and equals and because of this were extremely effective exemplars’\footnote{127}.

A.P. Elkin suggested that when Indigenous people were curtailed from collecting from nature they continued some of their resource-gathering from Europeans,\footnote{128} thereby challenging a perceived dependency to a level of agency. Parker asserted that ‘the giving was not all on my side, by any means’.\footnote{129} It is possible that the three girls (and their mothers) may have viewed themselves less as victims and more as usefully placed for interaction with a reliable economic source for mutual benefit, and thus also able to benefit their kin. The fact that the Noongahburrah women began to ‘dedicate their babies at birth to [Parker’s] service’\footnote{130} implied that they saw some value for those children.

Other recollections implied some ‘give’ within the asymmetric power dynamics. Parker recalled that ‘[w]hite people were an immense joke to Nimmaylee. She conformed to their rules as one playing a new game’.\footnote{131} Nimmaylee was also contemptuous of Parker’s ‘aquatic limitations’ and ‘thought it too idiotic to want to dry yourself with a towel, – just like a mad white woman!’\footnote{132} Of their walks, Parker wrote that Nimmaylee ‘used to tell me all sorts of bush wonders’, further, that ‘I was always the dunce of the party – the smallest child knew more of woodcraft than I did, and had something to tell of everything’.\footnote{133} Parker described how Nimmaylee, despite living in the house as a maid, gathered up younger children to practise and perform dances, writing that Nimmaylee ‘is quite an authority on corroborees, knowing ever so many different steps … The songs she knows too’.\footnote{134} These three women lived with Parker for
fifteen years, indicating that they found their conditions reasonable enough not to flee them earlier. After this time, one got married, one went to work for another family and one stayed on. Perhaps it was Nimmaylee to whom Parker was referring when she wrote to the newspaper, defending Indigenous people from the latest slander, saying she was home alone, the only white person for miles, ‘[o]nly darkies are within call; yet I feel neither loneliness nor fear. I hear one of the girls I have brought up now coming in. She will put her blankets across my bedroom door and sleep there, so that to reach me anyone must first step over her’.135

Over time, Noongahburrah elders, it seemed, also deemed Parker trustworthy and esteemed her well enough to share many of their ancestral stories and culture with her (Figure 7.14). Three chapters of her 1905 ethnography *The Euahlayi Tribe*136 conveyed detailed information about Noongahburrah initiations and *wirreenuns*,137 one of whom she claimed made visible his ‘familiar’ to her. If true, this was an extremely rare privilege.138

Parker’s texts were undoubtedly written from a European perspective, but it was a very particular perspective. Firstly, it was a perspective influenced by her socialisation in the contact zone with a primary Indigenous carer and Indigenous playmates in her formative years.139 Secondly, the Noongahburrah were in a position of power regarding Parker’s vocation, holding knowledge, as well as some degree of discretion on whether or not to answer Parker’s questions or tell her stories. Thirdly, Parker aimed to change general public awareness: ‘People live in a country’, she wrote, ‘and yet know little of the aboriginal inhabitants’.140 In 1906, the *Register* reported that Parker’s work ‘may teach us not to be surprised by traces of elevated thought and morality in the religious traditions of this people’; indeed, it continued that she conveyed that Indigenous people were ‘tender with affection’ and ‘very much like you and me or, rather, they are our superiors in poetic fancy’.141 This was a radical idea.
So how did Parker’s interest evolve into a vocation, five publications¹⁴² and fame? Firstly, her education and class gave her access to reading material and, by all accounts, she read everything she could lay her hands on, including leading international anthropological texts.¹⁴³ She was privileged with an elite intellectual background,¹⁴⁴ helpful connections and, indeed, what almost every successful woman of the era needed: confidence, influential male mentors and a supportive partner. In addition, her personality and her early childhood experiences gave her an ease to establish substantial long-term relationships with Indigenous people. Parker was proud of her credentials, claiming she ‘[knew] well members of nine tribes, though that which I know best is the Euahlayi-speaking one’.¹⁴⁵ As an intellectual, she was keenly aware that she was ‘collecting the Aboriginal legends at a time when the world was becoming conscious that such material was in danger of being lost forever’.¹⁴⁶ Parker had begun her work by compiling a Noongahburrah vocabulary,¹⁴⁷ then ‘devoted eleven years ‘to the study of their folklore’.¹⁴⁸

John Strehlow shed light on Parker’s three powerful mentors: her uncle Simpson Newland (1835–1925), Noongahburrah elder Peter Hippi, and anthropologist Andrew Lang.¹⁴⁹ Newland, president of both South Australia’s Zoological and Acclimatisation Society and the South Australian Branch of the Royal Geographical Society, was a writer interested in the history of settlement and author of a well-known classic, the novelised history Paving the Way.¹⁵⁰ He has been described as ‘passionate about
aborigines’, compiled word lists of the Darling River people and proposed the establishment of the Coorong as an Aboriginal reserve. Parker frequently visited him and he probably encouraged her in her writing endeavours. As Strehlow pointed out, Parker was her uncle’s prodigy, his ‘intellectual heir’, no doubt she was an enthusiastic student and rich sounding board.

Parker dedicated her *Australian Legendary Tales* to Peter Hippi, a Noongahburrah elder who, she wrote, had been in ‘long and faithful service to myself and my husband’. This tribute to a mentor and informant must be seen in light of the common practice of her day. For example, the amateur ethnologist F.J. Gillen, who also lived for many years with Indigenous people, characteristically did not acknowledge or name his informants. Parker also included one story in the Noongahburrah language in *Australian Legendary Tales*. Dalziell considered this rather rare acknowledgement of an Indigenous elder an ‘implicitly cruel and disquieting irony’, as she arrogated Hippi’s ‘sovereign’ place as her own, as ‘sovereign’ ethnographer – both in her employment of ethnography’s construction of acute distance of difference and Hippi’s imminent end – in Parker’s words – as ‘probably the last king of the Noongahburrahs’. In other words, Dalziell argued, Parker’s sympathetic designs were ideologically encoded. Be that as it may, there is little reason to doubt the sincerity of Parker’s respectful dedication to an eminent leader of her Indigenous community – a longstanding associate, worker, mentor and informant. These were lengthy relationships, built over the course of not only one, but in many cases two, decades.

My investigation in this thesis into the everyday stories and social nuances of such intercultural relating builds a case for the significance of the personable and everyday engagement as a site of transculturation and two-way agency, however limited, over lengthy periods. The ‘cruel irony’ must be balanced by the value – to Hippi, his descendants and Parker’s readership – of Parker’s sincere interest in the things Hippi most valued: his culture, their conversations and her recording and careful re-checking of his words. Indeed, it is hard to imagine that such interest did not affirm or hearten his days. In 1902, when interviewed by the Adelaide newspaper *The Register*, Parker refused to be drawn into discussing the ‘fate of the blacks she loves so well’. Rather she insisted that ‘they were very much misunderstood and badly treated, even by people who meant to be kind to them, but, who were injudicious’. The same journalist conjectured that Parker had ‘raised the Australian aborigines to a higher platform on the social scale than has hitherto been assigned to them’.
Evans, Grimshaw and Standish, and John Strehlow, discussed the importance of Parker’s third mentor, the British anthropologist and folklorist Andrew Lang, whom she met in 1905 on a trip to London. Lang’s support and lengthy theoretical ‘introductions’ legitimised Parker’s work and extolled her virtues as a ‘close scientific observer’. Dalziell reiterated that Parker situated her work within international ethnographic discourse by referencing other anthropologists, and located her collections of Indigenous ancestral stories within the ‘popular paradigms of evolutionary theory’, in order to authorise her position and as ‘an end point of their signification’. Dalziell illuminated how ethnography was implicated as a trope that, on the one hand, figured Indigenous people as an ‘expiring anachronistic race’, thus supporting colonisation of their lands and justifying the collecting of ‘relics’ but, on the other hand, used and transfigured Indigenous narratives into commodities for Western consumption.

Further, Dalziell argued, Parker’s ‘sympathetic intentions are bound up to some degree with the dominant ideologies of gender’ and that we should not disregard ‘the possibility that Parker’s stated sympathetic intention to collect Aboriginal narratives was implicated in the operations and discourses that enabled her ‘textual museum’.

Strehlow, on the other hand, demonstrated how Parker’s research was crucial in galvanising Lang to ‘form a kind of literary collaboration with her’ as her research shed light on some anthropological debates around marriage laws, Indigenous nescience of procreation and ‘religious belief’, as opposed to animism and ghost worship. Parker’s in-depth and long-lived experiences could not confirm the savagery she was supposed to find. Parker and Lang, Strehlow argued, ‘were swimming against the tide. Received wisdom in western thought was pushing Australian aborigines down the scale of humanity, even as Lang and Parker were trying to push them up’. While Parker and Lang were arguing for the literary sophistication of the myths and religious ideas of Indigenous people (both coming from a classics background rather than the sciences), Herbert Spencer, Edward Tylor, Baldwin Spencer and others were concentrating on evidence of their degenerate material culture, nescience and doomed, simplistic way of life.

It is useful to remember that Tylor defined ethnography’s undertaking to discover ‘the uniform operations of the mind by which mankind had advanced from savagery to civilization, as if savagery were simply a ‘necessary stage of development through which every race has passed’. Tylor argued in 1891 that accounts of Australian Indigenous religious ideas such as ‘a superior being’ and ‘a great flood’ were due to missionary influence and were ‘frequently misleading and mistaken’, due to
contaminated or inauthentic records. Such ideas would have disrupted the clean hierarchical stages of cultural progress that he was trying to prove. Parker, through her checked and re-checked research, came confidently to a contrary point of view: that the Indigenous belief of Baiame, their ‘all father’, was not borrowed from Europeans. Lang argued in his book *Magic and Religion* that experienced informants attested that there was a great unwillingness ‘to adopt ideas from the whites’, particularly by the conservative men of high degree.

It was to these armchair theories that Parker was referring when she said:

I dare say little with an air of finality about black people; I have lived too much with them for that. To be positive, you should never spend more than six months in their neighbourhood; in fact, if you want to keep your anthropological ideas quite firm, it is safer to let the blacks remain in inland Australia, while you stay a few thousand miles away. Otherwise, your preconceived notions are almost sure to totter to their foundations; and nothing is more annoying than to have elaborately built-up, delightfully logical theories, played ninepins with by an old grey-beard of a black, who apparently objects to his beliefs being classified, docketed, and pigeonholed, until he has had his say.

Aside from this, the common feature in anecdotal asides of shared historical space found in these early women’s ethnographical writing, whereby Indigenous people ‘crossed into history’, was a discursive progression which, Patrick Wolfe explained, would undo the evolutionist conflation of time and space. Further, by recording an Indigenous perspective, Parker collaboratively undid common stereotypes, for example: ‘The blacks say the smell of white people makes them sick; we in our arrogance had thought it the other way on’ [sic].

As for the acknowledgement of Parker’s scientific standing, despite these anecdotal asides, Strehlow pointed out that Lang emphasised his own ‘very minor role’ in Parker’s book and praised it as ‘within its limits … almost as valuable as those of Messrs Spencer and Gillen’, and unique because of her access to Aboriginal women. Parker too raised this issue, writing that ‘in books about blacks, you always read of the subjection of the women, but I have seen henpecked black husbands’. Once again, like the other nineteenth-century colonial women in this thesis, her writing contained many subtle insights into Indigenous women’s worlds, and evidence of their ritual empowerment and agency: ‘Certainly, amongst the blacks, age is no disqualification for
a woman; she never seems to be too old to marry, and certainly with age gains power. As well as various individual passages describing women’s daily activities, Parker included a whole chapter on ‘Birth-Betrothal – an Aboriginal girl from Infancy to Womanhood’, with a beautiful section on how midwives enticed babies into the world. Moreover, Parker wrote:

the women of the Euahlayi have some knowledge of, and some means of, mystic access to Byamee, though they call him by another name … Certainly woman is given a high place in their sacred lore. The chief wife of Byamee, Birrahgnoooloo, is claimed as the mother of all, for she, like him, had a totem for each part of her body; no one totem can claim her, but all do.

The Noongahburrah women were portrayed in many sections of the book as empowered and protective of the Parkers. In one incident, Parker recorded a women elder giving her a weapon to dispose of the ‘mortgagor’ who, the Noongahburrah had understood, was possibly going to evict the Parkers: ‘I hear im d’st peller going to take eberything belongin’ you. I petch yo dis nullah nullah, you gib im one crack longa head’. When Parker looked doubtfully at the gift, she recorded the elder’s reaction:

‘you keep im, spos’m you too frightened kill im, you send longa camp for me. I kill im, sposin’ pleeceman catch em, put me longa courthouse, i tell im J.P. big peller tief dat peller, too much steal altogether goondie belongin’ my missis. I pute for my missis, dat all right, I not fritened J.P., I tell ’im straight’. I have that weapon still, but happily did not want to use it.

Such passages hardly support any evaluation of Parker as a sympathetic superior of a dying race ‘offering some kind of palliative care’. Her writing in fact implied that the Noongahburrah felt that Parker was under their charge, or at least that they felt empowered enough to make a show of their reciprocal protection and concern for their ‘missis’. One time, when Parker told some Noogahburrah she was almost out of flour and probably could not afford to buy any more due to a recent price increase, ‘Polly’ soon after brought in her own bag of flour, saying, ‘“Dat for you. Poor peller you … you and Matah been gib me plenty clothes, plenty bacca, altogether plenty. Pore peller, you now, I gib you flour”, and until she saw the team with more arrive she refused to take it back.”
Parker also recorded an incident when the eighty-plus year-old ‘Bootha’, the local ‘Wirreenun or doctor-wizard’, who ‘always’ cleared the station house from evil spirits by a smoking ritual ‘if I were alone and, she thought, in need of protection’, was leaving the station for some time. In her stead, Bootha left various powerful painted posts in Parker’s garden to keep away evil spirits, warn of death and ensure rain for her flowers and vegetables. Indeed, it appears from many recollections of Bootha’s conversations that she was patronising towards Parker.

Belinda McKay argued that white women writers ‘appropriating race issues’ keenly adopted ‘authenticity effects’ by promoting their ‘personal connections’, ‘privileged insights’ and ‘first person narration’, to position themselves as ‘sympathetic and knowledgeable spokespersons for indigenous people’, all the while increasing their vocational standing and implying they were mere observers, not participants, in usurpation of Indigenous subjugation. Parker was guilty of all these charges, but it would be very shortsighted to minimise the Indigenous agency behind such relating and endeavours. Against claims of Indigenous powerlessness in the colonial encounter stands Kim Mahood’s insight of similar current power games: ‘She [the white interloper] doesn’t understand that she is colonised territory. Invisible to her, power struggles of ancient lineage and epic proportions are being played out. This is our kartiya – hands off’. There was little these women ethnographers could gather without Indigenous participation and, indeed, endorsement. Their so-called informants were mature elders who chose their spokespeople intelligently, and established and often pursued these intercultural relationships very possessively.

Of the surety of a Noongahburrah confidence, Parker wrote:

An old gin who worked about the station had a pierced nose, and often wore a mouyerh, or bone, through it. A white laundress wore earrings. She said one day to the old gin: ‘Why you have hole made in your nose and put that bone there? No good that. White women don’t do that’. The black woman looked the laundress up and down, and finally anchored her eyes on the earrings. ‘Why you make hole in your ears? No good that. Black gin no do that, pull ’em down your ears like dogs. Plenty good bone in your nose make you sing good. Sposin’ cuggil – bad – smell you put bone longa nose no smell ‘im. Plenty good make hole longa nose, no good make hole longa ears, make ’em hang down all same dogs’. And off she went laughing, and pulling down the lobes of her ears, began to imitate the barking of a dog.
The protagonists in these passages hardly conformed to the subjects that Dalziell asserted were ‘variously identified as expiring, anachronistic, child-like, obliging and culturally incompetent’.192

Parker’s work echoed aspects of cultural relativity that developed out of German romantic theory and that would in the twentieth century replace the further dominance of social evolutionism in anthropology. The Register in 1902 declared her educative intention successful in assessing that the Yuwalaraay legends contained ‘imagination, poetry, ethics, and a religious recognition of a reasonable, just, and lovable Almighty’.193 Although Parker’s work reached an audience undreamt of by most of her male contemporaries,194 rivalling that of any male anthropologist,195 her ethnography shared characteristics with the works of Hassell and other women of her type and, as a body of work, was perhaps the triumph of the genre. These characteristics included a shared historical space, Indigenous opinion, the incorporation of Indigenous women’s perspectives, and attribution of long-term valued relationships with Indigenous individuals. Moreover, her book was the first in Australia to be illustrated by an Aboriginal artist, Tommy McRae, and his art became widely known (Figure 7.15).196

Figure 7.15

Women’s Ethnographic Discourse and its Scientific Counterpart

A few well-educated women living in the contact zone, curious about Indigenous culture and keen for intellectual pursuit, established a distinctive early ethnography in the Australian colonies. Because they were not undertaking their ethnography through academic training or as a recognised profession, their contribution was generally due to
a combination of proximity, empathy and intelligence. Collecting and drawing the flora and fauna were often their initial endeavours, as these were acceptable pastimes for well-educated women with an interest in the natural world, including that of their Indigenous neighbours. These interests, as I have demonstrated, were often the result of an ‘inheritance of concern’, a family tradition of friendship, ease, compassion or philanthropy with Indigenous people, or simply early intercultural contact. Among these women there seemed to be little evidence of the disdain for Indigenous informants that Griffiths attributed to many of the stone tool collectors.197 Rather, the contribution peculiar to women settlers’ ethnography came from their intimacy or insider knowledge, their ability to recognise a common humanity – albeit within a racial hierarchy – and their capacity to convey the poetry of Indigenous worldviews and of the people themselves.

We can deduce that, given the restraints of social mores, developing a passion for Indigenous others was more likely tolerated than supported,198 and that the women of whom we are aware, like Dunlop, Taylor, Hassell and Parker, worked in relative isolation, fortified by their class, outspoken male mentors and family support. For Dexter and Dunlop, who endured antagonism from the editors of the Sydney Morning Herald and the Age and presumably from many of their readers; for Bundock and Mills, who lacked male champions; and for Everitt, who fell out with one; it is safe to assume that their contributions could have been more significant had they been validated and nurtured by successful male scientists.199

As Lynn Barber argued, for these women in their fields200 there existed ‘the usual obstacle that women were not expected to achieve anything. Once their interest verged on real intellectual application it became “fatiguing” and “unhealthy”’.201 Dexter’s obvious intellectual skill and courage were not appreciated in an era when women were still, according to an 1840 article titled Comparative Intellectual Character of the Sexes, ‘supposed to be utterly deficient, or incapable’ with regard to ‘the acquirement of abstract knowledge’.202 Nonetheless, science in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a ‘fashionable, improving pursuit embraced by a broad cross-section of the population’,203 including educated women. But as science became more institutionalised and specialised, moving away from the ‘polite’ and popular discourse of the nineteenth century, argued Carl Thompson and McBryde, it narrowed opportunities for female participation.204 Generally, however, the foundation of state museums, the growth of the tourism industry and the display of ethnographica in
national and international exhibitions popular in the nineteenth century intensified collecting.

Women conducted their collecting activities within the existing social expectations of their domestic and social roles. As Skene argued, their labour was ‘intended to extend rather than challenge the practices of the discipline’.205 But the move towards a vocational status ‘offered them a space beyond the roles prescribed them by social convention’,206 and their presence in the field, their valuable contributions and insider knowledge meant that, by the twentieth century, they were increasingly hard to ignore.

Some of the women in this chapter were interested in Aboriginal art. Mary Everitt, briefly discussed at the beginning of this chapter, wrote to A.G. Stephens of the Bulletin between 12 June and 10 July 1901, attempting to have her drawings and descriptions of rock-carvings and cave drawings at Burragorang (south of Sydney) published, along with her collections of grammar and ‘myths and legends’,207 but without success. She did, however, manage to save an Indigenous people’s grinding site for national heritage.208 Parker recorded Indigenous pigments, where they were sourced and the Indigenous appropriation of European colours.209 She also noted that ‘the blacks are great patrons of art and encourage native talent in the most praiseworthy way’.210 Indeed, Parker wrote, ‘a man can gain quite a tribal reputation for being an originator of decorative designs’211 and that the Yuwalaraay used large sculptures and bark paintings in their ceremonies:

The stage effects of corroborees are sometimes huge sheets of bark fastened on to poles; these sheets of bark are painted in different designs and colours, something like Moorish embroideries. Sometimes there is a huge imitation of an alligator made of logs plastered over with earth and painted in stripes of different colours, a piece of wood cut open stuck in at one end as a gaping mouth. This alligator corroboree is generally indicative of a Boorah, or initiation ceremony, being near at hand. Sometimes the stage effects are high painted poles merely.212

The careful documentation and at times the attribution of authorship and Indigenous names of items and photographs213 by women like Bundock, Dietrich and Bates were significant contributions to collections now available to the public and the descendants of Indigenous producers. According to Janice Lally, most items that came into the Berlin Museum, for instance, ‘came without specific documentation that
individualised the Aboriginal makers by the Aboriginal suppliers’. Likewise, in some of their collecting practices these women contributed objects or stories relating to Indigenous women and their knowledge that were considered of little importance at that time. Men’s ritual and hunting artefacts were far more prized; the collections assembled by white women were among the first to address this imbalance.

Furthermore, some documentation produced by women in the nineteenth century, such as that written by Ann Fraser Bon, while not ethnography, significantly championed the standing of Aboriginal art, as well as advocating for Indigenous rights. Bon’s decades-long intimate relationship with the artist and statesman William Barak in Victoria is now well recognised. She produced what is probably the first published biography of an Aboriginal artist, in which she called Barak ‘The painter’ and ‘The statesman’—supporting both titles with explanations of dignity and worth. Under the heading of Painter she explained that Barak ‘had refined tastes, being fond of music and painting’. Some of his art ‘was presented to the Prince of Wales when he visited Melbourne’, while others ‘are to be seen in the museums of Europe’. She described Barak’s gift of a corroboree painting to Sir Henry Loch as an act of benevolence and sympathy in response to the governor’s keen but unfulfilled desire to witness a corroboree. It was fittingly placed on the governor’s wall, ‘beside pictures of old masters’. In line with her strongly expressed esteem of Barak’s sophistication as an artist and aristocrat, Bon presented a portrait of him to the ‘people of Victoria’ to be hung in the parliament. She would surely not have approved of the juxtaposition of Barak’s portrait beside a life-sized bust of Melbourne’s 20,000-year-old ‘prehistoric man’ in the ‘very notable exhibit’ planned by the men of the ‘Naturalists Club’, more than thirty years later. Bon also donated a painting by Barak to the Ballarat Art Gallery in 1934, the first work of Australian Aboriginal art to enter an art gallery rather than an ethnographic museum.

Bundock’s, Minns’ and Dietrich’s collecting practices have been mentioned but, more often, women’s collections went unrecorded. There was one reference to Sophie La Trobe, wife of the first Governor of the Port Phillip District, donating items contained in cases of material culture sent to the Société d’Histoire Naturelle de Neuchatel. These included ‘a basket, a feather “bouquet”, a neck ornament, and a net made by Indigenous women’. And there were probably many others, who are little referenced. For example, there are very few references to Parker’s collection. Visitors to her house in Adelaide in her later years commented on the Indigenous art hung alongside her collection of Hans Heysen paintings and other Australian settler art. At
Bangate Station, Parker said, ‘as the hall became crowded with the native weapons I collected, the extra ones were put on the verandah and the creepers were twined round them’223 (Figure 7.16).

We only know of Jeannie Gunn’s interest in Aboriginal art because of the photographs she used to illustrate *The Little Black Princess*, which attested to her collection. These included both men’s and women’s objects, along with cave paintings, simultaneously bringing Aboriginal art to the attention of a wide audience (Figure 7.17).
All of these women benefited from the colonial process of taking over and exploiting Indigenous lands, resources and labour, and of furthering European knowledge systems from a Eurocentric perspective that constructed Indigenous people as the ‘other’. Nonetheless, these women stood out for their transcultural relations with Indigenous people and their culture, and their ‘willingness to accept them as people’. In contrast, some of their male contemporaries, so prominent in the history of Australian anthropology, like Spencer and Stirling, had neither the background of close interaction or friendship, nor the interpersonal skills, to relate to Indigenous people as sharing a common humanity. This is not to imply that there were no male researchers similar to these women, but there were many – such as Reynell Eveleigh Johns, one of the major collectors of south-east Aboriginal material culture – who knew little of the people themselves.
Figure 7.18
Indigenous artists, Men’s and Women’s Objects, n.d., illustrations from Mrs Aeneas Gunn,
Little Black Princess
In the 1890s, while Ethel Hassell was unsuccessfully attempting to get her book published, Mary Bundock was concentrating on her collecting and Parker was writing her first book, *Australian Legendary Tales*,\(^227\) the young English prodigy, Walter Baldwin Spencer, still fresh from his studies in Oxford and appointed Professor of Biology at the University of Melbourne in 1887, crossed paths with Dr Edward Stirling. Stirling was a surgeon, Professor of Physiology at the University of Adelaide and Director of the South Australian Museum. He had already traversed the continent from Darwin to Adelaide, collecting ethnological and zoological specimens.

Anxious that their evidence should influence Western science and bring them acclaim in advancing the latest theories of the day, Spencer and Stirling were emerging academic stars, and were chosen to participate in the Horn Scientific Expedition to Central Australia in 1894. Stirling, the senior of the two, already enjoyed an established reputation as a Fellow of the Royal Society, London, and was employed as the expedition’s anthropologist. Spencer was zoologist and photographer; however, he was just as captivated by the Aboriginal ‘specimens’ as the biota and, as Dean Ashenden put it, ‘he also knew that mapping the evolution of homo sapiens was one of the hottest intellectual fields in the English-speaking world’\(^228\).

Nineteenth-century British anthropology was predominantly evolutionist and, for the young, imperialist Spencer, Indigenous Australians were believed to be ‘the missing link’ between animals and humans. As a biology graduate and evolutionary enthusiast, Spencer was heavily influenced by natural science paradigms and social Darwinist theories. He was one of the early band of field workers who collaborated with their English mentors, the famed armchair anthropologists Sir James Frazer and Edward Tylor, who used Australian data to support their theories. ‘Any work that I have done has been due to this initial stimulus of H.N. Moseley and Tylor, and later and still more, to that of Frazer’,\(^229\) remarked Spencer in a letter to Henry Balfour in 1912.\(^230\)

Both Spencer and Stirling believed in biological and racial determinism and conformed to a natural science taxonomic methodology of collecting, describing and identifying specimens. Theirs was the empirical evidence needed to advance knowledge and confirm theories.\(^231\) Mulvaney described their distinguished academic advisors as:

all natural scientists who only studied man in search of evidence to confirm laws of development which they had already postulated. There is no hint in the writings of the founding fathers of anthropology that they felt any humanitarian concern for the savage, particularly the primeval Australians.\(^232\)
These values had significant influence on Spencer and Stirling. In the 1890s, they were excitedly announcing their discovery of Indigenous nascence, particularly in relation to conception. Stirling argued that Indigenous people showed lower intelligence through their alleged lack of ‘a knowledge of physiological processes, which it appears to me, we are not justified in attributing to people of the mental status of Australians’. They also ‘tended to elide the social and political reality of their subjects’, revealing their determination to depict a pristine ‘primitive’ Indigenous culture for the curiosity of the reading public and the purpose of evolutionary and diffusionist theories. Spencer lectured on Darwinism in Melbourne and corresponded with Alfred Russell Wallace, a co-formulator of the theory of evolution by natural selection. Wolfe bluntly asserted that Spencer not only marked a ‘high point in evolutionist ethnography’ but ‘was centrally involved in constructing a policy with which Australian governments sought to eliminate the Aboriginal race’.

In Spencer and Gillen’s book *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (1899), the Appendix, as Dean Ashenden noted, ‘provides fifty-three measurements of the physiognomy of thirty numbered individuals. No individual is named or thanked, and differences in behaviour, personality and outlook are not recorded’. Amateur anthropologist John Mathew, who also followed this approach in his early twentieth-century work, exemplified this standardised, impersonal, scientific collection of information considered appropriate to recording flora or fauna:

The Kabi and Wakka men were of low stature. The average would not exceed 5 feet 5 inches. In rare cases a height of about 6 feet was attained. The range would be from 5 feet 1 inch to 6 feet. In proportion to the men the women were rather tall. The people were light in the bone. The lower part of the limbs was usually fine. The thighs, much more rarely the calves of the legs, were well developed. The muscles of the back and breast were often prominent. In walking, the head was thrown well back … The cheekbones were high, the chin small and retreating, the jaws prognathous, the mouth wide and prominent, the teeth large and white, the lips heavy but not so thick as those of the negro.

Although one can choose particular passages to serve various ends, comments such as these demonstrate the detachment valued by the profession keen to prove its discipline’s unbiased, scientific rigour.
While many of the female protagonists discussed in this thesis were well read and interested in men’s theories, particularly Parker, they tended to give personalised renditions of Indigenous people, their social realities and beliefs. This was a product of ‘feminine licence’ – notions of acceptable Victorian femininity that legitimised anecdotal ‘life writing’ and its subjective rendering as a genre of early modern women’s texts. But it was also due to the intimacy of their long-term relationships, which often started at birth, and which resulted in fluency in, or at least a working knowledge of, Indigenous vocabulary. McBryde observed of Bundock’s ethnography:

The Aborigines in her account are people, not exemplars of a stage of human existence long past in the civilised European World. Nor are they stereotyped as either quaint and foolish, to be ridiculed, or brutal and savage, and therefore to be feared. Although awareness of cultural difference and the ‘exotic’ is evident in her account, it bears the stamp of personal experience and an individual quality rare in such writings.

In the contact zones, there was what Tom Griffiths identified as an everyday ‘racial intimacy … a world where white and black knew one another by name, borrowed traditions and skills, learnt and taught as well as fought’. Unlike the commonly temporary excursions or expeditions taken into country to do field work by male scientists of amateur field workers, the condition of being a ‘situated knower’ in the contact zone was common to all the women ethnographers I have discussed. McBryde referred to this as ‘long-term direct contact with the people of one region’, arising from living in close proximity with Indigenous people, with opportunities for daily intimacies, especially in the domestic realm. In the accounts I have discussed, early women’s scientific knowledge production arose from a foundation of such everyday, long-term interactions. This was a zone of mutuality. Shared values and duties included preparing food for the young, aged and sick. Caring and healing provided opportunities for discourse and reciprocities across the racial divide. A certain gender camaraderie, based on the commonality of motherhood, nurturing, kinship (extended family) and the value of belonging, provided the coordinates of identification that enabled women’s storytelling of a shared historical space, rather than the limitations of imperial surveillance.

Indigenous women were, after all, primary nurturers (of children, community and land) and educators of complex kinship systems. Their agency should not be underestimated. Indigenous women spent hours working alongside isolated station
women; indeed these Indigenous women often nursed and parented their children. Lyn Riddett and Jennifer Isaacs recorded that Indigenous women acted as skilled midwives to white women and often, Isaacs noted, ‘as wetnurse for [white] babies when the mother was ill’. In isolated areas, white children born on Indigenous lands were regarded as ‘country men’; they were brought up to speak the local language and were introduced to a certain level of insider perspective. Many such children not only inherited a concern for the plight of Indigenous people but also, like Louisa Atkinson and Isabella Dawson, were embedded in intercultural relational networks and kinship systems. Their province of research or collecting was their world of lived experience. Behind and bearing on their work were their personal biography and perspectives, their observations and choices, ‘socially situated in the worlds of – and between – the observer and the observed’.

Clearly, white women benefited from colonisation, as Patricia Grimshaw and Ann Standish pointed out, simply by accepting ‘as given their right to livelihoods and homes on erstwhile Aboriginal lands’. This was hardly remarkable for dependent white women of their era. What was remarkable was that some colonial women challenged the boundaries of difference and socially unacceptable ‘fraternising with the natives’ to devote years to establishing close intercultural relationships, learning language and culture. Very few white people in the nineteenth century were interested in spending so much time and the associated relational obligations involved in lengthy conversations over many years, sitting down alongside Indigenous people to record their treasured culture, whatever the motive – the usual charge being to self-publicise or increase their standing. The women discussed in this thesis were mostly well educated, well connected, intelligent and motivated, so it would be surprising if they did not have some level of drive and ambition, but such attributes should not be judged against them. By defending Indigenous intelligence and sophistication, they implied a common humanity. In some cases they boldly aligned themselves with an Indigenous perspective, and declared themselves in personal or social relationships with Indigenous others. One of their strongest traits was foregrounding Indigenous individuals, their most significant informants, and their dialogues, rather than homogenising and concealing them within the anthropological theories of the day.
Endnotes

1 Isabel McBryde termed this intergenerational thread ‘an inheritance of concern’. McBryde, “Miss Mary, Ethnography and the Inheritance of Concern: Mary Ellen Murray-Prior,” p. 40. She argued that this ethic was often passed down through families. At times, husbands or parents who keenly felt the responsibilities of dispossession and/or enjoyed friendly relations with Indigenous workers and gave a home to Indigenous refugees, mentored women writers.


3 James Clifford called the process of writing ethnologies ‘salvage ethnology’. See Clifford and Marcus, Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography, p. 112.

4 This was not a gender-specific practice and was backed up by Indigenous requests around the country. For example, Helen Wurm wrote: ‘they told me they had agreed to produce the paintings because they were aware that their heritage might be lost and they wanted it preserved … However, they stressed that everything must be recorded properly’. Quoted in Margie West, “The Woman with Men’s Business,” in The Makers and Making of Indigenous Australian Museum Collections, ed. Nicolas Peterson, Lindy Allen, and Louise Hamby (Melbourne University Press, 2008), p. 551. A particularly informative example is the Berndts’ record of Yolngu clan leaders requesting, in 1947, an affidavit to affirm that the purpose of cultural materials gifted was to ‘use these things to teach the richness, diversity and creativity of Yolngu culture’. John Stanton, “‘I did not set out to make a Collection’: The Ronald and Catherine Berndt Collection at the Berndt Museum of Anthropology,” in The Makers and Making of Indigenous Australian Museum Collections, ed. Nicolas Peterson, Lindy Allen, and Louise Hamby (Melbourne University Press), p. 528.

5 The paper was read at the Royal Society on 5 December 1900 and published in the Journal of the Royal Society of New South Wales. R.H. Mathews and M.M. Everitt, “The Organisation, Language and Initiation Ceremonies of the Aborigines of the South-East Coast of N.S. Wales,” Journal of the Royal Society of New South Wales, vol. 34 (1900). Seven letters from Everitt to A. G. Stephens, editor of the Bulletin, survive in the University of Queensland Library, Hayes Collection UQFL2:949–950. It is apparent that Everitt knew a good number of Aboriginal people in the Sydney area and had a deep interest in their language, customs, history and art. In 1901 Mathews and Everitt had some sort of falling out, and though Everitt tried to have her work published on her own merit, she did not succeed and a subsequent joint paper that had been written with Mathews was never published. Everitt’s work included accounts of Captain Cook’s landing at Botany Bay, various grammar lists and drawings and descriptions of cave art. See Smith, Some Mythology and Folklore of the Gundungurra Tribe by R.H. Mathews: Edited with Commentary and Essay on the Work of Mathews by Jim Smith. Organ, Illawarra and South Coast Aborigines 1770–1900: Report to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Canberra, 1 December 1993, pp. 192–200.

6 This huge Australian and South Sea Islands collection, with which Mills had been engaged for over two decades, alongside her partner, H.E. Pain, was shown in Melbourne in 1872 and went on to become a feature of the Australian wing at the Crystal Palace. Though there is specific mention of her role in the egg collection, there were many items of clothing and ornaments that one can conjecture she played no small part in their care and display over such a lengthy engagement with the collection. “Australian Collections at the Crystal Palace,” Brisbane Courier, 18 April 1873, p. 3.

7 Although they lived and worked as husband and wife they had never been legally married.
Endnotes (continued)

8 ‘When H.E. Pain and Elizabeth Minns were in this colony they passed for man and wife, and I, for one, never knew them to be other than Mr. and Mrs Pain. I believe the larger portion of the collection was got together by the lady, [my italics] and that the partial loss of the use of her lower limbs was due to the exposure she had been subjected to in obtaining them. I remember distinctly being told by Pain himself, when the collection was exhibited below St George’s Hall, that the entomological section and the cases of birds’ eggs had all been gathered by “Mrs Pain.” She was a most amiable, intelligent woman, and I am sure many others feel towards her the greatest sympathy’. “Flagellum”, “H.E. Pain and his Collection: To the Editor of *The Argus*,” *Argus*, 17 May 1875, p. 7.


10 This collection began within a year or so of settlers’ first contact with Indigenous people, and was assembled over a period of ten years between 1863 and 1872, with most items coming from around the town of Bowen during 1869 and 1872. Ray Sumner conjectured that Dietrich’s work was unknown in Australia because her ‘extensive scientific notes’, written in German and detailing her field collecting, were destroyed in the ravages of World War II. Further, other written work about her, including a partly fictional memoir by her daughter, was also in German. Her gender was, however, surely the factor that lay at the heart of her obscurity, as Carl Strehlow’s German anthropological publications, for example, which were not translated into English, had considerable influence.

11 Dietrich’s ethnology was found in hundreds of specimen labels that she produced for the items she collected, rather than in an ethnological text.


13 BAAS (British Association for the Advancement of Science), “Notes and Queries on Anthropology, For the Use of Travellers and Residents in Uncivilized Lands,” (London: Edward Stanford, 1874).

14 Ibid., v.

15 Ibid.

16 Lorimer Fison and Alfred W. Howitt sent out questionnaires in the late nineteenth century in Australia. Some of these questions were referred to in Lorimer Fison and Alfred William Howitt, *Kamilaroi and Kurnai: Group-marriage and Relationship, and Marriage by Elopement* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1991 (1880)).

17 May Benson, from Brenda Station on the north-western border of New South Wales, typified such women. Over the course of 1906–07, Benson corresponded extensively with Smyth’s contributor, A.W. Howitt, answering his questions and sending extensive lists of kinship, language and marriage information. More than fifteen letters of correspondence are available and Benson’s deferential letters to Howitt display a sycophantic willingness to serve. May Benson, Letters to and from A.W. Howitt, A.W. Howitt Collection, National Museum of Victoria.

18 Christina Smith, Letters to A.W. Howitt, M69: A.W. Howitt Collection: Box 1, Folder 1, AIATSIS [Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander Studies] Library.


Endnotes (continued)

21 The date of writing varies in references from 1940 to 1940–49.


23 For example, Thomas Bamfield.


25 There were important exceptions to such generalisations, such as the amateur ethnologist Phillip Chauncy’s 1878 observation: ‘Though the men make drudges of the women, and often treat them in a harsh and sometimes a brutal manner, yet they are capable of strong affection. I have always observed that at native camp that the women appear as hilarious and independent as the men. Husband and wife are often much attached to each other, and continue to be so when they grow old’. Smyth, *The Aborigines of Victoria: With Notes Relating to the Habits of the Natives of Other Parts of Australia and Tasmania*, 1, p. 283.

26 Smith, *The Booandik Tribe of South Australian Aborigines: A Sketch of Their Habits, Customs, Legends, and Language. Also: An Account of the Efforts Made by Mr and Mrs James Smith to Christianise and Civilise Them*.

27 Ibid., iii.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid., iv.

30 Specifically in order to better convert them. Ibid.

31 Also spelt Booandik, Buandik, and Buandig, among other variants.

32 Smith, *The Booandik Tribe of South Australian Aborigines: A Sketch of Their Habits, Customs, Legends, and Language. Also: An Account of the Efforts Made by Mr and Mrs James Smith to Christianise and Civilise Them*, p. 34.

33 Ibid., p. 37.

34 Such as when a Buandig audience scoffed at her attempts to convey some religious doctrines (ibid., p. 56.), or when ‘Calluin laughing till her sides ached at the recollection of my awkwardness in handling the waddy’. (ibid.) There were also various exchanges with the women sharing personal concerns, such as worrying about their male family members when absent. See Christina Smith, Diary of Christina Smith, Papers of the Smith Family, PRG 144, Mortlock Library of South Australiana, State Library of South Australia, entry for 13 March 1847, p. 32.

35 Smith related Aboriginal accounts of the Maria episode of 1840 in *The Booandik Tribe of South Australian Aborigines: A Sketch of Their Habits, Customs, Legends, and Language. Also: An Account of the Efforts Made by Mr and Mrs James Smith to Christianise and Civilise Them*, p. 24, and of the Guichen Bay/Avenue Range massacre of 1849 (ibid., p. 62.) and in her diary (1839–1854). Smith, “Diary of Christina Smith.” Smith recorded Indigenous laughter at her ineptitude with their artefacts but also their approval that her son spoke their language, and her display of trust. Smith, *The Booandik Tribe of South Australian Aborigines: A Sketch of Their Habits, Customs, Legends, and Language. Also: An Account of the Efforts Made by Mr and Mrs James Smith to Christianise and Civilise Them*, pp. 40–41. Further, she recorded individual sentiments, such as Jemmy MacIntyre saying, ‘The Schanck was my father’s land, “which he seldom left … My heart was sorry when I left my land – I love it dearly”’. Ibid., xi.
Endnotes (continued)

36 Despite recording perceived depraved behaviour, such as cannibalism, the killing of babies, and the prostituting and beating of women, she also recorded many acts of kindness; for instance, in 1846 an Indigenous man identified as ‘Blue shirt’ cared for and accompanied a sick and solo white man for six days, providing for him and guiding him to the safety of a distant outstation before leaving him ‘a few hundred yards’ from the destination, citing his fear of guns. Smith, *The Booandik Tribe of South Australian Aborigines: A Sketch of Their Habits, Customs, Legends, and Language. Also: An Account of the Efforts Made by Mr and Mrs James Smith to Christianise and Civilise Them*, pp. 42–43.

37 Although his volumes included a range of ethnological perspectives, some of which resisted this mold, there were many examples of homogenous generalising. Brough Smyth’s ‘Introduction’ began: ‘Throughout Australia the natives exhibit a general conformity to one pattern, as regards features, color, and mental character’. Smyth, *The Aborigines of Victoria: With Notes Relating to the Habits of the Natives of Other Parts of Australia and Tasmania*, 1, xvii.

38 For example, ‘My son … brought me word that I was wanted for another birth. Smith, *The Booandik Tribe of South Australian Aborigines: A Sketch of Their Habits, Customs, Legends, and Language. Also: An Account of the Efforts Made by Mr and Mrs James Smith to Christianise and Civilise Them*, p. 6.

39 Ibid., xi.

40 For example, ibid., pp. 24, 62.

41 In line with Indigenous protocol, they also nominated her as ‘sister’ to them.

42 Smith, *The Booandik Tribe of South Australian Aborigines: A Sketch of Their Habits, Customs, Legends, and Language. Also: An Account of the Efforts Made by Mr and Mrs James Smith to Christianise and Civilise Them*, pp. 40–41.

43 Ibid., p. 4.

44 Or indeed, Gillen commented to Spencer in July 1901 on his lack of conversation: ‘In doing work that you disapprove of or disbelieve in his ideas for if he once gets that idea into his head he will shut up like an oyster and wild horses will not drag reliable information out of him’. D.J. Mulvaney, H. Morphy and A. Petch, eds, *My Dear Spencer: The Letters of F.J. Gillen to Baldwin Spencer* (Melbourne: Hyland House, 1997), p. 7.

45 Crow, “Colonialism’s Paradox: White Women, ‘Race’ and Gender in the Contact Zone, 1850–1910,” p. 3.


47 Smith, *The Booandik Tribe of South Australian Aborigines: A Sketch of Their Habits, Customs, Legends, and Language. Also: An Account of the Efforts Made by Mr and Mrs James Smith to Christianise and Civilise Them*, p. 7.

48 Ibid., p. 34.

49 Ibid., p. 3. Also quoted in Nettelbeck, “‘Seeking to Spread the Truth’: Christina Smith and the South Australian Frontier.”

50 Smith, *The Booandik Tribe of South Australian Aborigines: A Sketch of Their Habits, Customs, Legends, and Language. Also: An Account of the Efforts Made by Mr and Mrs James Smith to Christianise and Civilise Them*, p. 3.

51 Nettelbeck, “‘Seeking to Spread the Truth’: Christina Smith and the South Australian Frontier,” p. 87.
Endnotes (continued)


54 de Salis, *Two Early Colonials, by a Great-Granddaughter, Margaret de Salis*, p. 21.


56 In a footnote to her poem ‘The Irish Mother’, Dunlop wrote: ‘The last line is the Irish cry of a broken heart, of which there can be no adequate translation. The name Varia, is MARY. The other Irish words are expressions of fondness for which the English tongue offers no sounds half so tender. Eliza Hamilton Dunlop, “Advertising. [Poetry. Songs of Exile, The Irish Mother],” *Australian*, 12 January 1839, p. 4.

57 See Reece’s fascinating article: Bob Reece, “‘You would have loved her for her Lore’: The Letters of Daisy Bates,” *Australian Aboriginal Studies: Journal of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies*, no. 1 (2007).


60 Wullati (a.k.a. Wallati) and translated by Eliza Hamilton Dunlop, “Native Poetry,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 October 1848, p. 3. Niel Gunson also wrote that Dunlop won the confidence of ‘the chief Boni’. Gunson, “Dunlop, Eliza Hamilton (1796–1880).”

61 Wullati (a.k.a. Wallati) and translated by Eliza Hamilton Dunlop, “Native Poetry,” p. 3. Of this poem, the missionary Threlkeld wrote: ‘Such is a fair specimen of Song, translated, with a little political licence. The orthography, although different from the system laid down in my Australian Grammar, sufficiently conveys the sound to enable me at once to discover the dialect of Wullati the Poet who reside, near our residence on the seashore, close to moon Island, until he died’. Niel Gunson, ed. *Australian Reminiscences and Papers of L.E. Threlkeld, Missionary to the Aborigines, 1824–1859*, vol. 1 (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1974), p. 58.


63 Ibid.


66 Ellen’s brother was Edward Ogilvie, who could speak the local language, was a compassionate pastoral giant who championed interracial goodwill, and an important mentor for Mary Ellen.

Ogilvie documented the local grammar and spoke the language fluently. Given his respect for Indigenous culture, being ‘in good stead in his dealings with the blacks’ and considering them ‘witty and amusing’, he probably would have had souvenir collections in his home, which the Bundock girls visited. See “Upper Clarence River,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 January 1923, p. 7.

McBryde argued that this ethic was often passed down through families, at times mentored by husbands or parents who keenly felt the responsibilities of dispossession and/or enjoyed friendly relations with Indigenous workers, giving a home to Indigenous refugees. McBryde, “Miss Mary, Ethnography and the Inheritance of Concern: Mary Ellen Murray-Prior,” p. 40.


“Upper Clarence River.”

Ibid.


“Upper Clarence River.”


Ibid., pp. 32–33.


Kerr reported: ‘Mary’s collection of dilly-bags was shown at the Sydney International Exhibition in 1879 and subsequently presented to the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, England. She sent dilly-bags, water vessels and fishing lines to the 1883 Amsterdam International, Colonial and Export Trade Exhibition and subsequently donated boomerangs, water vessels and message sticks to the Rijks Museum voor Volkunde, Leiden (in 1888 and 1892). In 1895 she gave boomerangs and water vessels to the Australian Museum in Sydney. Further collections of dilly-bags and necklets were also presented to the Australian Museum, as well as to Leiden’. Kerr, “Mary Ellen Bundock.”

This was a year after the professor visited leading museums, universities and technical colleges of Europe.
Endnotes (continued)


87 Ibid.


89 Ibid., p. 63.


91 Ibid.

92 Ibid.


95 Ibid.

96 Dawson, The Australian Aborigines: The Languages and Customs of Several Tribes in the Western District of Victoria, Australia.

97 Ian Clark, “Reconstruction of Aboriginal Microtoponymy in Western and Central Victoria: Case Studies from Tower Hill, the Hopkins River, and Lake Boga,” in Aboriginal Place Names: Naming and Re-naming the Australian Landscape, ed. Harold Koch and Luise Hercus (Canberra: Australian National University ePress, 2009), p. 212.


100 James Dawson, Letter to Charles Darwin, 30 July 1881, Darwin Correspondence Project www.darwinproject.ac.uk.


102 Quoted by Dawson, The Australian Aborigines: The Languages and Customs of Several Tribes in the Western District of Victoria, Australia, iii.
Endnotes (continued)


104 Dawson, *The Australian Aborigines: The Languages and Customs of Several Tribes in the Western District of Victoria, Australia*, iii.

105 Ibid., v.


107 William Buckley was not literate, but an apparent collaboration between John Morgan and William Buckley, with the Aboriginal Protector William Robertson acting as Trustee for both parties, led to the publication being written in first person by John Morgan. Morgan, *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*. However, this ‘official’ version of events did not name Buckley’s wife.

108 Mr Goodall was Superintendent of the Aboriginal Station at Framlingham, where Purranmurnin Tallarwurnin was then residing. See Dawson, *The Australian Aborigines: The Languages and Customs of Several Tribes in the Western District of Victoria, Australia*, pp. 110–111.

109 On the other hand, he might have been fearful for his liberty if he had made himself known.


111 Ibid., p. 17.


113 Muir wrote of transculturation when she recorded that Miola, accompanying the children while they had their lessons, also learnt to read and write. Marcie Muir, “Stow, Catherine Eliza (Katie) (1856 – 1940),” in *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Melbourne University Press, 1990), p. 25.

114 Parker mentioned this incident in her later ethnology and Muir provided further details. Parker’s two-year-old sister Rosina was the only other remaining daughter. Ibid.

115 Near Walgett on the Narren River in north-west New South Wales.

116 See Heather Goodall for her analysis of the way Indigenous people were able to maintain their ceremonial ties and much of their traditional lifestyle in this period. Heather Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in New South Wales, 1770 –1972* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1996), pp. 57–72.

117 There are two different dialects, one called *Yuwaalayay* and one called *Yuwalaraay* (also commonly spelt *Yularoi*). In this chapter I will be using the term ‘Noongahburrah’ to refer specifically to the geographic term of origin for the people along the Narren River; see note below.
Endnotes (continued)

118 The designation Noongahburrah is a geographical zone of origin term for the people with whom Parker worked, located along the Narren River. This term adds the associative suffix *barra* to the stem *nhungga*, meaning kurrajong tree, hence the name Nhunggabarrah, meaning kurrajong-country people. See Anna Ash, John Giacon and Amanda Lissarague, *Gambilaraay Yuwaalaraay and Yuwaalayaay Dictionary* (Alice Springs: IAD Press, 2003).

119 Grimshaw and Evans, “Colonial Women on Intercultural Frontiers: Rosa Campbell Praed, Mary Bundock and Katie Langloh.”

120 On one page of her memoirs, Parker called her ‘maids’ ‘my little black-but-comelys’, almost certainly taken from the title of the book Joseph Besley Gribble, *Black But Comely*, Or, Glimpses of Aboriginal Life in Australia. (London: Morgan & Scott, 1874); ibid. ‘Black but comely’ was a phrase taken from the Song of Solomon in the Bible, and around the turn of the century did not have negative connotations.

121 Parker also wrote in her diary that ‘Their great delight was to make me sprays to wear from flowers that they had grown themselves’. Muir, “Stow, Catherine Eliza (Katie) (1856–1940),” p. 87.


124 Ibid., p. 122.

125 In her ethnology Parker said that Barahgurree and Bogginbinnia were the names of two of her maids, so it is likely these are the first two, but it is not certain. Katie Langloh Parker, *The Euahlayi Tribe: A Study of Aboriginal Life in Australia* (London: Archibald Constable & Co., 1905), Chapter 3: “Relationships and Totems,” [n.p.].


127 Moreover, ‘their hair-styles, habits, and housekeeping skills were eagerly copied by the newly-settled native women, with very little tuition or coercion’. Barwick, “And the Lubras are Ladies Now,” p. 56.


129 ‘They were on very good terms with me. They would exchange gifts with me: I might receive a carved weapon, and one of them some tobacco’. Parker, *The Euahlayi Tribe: A Study of Aboriginal Life in Australia*, Chapter 1: “Introductory”.

130 Indeed, Parker wrote that ‘it became a camp fashion for mothers to dedicate their babies at birth to my service’. Muir, “Stow, Catherine Eliza (Katie) (1856–1940),” p. 87.


132 Ibid.

133 Ibid., Chapter 8: “Foraging and Cooking” [n.p.].

134 Ibid., Chapter 8: “Foraging and Cooking” [n.p.].

135 Katie] [Langloh Parker, “My Darkie Friends (reprinted from *The Sydney Mail*),” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 December 1899.


137 Clever man or healer/sorcerer
Endnotes (continued)


139 For example, Parker recalled ‘I shall never forget my rambles through the Bush with a retinue of natives. I learnt that every distinctive bit of nature – say a heap of white stones, the red mistletoe, the gnarled dark excrescences on the trees, and so on, each had its legend’. Muir, “Stow, Catherine Eliza (Katie) (1856–1940),” p. 146.

140 Parker quoted her neighbour’s ignorance for believing that the Indigenous people did not have ‘any legends at all’. K. Langloh Parker, *Australian Legendary Tales: Folklore of the Noongahburrahs as told to the Piccaninnies* (London & Melbourne: D. Nutt, 1896), vii.

141 “Corroboree Songs,” Register, 22 September 1906, p. 6.


143 She referred to Herbert Spencer’s writings and to Max Muller, among others, and corresponded with Alfred Howitt, Edward Tylor and Andrew Lang.

144 Parker’s family was from a dissenting Congregationalist tradition. Her grandfather was a minister, her grandmother an ‘accomplished classical scholar’ and her uncle in leadership positions in the scientific world. See Strehlow, *The Tale of Frieda Keysser. Frieda Keysser and Carl Strehlow: An Historical Biography. Volume 1, 1875–1912*, pp. 585–586.

145 Parker continued to say that ‘of which the Noongahburrahs are a branch’. Parker, *More Australian Legendary Tales*, ix.

146 Grimshaw and Evans, “Colonial Women on Intercultural Frontiers: Rosa Campbell Praed, Mary Bundock and Katie Langloh.” Parker wrote that they, as Max Mueller had indicated, ‘might be and ought to be collected in every part of the world’.

147 Ibid., p. 147.

148 Parker, from an unpublished manuscript, quoted in Muir, “Stow, Catherine Eliza (Katie) (1856–1940),” p. 146.


152 Ibid., p. 587.

153 Parker, *Australian Legendary Tales: Folklore of the Noongahburrahs as told to the Piccaninnies*.

154 Demonstrating her professional connections, Parker said she was inspired by Tylor’s insistence that ‘the philologist would be thankful for a specimen of these tales in their native form’. Parker, *The Euahlayi Tribe: A Study of Aboriginal Life in Australia*. 

357
Part Three: Postscript and Conclusion

Endnotes (continued)

155 The recording of his words and the knowledge that her writing transmitted to later descendants were highly significant.

156 “An Australian Literary Lady,” Register, 28 July 1902, p. 3.

157 Ibid.


159 Dalziell, “‘We Should Try, While There is Yet Time, to Gather All the Information Possible of a Race Fast Dying Out’: Unsettling Sympathetic Women,” p. 131.

160 Ibid., p. 134.

161 Ibid., p. 133.

162 Ibid., p. 134.

163 Although it may indeed have been the other way around; that is, that Parker sought out Lang’s collaboration. Strehlow, The Tale of Frieda Keysser. Frieda Keysser and Carl Strehlow: An Historical Biography. Volume 1, 1875–1912, p. 587.

164 Ibid., p. 589.

165 Parker explained in a letter to Lang that Spencer’s ‘Ghost theory’ of the origin of religion in the worship of ancestral spirits was incompatible with what she had learned from the Noongahburrah. See ibid., p. 893.

166 Most of these did not live much among, or have lengthy relationships with, Indigenous people.


168 Sigmund Freud, Totems and Totemism (1946 (1918)), p. 29.


170 Parker questioned an elder about whether this idea of Baiame was influenced by the missionaries; he replied that if it were so, the young men would know most about Baiame, but they knew nothing, apparently because the old rites had fallen into disuse. Nor were they much more familiar with Christian doctrines. Parker also explained: ‘It may seem strange that I should know anything about a belief carefully kept from women, but I have even been privileged to hear “Byamee’s Song”, which only the fully initiated may sing; an old black, as will later appear, did chant this old lay, now no longer understood, to myself and my husband’. Parker, The Euahlayi Tribe: A Study of Aboriginal Life in Australia, Chapter 2: “The All Father Byamee” [n.p.].


173 Parker, The Euahlayi Tribe: A Study of Aboriginal Life in Australia, p. 141. Note that Dalziell used this quote for a different purpose; see Dalziell, “‘We Should Try, While There is Yet Time, to Gather All the Information Possible of a Race Fast Dying Out’: Unsettling Sympathetic Women,” p. 336.

Endnotes (continued)


178 Ibid.

179 Tempts the baby into the world by descanting on the glories in it. First, perhaps, she will say: ‘Come now, here’s your auntie waiting to see you’. ‘Here’s your sister’. ‘Here’s your father’s sister’, and so on through a whole list. Then she will say, as the relatives and friends do not seem a draw: ‘Make haste, the bumble fruit is ripe. The guiebet flowers are blooming. The grass is waving high. The birds are all talking. And it is a beautiful place, hurry up and see for yourself’. Parker also recorded songs for babies Gheerlayi ghilayer:

\[
\text{Wahl munnoomerhdayer,} \\
\text{Wahl moooroonbahgoo,} \\
\text{Yelgayerdayer deermuldayer,} \\
\text{Gheerlayi ghilayer.}
\]

Which means:

Kind be,
Do not steal,
Do not touch what to another belongs,
Leave all such alone,
Kind be.


180 Ibid., Chapter 2: “The All Father Byamee”.

181 Muir, “Stow, Catherine Eliza (Katie) (1856–1940),” p. 90.

182 Ibid.


184 Muir, “Stow, Catherine Eliza (Katie) (1856–1940),” p. 90.

185 Ibid., p. 97.

186 Parker described these posts and their purpose: ‘These post are painted red black, and white with a snaky pattern, the Kurreah sign, on them. She also planted in my garden two other witch-poles, one painted red and having a cross-bar about midway down it from which raddled strings were attached to the top; this was to keep away the Euloowayi, black fellows possessed of devils, who came from behind the sunset. The other was plain red-painted, tapering pine-pole which she said, when it fell to the ground, would tell of the death of someone related to an inmate of the house. Should it lean towards the house it foretold misfortune; if she were any time away, when she was returning she would send her Mullee Mullee to sit on the top and bend it just to let us know. This pole would also keep away the spirits of the dead from the house during her absence. Ibid., p. 100.

187 Ibid., p. 97. The post ‘worked’; it did indeed signal the death of a member of the household and the garden was kept alive by rainfall.
Part Three: Postscript and Conclusion

Endnotes (continued)

188 For example, ibid., p. 100.
189 McKay, “Writing From the Contact Zone: Fiction by Early Queensland Women,” p. 92.
190 Ibid., p. 68.
192 Dalziell, “‘We Should Try, While There is Yet Time, to Gather All the Information Possible of a Race Fast Dying Out’: Unsettling Sympathetic Women,” p. 335.
193 “An Australian Literary Lady,” p. 3.
195 After their publication, Parker’s collection of Yularoi (Euahlayi) stories, Australian Legendary Tales: Folklore of the Noongahburrahs as told to the Piccaninnies received international recognition. See “Back from Abroad: Chat with Mrs. Percival Stow.,” Register, 7 March 1927, p. 12, reporting that Parker had two English publishers for Australian Legendary Tales. Subsequent American and Russian editions were published and the collection was republished in 1897, 1953, 1955, 1959, 1967 and 1978. Muir, “Stow, Catherine Eliza (Katie) (1856–1940).”
196 This edition was instigated by Andrew Lang and backed by Parker. McRae’s artwork had been brought to Lang’s attention by his brother, Dr Lang of Corowa, who knew the artist. Another nineteenth-century woman, Theresa Walker, a sculptor from Adelaide and the sister of Phillip Chauncy, collected McCrae’s work. Chauncy had images of those works reproduced in Smyth, The Aborigines of Victoria: With Notes Relating to the Habits of the Natives of Other Parts of Australia and Tasmania, 1.
197 Griffiths, Hunters and Collectors, p. 3.
198 With some exceptions, for example Christine Smith.
200 For Barber, this field was natural history or science.
201 Barber, The Heyday of Natural History, p. 125.
202 Hale, “Comparative Intellectual Character of the Sexes.”
204 Ibid., p. 332. McBryde, “Miss Mary, Ethnography and the Inheritance of Concern: Mary Ellen Murray-Prior,” p. 39. However, when anthropology became institutionalised and professionalised in Australia, from about 1920 onwards, it attracted many women.
206 Ibid., p. 12.
Endnotes (continued)

207 There were seven letters. Everitt’s letter of 12 June 1901 mentioned that, along with their collaborative paper that R.H. Mathews had read to the Royal Society, she had another paper, which she included and said was also prepared for the Royal Society. ‘I sent them last February (solely on my own account) drawings and descriptions of rock-carvings at Burrangorang, which they accepted, but afterwards said the paper was too short and desired something added’. She then indicated that Mathews withdrew it after ‘a point of offence taken by me at this person [Mathews]’. In this same letter she indicated she was about to take three months’ leave, in which she would further study the ‘pigment on the caves’. Mary M. Everitt, Letter to A.G. Stephens, 12 June 1901, Hayes Collection, UQFL2: 949-950, Manuscripts Collection, University of Queensland Library.

208 The stationmaster William Albert Cuneo, who lived near Everitt’s mother, was interested in Aboriginal history and showed her an Aboriginal axe-grinding site on Myrtle Creek, between Thirlmere Railway Station and the Bargo Road. ‘As the area was being quarried for the production of grindstones, Everitt took steps to have part of the site protected. Cuneo said “Miss M.M. Everett [sic] deserves special mention for saving from the drill and gelignite one of the super-fluted grinding places.”’ Smith, Some Mythology and Folklore of the Gundungurra Tribe by R.H. Mathews: Edited with Commentary and Essay on the Work of Mathews by Jim Smith, p. 43.

209 ‘Their original paint colourings were white, red, and yellow; occasionally they said they got some sort of blue by barter, but very occasionally, as it came from very far. White was from Gidya ash, or gypsum; red and yellow, ochre clay; but they also got both red and yellow from burning at a certain stage certain trees, gooroolay for red; the charcoal, instead of being black, having red and yellow tinges. But since the white people came the blue bag has put yellow out of fashion, and raddle is used for the red’. Parker, The Euahlayi Tribe: A Study of Aboriginal Life in Australia, Chapter 14: “Costumes and Weapons”.

210 Ibid., Chapter 15: “The Amusements of Blacks”.

211 Ibid., Chapter 14: “Costumes and Weapons”.

212 Ibid.

213 A descriptive list of Dietrich’s 150 photographs for the Museum Godeffroy was printed in 1880 and also 1881 – these are obviously very valuable as records of the time when they were taken and for their individual Indigenous portraits. See Ray Sumner, “Amalie Dietrich and the Aborigines: Her contribution to Australian Anthropology and Ethnography,” Australian Aboriginal Studies, no. 2 (1993), p. 3. Bates’ photographs are mostly in the State Library of Western Australia and the National Gallery of Australia.

214 Janice Lally, “Collecting Under the Influence of Evolutionism,” in The Makers and Making of Indigenous Australian Museum Collections, ed. Nicolas Peterson, Lindy Allen, and Louise Hamby (Melbourne University Press, 2008). This was certainly the case with Dietrich’s items and, as she was merely following instructions in what to collect, she did not acquire women’s material culture, unlike Bundock and McConnel.


216 W.E. Roth and A.C. Haddon, however, had a low percentage of weapons in their collections. See Table 11.2 in Peterson, Allen and Hamby, The Makers and Making of Indigenous Australian Museum Collections, p. 299. See also information on McConnel’s collection of 500 objects in O’Gorman Perusco, “Only Sticks and Bark: Ursula McConnel – Her Collecting and Collection”, and on Bundock in Marcus, First in their Field: Women and Australian Anthropology.
Endnotes (continued)

217 Bon persistently lobbied for the just treatment of the Woiworung, Djarud Wurrung and Taungurong people living at Coranderrk Mission at Healesville, Victoria. Using her influence with politicians and Presbyterian clergy, she persuaded a government investigation into conditions at Coranderrk and succeeding in changing policy. In 1904 she became the first woman to be appointed to the Board of Protection of Aborigines. While on the board she maintained ‘voluminous’ correspondence with Aboriginal people all over Victoria, ‘remaining uniquely responsible to them’. See Joan Gillison, ‘Bon, Anne Fraser (1838–1936),’ in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Melbourne University Press, 1979.


219 Ibid.


221 The exhibition was held on 18 and 19 November 1930 (ibid).


223 Muir, “Stow, Catherine Eliza (Katie) (1856–1940),” p. 64.


225 Already mentioned in this thesis were Phillip Chauncy, James Dawson, Carl Strelhow and Lancelot Edward Threlkeld. Further to these was the Scottish-born John Hunter Kerr (1821–1874), a contemporary of Mary Bundock. A farmer and collector, Kerr presented his comprehensive collection of Aboriginal material culture to a wide public in Victoria and shared some similarities with Bundock.


229 Frazer theorised a progression, from ‘primitive magic’ to religion, culminating in science.


231 Spencer owed much of his field work to his collaborator, the Irish postmaster Frank Gillen; together they produced several texts, which as a group would become one of the most celebrated contributions to Australian intellectual history.


234 Stirling, quoted in ibid., p. 22.


Endnotes (continued)


238 Spencer and Gillen, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*.

239 Ashenden, “The Strange Career of the Australian Conscience”.

240 Mathew, *Two Representative Tribes of Queensland with an Inquiry Concerning the Origin of the Australian Race*, pp. 72, 76.

241 A term defined by Marlene Kadar as ‘a less exclusive genre of personal kinds of writing’, which can include an amalgamation of autobiography and/or biography and/or fiction and/or chronicle. See Michelle M. Dowd and Julie A. Eckerie, *Genre and Women’s Life Writing in Early Modern England* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), p. 3.


243 Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors*.

244 Apart from Amelia Deitrich.


247 Jennifer Isaacs recorded that one white child at Wentworth station was given the name Oonda-narka, meaning ‘countryman of mine’. Ibid.


Chapter Eight:

Conclusion

Our survival as a species depends on our ability to recognize the borders between difference as fertile spaces of desire and fluid sites of syncretism, interaction and mutual change.

—Susan Friedman

The ascendency of social evolutionism in the second half of the nineteenth century provided ethnography with an epistemological compass, bolstering its claims to be a science and thereby transforming it into the academically reputable and theoretically grounded profession of anthropology. Australia was a prime site for the emerging discipline of anthropology, not only because Australian Aboriginal people, being widely considered the most primitive in the world, were a test case for social evolutionism, but also because their rapid destruction, due to the advance of Western civilisation, added an urgency to their study.

Before social evolutionism took hold of the Western imagination, ethnography had been, along with botany and other natural sciences, part of a general, often amateur, scientific effort of empirical study or information-gathering, in which large numbers of women were involved. As ethnography became more professionally organised and, as a consequence, more specialised, professional societies were formed; these prohibited female membership in order to retain their credibility as professions. Although women were granted membership of the Ethnological Society in 1863, their admittance was blamed for sanitising the ‘grave, erudite and purely scientific study [that] requir[ed] the most free and serious discussion’. One result was the formation that year of the Anthropological Society, in order to spare the ladies from crude topics of sex and anatomy. When the rigorously masculinist and scientific Anthropological Society finally invited ‘the fairer portions of mankind’ to one of its gatherings in 1870, it was clear that women could no longer be overtly excluded from branches of the emerging discipline.

The two societies amalgamated in 1871 to form the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland. Women were admitted to the Institute’s proceedings, but their position remained tenuous. For example, in 1883 the anthropologists, comprising the Anthropometric Committee of the British Association for the Advancement of
Science, whose purpose was to collect information about humans and races of the British Empire, ‘forecast nothing less than the extinction of human species if the position of women continued to improve’.

As anthropology developed as a discipline in its own right in the late nineteenth century, lay field workers in the colonies were increasingly called upon to supply material for anthropologists based in Europe and America. While there were some women ethnographic field workers, the complex ideological currents of gender and ‘race’ made women unlikely contributors to the official ethnographic and anthropological discourse until well into the twentieth century. The discourse of early anthropology largely involved, and was framed by, ‘men talking with men about men’. Significant links were established at this time between Australian colonist field workers and armchair anthropologists and sociologists such as Sir Edward Tylor and Sir James Frazer, both based in Britain; the French sociologist Emile Durkheim; and the American anthropologist Lewis Morgan. As Tim Murray surmised, ‘to all intents and purposes Fison and Howitt were working for Morgan (and Tylor) and Spencer and Gillen for Frazer (and Tylor)’, all of whom were social evolutionists.

The first substantial book on Aboriginal culture and its art, Robert Brough Smyth’s *Aborigines of Victoria* (1878), comprised compilations of largely amateur ethnographies. The book proved very influential as source material for anthropological studies in Australia and overseas. Smyth, a bureaucrat and devotee of natural history, used work by other ethnographers like Alfred W. Howitt and the surveyor Phillip Chauncy. Chauncy passed on the drawings of Tommy McRae – then known as Tommy Barnes – including works collected by Chauncy’s sister, the professional artist Theresa Walker. Tommy Barnes (McRae) (1835–1901) was the first Indigenous artist to be named and written about as an individual artist. Some of the writing Smyth selected for his compilation, including that by Chauncy and the Reverend William Ridley (1819–1878), was distinctly opposed to theories of social evolution.

In *Aborigines of Victoria*, Smyth acknowledged the efforts of nearly fifty eminent male contributors, and it was only at the end of the list that he thanked the sole female entrant, a Miss E.M. a ‘Beckett, ‘Who was so good as to make a drawing of a characteristic Tasmanian plant’. With these words Smyth confirmed the conventional feminine pastimes of plant pressing and floral painting, and in so doing effaced the knowledge and labour of those women who at times provided information to male contributors. Two such examples we know of were Theresa Walker and Christina Smith; how many others there were, we do not know. Howitt did use women
ethnographers, for instance May Benson from Brenda Station on the north-western border of New South Wales. Over the course of 1906–07, Benson corresponded with Smyth’s contributor, A.W. Howitt, answering his questions and sending extensive lists of kinship, language and marriage information.14

The call to document and gather material was evident in daily newspapers, and some more emboldened women may not have felt precluded from the urgency conveyed. At a public lecture given in 1896 by the amateur anthropologist R.H. Mathews, reported in the Sydney Morning Herald, the speaker requested that native drawings be forwarded to fifteen societies.15 However, art was not high on the agenda of nineteenth-century ethnography. Howard Morphy commented that early ‘Australian ethnographic museums were oriented away from “art” and towards the technology of everyday life’.16 The collections were more memorials to a passing people or, as Jones contended, concerned with ‘their symbolic status as trophies, than with perceptions of their qualities of beauty, skill, or workmanship’.17 Thus, for many of the early women ethnographers, such as Mary Bundock, Isabella Taylor Dawson and Ethel Hassell, there was little reference to art in existing literature, or collections for them to draw upon; nor was there a great emphasis on art in their own writing.

Nevertheless, white women were early participants in facilitating the production of Aboriginal art and craft, in early craft workshops and cooperative intercultural art ventures with Indigenous women. For example, nineteenth-century colonial missionary women or their family members, like Ethel Shaw’s mother at Coranderrk and others at Lake Tyers and Framlingham, supported women making ‘baskets, hats, mats and opossum rugs [as] the most reliable and often the largest source of year-round cash income until the 1880s’.18 Economic independence was a prime motivation for these workshops: ‘economic dependence [for Indigenous women] is the root of all evil’,19 argued the activist Mary Montgomerie Bennett.20 Her work at Mount Margaret in the raffia craft shops and her early instructions in spinning and weaving at Ernabella would have a long legacy, as would the work of Geraldine MacKenzie at Aurukun Mission on Cape York Peninsula and Greta Mathews at Warruwi on Goulburn Island, in supporting art and craft industries for Indigenous women (Figure 8.1). The development of such small-scale enterprises was part of the missionising agenda, and laid the foundation for today’s thriving Australian Indigenous art industry.
Figure 8.1
E.J. Fysh, A Raffia Workshop at Coranderrk near Healesville, Victoria, c. 1900.

However, white women working in such enterprises were not necessarily inclined to write ethnography. The early women ethnographers I have discussed were mainly stimulated by their often intimate and lengthy experiences as participants in everyday Indigenous lives. Further, because of the belief that Indigenous traditions were fast expiring, the need to gather data superseded gender prejudices. The anthropologist Andrew Lang, in his foreword to Katie Langloh Parker’s 1905 ethnographic work *The Euahlayi Tribe*, advocated research opportunities for women who lived in a rural environment, ‘supposing the squire’s wife to be an intelligent and sympathetic lady, with a strong taste for the study of folklore and rustic customs’.21

Although Lang’s view was not widely held, calls to document Indigenous art or to answer surveys did interest some settler women who grew up on stations, or who had time to explore their surroundings. After all, the calling of the naturalist and the work of scientific enquiry were not exclusive to men. In the words of Lynn Barber, if ‘for gentlemen it [natural history] offered new pretexts to go out and shoot something … for ladies it offered new subjects for watercolours, for albums, or embroidery’.22 Pratt, in fact, suggested that ‘the naturalist figure often has a certain androgyny about it’,23 as if these women had, through their implied independence and ease in the bush, overcome the limits of the Victorian-era domesticity that framed women’s lives in nineteenth-
century Australia. And, as this thesis suggests, independence and ease in the bush were probably largely due to these women’s close association with Indigenous people, especially Indigenous women. Thus, two broad themes of colonial Australia intersect in this thesis: the hegemonic epistemology of imperial science, in particular the ethnographic enterprise, and the debate concerning white women and Indigenous interactions, which in the last decades of the twentieth century became a focus of feminist histories of frontier relations.

Postcolonial theory of contact zones understood the frontier as a fluid, rather than fixed, space, where difference, identity and power were contested, negotiated and entangled. For some time, the conventional white male perspective of colonial history as the civilisation of ‘terra nullius’ had been found wanting by its own limited terms. Until the latter part of the twentieth century, this history not only had been written by an array of white men, but was also drawn from the documents of white men: their letters, reports and studies. Despite feminist historians restoring women and their stories into these ‘his-stories’, Meg Vivers argued that, even after four decades of feminist revision, there was still ‘a surprising lack of reference to primary female sources in texts that deal with contact history’. 24 Hence the ‘specificities and sensitivities of female experiences and observations have not been adequately considered’.25 Nor have the perspectives of Aboriginal and migrant women and men, and their oral histories. This thesis demonstrates that the same lack of consideration of women’s contributions and specificities applied to the history of early Australian ethnography and the very early reception of Aboriginal art.

This thesis has examined the ethnographic writings and perspectives of mostly middle-class colonial women who were deeply embedded in an intercultural world, but also subject to the larger phallocentric and imperial forces of their era. Part One discussed those feminist revisionist histories of the early colony and contact zone that analysed the various factors, beliefs and contentions around race and gender that shaped the lives and work of women ethnographers in the colonial period. These included Victorian maternalism and its social conventions of femininity, domesticity and gendered labour in the professions of science and writing; the sexual politics of the frontier, involving the sexual exploitation of Indigenous women in remote areas where white women were few and far between; beliefs in progress, the hierarchy of races, the superiority of Europeans, and their right to appropriate Indigenous lands; and the exploitation of Indigenous labour and resources. Against this background, the thesis focused on the issues of current discourses on colonial history, such as the social
construction of European knowledge production, difference and ethnographic ‘othering’, and their implications in the ideology of colonialism, as in notions of ‘terra nullius’, the intelligence, humanity and primitiveness of Indigenous people, and the limits of transculturation.

My thesis has critiqued the dualistic approach of many feminist postcolonial histories, which reduced the white colonial woman to, on the one hand, a benevolent and sympathetic maternal figure taming a harsh frontier and civilising the moral excesses of male colonists and, on the other hand, a person complicit in various colonial projects as beneficiaries of power, privilege and the spoils of invasion in, for example, ethnography. My focus has been the latter, and to this end I employed the so-called third-wave feminist approach of investigating the multivalency of positionality and interpretation, seeking to complicate polarities and reveal what had been overlooked in the employment of binary and theoretical frameworks. I also attempted to be mindful of the mechanisms of this binary or ‘disciplinary imperatives’ behind the trope of the sympathetic white woman which, Tanya Dalziell argued, continues to have an ideological function in its performance.26

In this context, a multifaceted approach has been applied to investigating discourses around women’s early writing with Indigenous content. I have sought to identify the emergence of women’s ethnographic writing from the natural sciences, as in the Part Two case studies of Charlotte Waring Barton, her daughter Louisa Atkinson, and Ethel Hassell.

As Australia’s colonisation spread further inland during the nineteenth century, tensions and conflicts between settlers and Indigenous inhabitants intensified. While at first these encounters were conceived by most European observers according to the ‘Chain of Being’, in the second half of the century Herbert Spencer’s influential theory of social evolutionism effectively historicised the Chain of Being. This theory transformed the hierarchy of species – which was easily conflated into a hierarchy of races – into an ideology that regarded world history as a set of stages of social development, from savagery through barbarism to civilisation. Spencer’s social connotations of ‘survival of the fittest’27 provided an apparently rational pretext for the colonisation and genocide of Indigenous populations. While none of the subjects being discussed in Part Two were able to separate themselves completely from these larger paradigms of Western thinking, I argue that their lived social, intercultural experiences often overrode these paradigms in their accounts of Indigenous people and culture.
Meg Vivers argued that the lack of reference in Australian history to primary female sources and the way women often interacted with Indigenous people ‘overlooks the potential usefulness of individual and often unique representations of colonial environment and events’. Vivers demonstrated that colonial women’s texts provided extra dimensions of subtle, more intimate, details and domestic sensibilities to colonial history. Because of academic prejudice and suspicion of the unreliability and subjectivity of early women’s writing, including their ethnography, their early writings tended to be overlooked or disregarded. Like oral histories, they were the unsaid of the discourse and a function of the longstanding ‘hierarchised and gendered binary of specialised knowledges and the everyday’. Vivers argued that women’s documentation of what she termed ‘inscapes’ – an alternative perspective to the white masculine renditions of a progressive domination or pioneer triumph of appropriating ‘landscape’ – revealed, and revolved around, the world of ‘close and sensitive relationships between human beings and nature’.

Coming from an arts and an Aboriginal art background, I was interested in the participation in, or contribution of, women to the early Western reception of Aboriginal art. Although there was some acknowledgement of a few twentieth-century women in this history, the description of the reception of Aboriginal art in the colonial era seemed to be drawn entirely from the ethnography and collecting practices of men. The thesis has demonstrated that white women ethnographers were among the first substantial Western investigators of Indigenous culture. It has shown that in the nineteenth century there was a significant group of women contributors to ethnographic research and collecting, indicating that there are probably many more to be brought to light. It also revealed that the small amount of women’s work that was referenced was generally undervalued and scantily documented, or else highly contested. Although some individual efforts, such as Bundock’s collecting practices, were at times acknowledged, and Hassell’s ethnography was referenced or footnoted, most women’s endeavours were dismissed as pseudo, racist or amateur ethnography, despite the far reach of some of their endeavours by way of journalism – as in the articles of Caroline Dexter and Louisa Atkinson – and in the books of Caroline Waring Barton, Isabella Dawson Taylor and Katie Langloh Parker.

Chapter Seven of Part Three outlined the characteristics of nineteenth-century women’s ethnography as a distinct genre. While the practices of collecting and writing that characterised this genre have not yet been fully recognised, and could be considered less prolific, and certainly less official and less formal, than those of male
contemporaries, they had distinctive attributes which made them particularly valuable and forward-looking contributions to the discourse. Women’s unique, long-term placement in the domestic realms of vast, isolated stations, combined with their close interrelationships with their Indigenous neighbours, gave them a privileged position in ethnographic collecting, research and writing. This inspired some women to buck conventional social inhibitions, including the perceived anomaly of women’s scientific knowledge production about Indigenous people. Not until the twentieth century were women accepted into the professional world as ethnographers and anthropologists.

The general approach of this thesis has been to identify various constraints on women embarking as ethnographers. Numerous stepping stones to success were missing, unavailable or difficult to obtain, such as becoming academically qualified; having financial independence; and exchanging ideas through membership of scientific societies or having papers accepted, read or published in journals. Few such women received remuneration for their work until well into the twentieth century, and the support of male patrons was usually confined to family members. Lack of acknowledgement was also an obstacle for some women, such as Mary Everitt. Additionally, the societal ‘insistence upon a modest, proficient, self-demeaning level of amateurism as a “suitable accomplishment” for the well brought up young woman’ mitigated against their success and accomplishments. More recently, continuing doubts about the credibility of such women’s ‘popular’ writings, as well as feminist evaluations of their maternalism and complicity, has inhibited an appreciation of their unique perspective.

Nevertheless, I have argued that some well-educated wives and daughters living on remote pastoral properties were particularly well placed for ethnographic work, by their education and their socialisation in the contact zones. Immersed in an active Indigenous world, away from public white scrutiny; having time on their hands (several were widowed or childless); and relying on Indigenous people for company (as opposed to shorter-term anthropological field workers, who came and went but did not have a stake in, or depend on, either the land or relationships) were all factors that encouraged interdependency, with its dynamics of reciprocity and obligation. A certain cross-cultural camaraderie was also at times revealed in settler women’s writing and their anecdotal accounts.

I have also suggested that, from an Indigenous perspective, gender could work in women’s favour, because they were perceived as softer than their menfolk. Stories of their sharing of food and European medicines probably preceded them, and they were
most likely seen by Aboriginal people as potential intermediaries with their men. Anne O’Gorman Perusco reminded us that these European women ‘were already negotiating the margins of gendered behaviours as women in their own societies’. Women were seen and often employed as intermediaries on both sides. This was a product not only of an open and sympathetic approach (feminine licence) but sometimes also of the intimacy of long-term relationships, often from birth, which thus included fluency or at least a working knowledge of Indigenous vocabulary. Perhaps too, due to their subordinate gender, these women were sensitive to the hierarchy of power in colonial race relations.

This thesis has demonstrated that women’s narratives of a relational and everyday world brought a wealth of insight into the social nuances of engagement, and the reciprocal and transformative nature of cultural entanglements. In writing about Ruth Frankenberg’s scholarship, Ann Brewster said that ‘personalised embodied narratives foreground the particularity of the everyday’. Similarly, women’s ethnography revealed traces of the social intricacies of their interactions: that is, the politics of the intercultural everyday, as shown in Hassell’s and Parker’s work. These included the dynamics of inclusion and difference; oscillations and reversals of power; and what Brewster called ‘defamiliarisation’ or ‘the other putting the self into question’ or, as Dyer suggested, ‘making whiteness strange’.

Some women, like Hassell and Parker, characterised themselves in their writing as ungainly novices to Indigenous expertise, inspired and educated by their Indigenous masters. Even if they were unable to comply with Indigenous standards, they nonetheless recognised them as powerful and effective; for example, Hassell’s respect for Indigenous warnings about where to camp, and Louisa Atkinson’s documentation of the clever man who could walk the tree tops or the stone in the tree to keep the sun from going down. If at times patronising and racist, they nonetheless respected and observed Indigenous customs. Waring Barton, for instance, did not dismiss as childish such notions as not speaking the name of the dead. Recorded in these colonial women’s narratives were interactions that at times implied that they were aware, albeit fleetingly, of their own racial otherness, a troubling or inversion of their norm or privilege. Brewster argued that such ‘interaffective and intercorporeal detail of these “micropolitical” transactions remains largely unremarked and invisible in official discourses’, but is far from trivial or redundant.

Indeed, I have found that this nineteenth-century ethnographic genre has some distinguishing features and made some important contributions. Firstly, over and over in
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their anecdotal writings the women presented, and often foregrounded, Indigenous people as personable individuals of a shared humanity, not as exotic curiosities. Colonial women ethnographers nearly always named and acknowledged their informants, and both Taylor Dawson and Parker dedicated their work to particular Indigenous mentors. These women portrayed the immediacy of shared historical space, rather than an anachronistic objectification of Indigenous subjects banished to a bygone era. In their best examples, the texts revealed a flow of interactive activity, reciprocity, influence and dialogue with unfixed borders. This thesis has also shown how these women ethnographers recognised the increasing empowerment, prestige, influence and independence of Aboriginal women, particularly as they matured.

As well as giving indications of paternalism and white superiority, the texts provided simultaneous glimpses of the women’s Indigenous neighbours as protectors and hosts. Instances of so-called ventriloquising and appropriation cannot be denied. It has been argued that knowledge productions of the other inevitably reduce them to the terms of one’s own understanding, or merely set the other up as ‘the frame of reference, and fetishising it’. Patrick Wolfe outlined the structural nature of the problem:

Where survival is a matter of not being assimilated, positionality is not just central to the issue; it is the issue. In a settler–colonial contest, the question of who speaks goes far beyond liberal concerns with equity … Claims to authority over indigenous discourse made from within the settler–colonial academy necessarily participate in the continuing usurpation of Indigenous space (invasion is a structure, not an event).

Ethnographies, like all discourses, are mediated, ideologically encoded and commodified. To fixate on this intractable feature of ethnographic practice, however, or to reduce these documents to an ethnographic construct with no presumptive Indigenous precedent, risks obscuring the agency of Indigenous people in these dealings. As Marcia Langton wrote about the Western reception of Aboriginal art, it ‘accords no intention to’ Indigenous people. ‘To theorise that their works have been appropriated in some deterministic way is to fail to see and locate their power. They have changed the way non-Aboriginal people think about things.’

If it is true that Christina Smith and Isabella Dawson Taylor were asked by wise Indigenous elders and diplomats to preserve their language and culture and not let them be forgotten, and true that men and women of high degree chose to give the time to
teach or share with these white women their language, kinship relations, ancestral stories, magic and everyday concerns, then we ignore the very real possibility of Indigenous intention ‘to change the way non-Aboriginal people think about things’ through using these ethnographers as their agents or messengers. Indeed, despite their limitations, Parker’s mythologies played just such a role. Indigenous people continue to use white people as mediators and agents; there are too many examples to ignore. Like the influential colonial activist and psychoanalyst Frantz Fanon, many Indigenous elders, such as Eliza Dunlop’s associate, the poet Wallatu, sought an inclusive future that went beyond the frames of colonial structures.

Michael Christie argued in his research into Aboriginal epistemology that Indigenous modes of knowledge production were remarkably empiricist, rather than bound by prescribed belief systems, and thus always evolved ‘to allow humans to fit into, rather than outside of, the ecology’. Change and new phenomena were constantly integrated into their knowledge systems:

> A science in which all human dimensions, the social, economic, religious and political, are integrated and interpreted within, and in terms of, the rest of the physical universe … Aboriginal science has developed in parallel with an economy which is based upon constant, ongoing, highly tuned responsiveness to the physical and social environment, a subtle and complex responsiveness which involves simultaneous reception and procession of large amounts of extremely varied and constantly fluctuating stimuli.

This Indigenous epistemology produced vast insights into the natural world that women ethnographers, who were also natural scientists, recorded as worthwhile knowledge. The environmental sensitivity of Indigenous epistemology to complex webs and levels of interconnection, which are ‘utterly alien to our Western taxonomies’, fascinated women such as Parker and Hassell. Hassell, for example, recorded her Indigenous friends telling her, upon leaving for a long journey, that they would be back before the snakes went to sleep, and their teaching her how to tell when there were iguana eggs in a white ants’ nest: by noting the small round patch of a different colour at its base in softer clay. Parker related that ‘when the moon looks very yellow after it has risen on a winter’s evening, it is a sign of frost’. These sorts of insights were garnered from intercultural lessons and experience, not the objectivity of Western science. It simply does not ring true that Parker’s work sought to claim a form of authorial proprietorship of Yuvalaraay episteme; she had too much passion for sharing
its sophistication and cultural relativity, and she was too well aware of her scant appreciation of its vast, interconnected network, even after an engagement of twenty years.

Because this Indigenous epistemology applied to social and cosmic as well as natural relations, colonists also had to be integrated into the Indigenous belief systems. Indigenous people, Christie said, ‘constantly renegotiate their ontology’,52 though this is always done in reference to previous cosmologies.53 To infer or ascribe Indigenous elders as passive victims of either their own static belief systems or colonialism does not sit with my own, or a host of others’, experiences. Despite the ravages of colonisation, Indigenous elders are very aware of their power, both then and now, and generously engage with white men and women, renegotiating and incorporating change.

Henrietta Drake-Brockman, an early twentieth-century woman who recorded some ethnography and republished Parker’s Australian Legendary Tales in 1953, wrote of Pompey: ‘a man of high degree’. Pompey had demonstrated his flint-making to her while he visited a mission in the Kimberley, where Brockman was camping. Weeks later they unexpectedly crossed paths again. During the hot months and ‘business time’ she was in a vehicle that became bogged in a creek bed. Much to the passengers’ relief, a group of Aboriginal men appeared out of nowhere, ‘the most imposing of all … six feet, hair greased and banded, face lined with ochre paint, waist encircled with a belt of human hair into which various weapons were thrust, amazingly bade me good morning’.

After the car was freed and the white travellers turned to go, ‘Pompey stepped suddenly towards me. He took from his belt one of the most beautifully balanced kylies which I have ever handled, and held it out to me. “This one proper fella, missi” he said. “No more play-play”.’

We can only conjecture what inspired Pompey to give away one of his lovingly crafted boomerangs but, having been the recipient in several similar experiences, I imagine it was a mixture of the generosity of an Indigenous host, a response to the happenings – this re-crossing of paths, the interconnection that it signalled, and a sign of his plenty – and his sovereignty demonstrated by a gift that he knew Drake-Brockman would value.

Pompey’s gesture stayed with Drake-Brockman, inspiring her to research and republish Parker’s Yuwalaraay legends. She continued, ‘It was, to me, as if I had been handed the real freedom of my own country … Perhaps that is why I so greatly appreciate Mrs Parker’s admirable legends’. Drake-Brockman went on to collate and
transcribe Indigenous song cycles. Of course this statement could be critiqued for hyperbole, soft primitivism or a ‘Dreaming complex’,\textsuperscript{57} but as Charles Perkins has said:

\begin{quote}
My expectation of a good Australia is when White people would be proud to speak an Aboriginal language, when they realise that Aboriginal culture and all that goes with it, philosophy, art, language, morality, kinship, is all part of their heritage. And that’s the most unbelievable thing of all, that it’s all there waiting for us all.\textsuperscript{58}
\end{quote}

Drake-Brockman’s genuine and deep response implied that she understood the gift as one of hospitality, a blessing and an expression of implied responsibility. Further, in accordance with Indigenous science it was a responsiveness that integrated her into a wider world, as Rauna Kuokkanen explains, ‘by offering hospitality one participates in the endless reweaving of a social fabric on which all can depend – thus the gift of sustenance for the guest becomes gift of hope for the host’.\textsuperscript{59} In Indigenous epistemologies, reciprocity is not based on a two-way relationship of give-and-take exchange, Kuokkanen argued, but on a circular system of always receiving, yet giving back at the same time, with the Earth at the epicentre – an economy of circulation. For many of the women discussed in this thesis, there is a sense that their work was at least partly prompted as a response, and by a sense of responsibility, to Indigenous hospitality. It is likely that the memory of Pompey and their interaction was behind the first stand-alone line of Drake-Brockman’s book: ‘These legends are important’.\textsuperscript{60}

As I have demonstrated, many of the Indigenous people who were the mentors, friends and informants of these colonial women, and of other non-Indigenous people who followed them, did not perceive themselves as passive victims, but as superior to their white friends. The documentation of their words demonstrated that power was not as monolithic or as polarised as has been presumed.

While many of their male counterparts confined themselves to the objective criteria of Western scientific methodology, Parker and Hassell recorded the accuracy of Indigenous magical technologies, such as Beemunny’s foretelling of the breaking of the drought three days after her death.\textsuperscript{61} Hassell recorded the way Yilgar could tell the boss ‘how the sheep were looking at the out stations, and where the horses were running, thus saving him many a wary and fruitless ride, yet she rarely stirred away from the camp and her information was invariably correct’.\textsuperscript{62} This thesis has argued that despite these women’s implication in the injustice of colonial relations, their parallel
implication in Indigenous sociality gave an extra dimension of relational detail to their ethnography, which reveals Indigenous agency and the effects of transculturation.

I argue that, rather than there being a ‘structural impossibility’ of friendship between white women and Indigenous people due to ‘inequitable power relations and sexual rivalry’, women’s gazes were shaped not only by the larger forces and racism of their era (along with the methodology of their science), but also by their intercultural relations, that is, by their ongoing, interactive, everyday experiences of transculturation. Even as they were entering into European knowledge making, they were being gifted, taught, and over time learning to see the existence of, another science: an Indigenous episteme.

Many early ethnographers and collectors, of both sexes, shared a mutuality of experience with Indigenous neighbours who were a large presence in their daily lives. This was particularly true of those ‘native born’ who grew up with ‘an inheritance of concern’ and with Indigenous playmates, carers and teachers, recording that they were considered kin ‘altogether same like’. Often Indigenous carers ‘grew them up’ and they identified with an Indigenous or at least an intercultural Australia. Their writing, I suggest, helped cultivate a new national identity that was no longer entirely British, but more attuned to the rhythms of this country. By undertaking ethnographic research, they were exposed to a deeper level of intercultural understanding. In their designated student role, some of these women who listened and gave the necessary presence and time, such as Dawson Taylor, were chosen as able and respectful enough to document that knowledge, and many took this request very seriously. If we pay attention we can hear the stories – however mediated – that these women recorded, and on hearing them know that Indigenous people were not passive, homogenous objects of study, or curiosities, but dynamic characters: authors and authorities of culture. Through their interactive, relational and pedagogical bonds these nineteenth-century women recognised that their hosts and teachers were themselves producers of knowledge.

Despite what I have argued, nineteenth-century women’s ethnography remains tainted with the ongoing legacy of colonialism and the ‘science’ that legitimised Indigenous oppression. In her analysis of nineteenth-century Victoria, Marguerita Stephen wrote that ‘in this genocidal process, colonial practice and anthropology continuously cross-fertilised and reinforced each other’. Jackie Huggins asserted that ‘white women were and are still a major force in the implementation of government policies of assimilation and cultural genocide’. While not denying this, Anna Cole, Victoria Haskin and Fiona Paisley replied that such women were nonetheless ‘not to be
condemned or praised, they need to be understood within the contradictory and complex parameters of historical possibility’. In this spirit, I make my argument by unpacking the moral and ideological assumptions of the discourses that judged these women, whether positively or negatively.

In the case studies I have attempted to go beyond dichotomies and, as Cole, Haskin and Paisley sought, to consider these protagonists as socially situated and connected to Indigenous others, in ways that acknowledged ‘the complex enmeshment of experience that makes up the history of oppression, resistance and coexistence under colonialism’. In this they proposed an alternative methodology to conventional scientific knowledge production, with its ‘methodologies of disengagement and the politics of neutrality and impartiality’, characterised, as Kuokkanen argues, ‘by the absence of responsibility and respect for what is studied and known’. I have sought to underscore the contribution of these women’s responsive ethnographic narratives, born from participatory learning and distinguished by relational dynamics. This thesis honours the gifts and intention of those assured Indigenous voices revealed between these women’s lines. Their voices are confirmed by the attitudes of the mentors I have been privileged to know: ‘openness to the world, toward the “other”’.71

‘Ethics are not a problem of knowledge but a call of relationship.’72
Part Three: Postscript and Conclusion

Figure 8.2
Photographer unknown, Daisy Bates with Joobaitch, c. 1905.

Figure 8.3
Billingee, Drawings of Male and Female Ceremonial Dress, c. 1905.
Figure 8.4
Billingee, Drawings of Nose Pins Made from Wood and Bone, c. 1905.
Endnotes

1 Friedman, “Beyond White and Other: Relationality and Narratives of Race in Feminist Discourse,” p. 66.

2 British scientific societies had begun with the Geological Society in 1807, the Zoological Society in 1826, the Geographical Society in 1830, the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1831 and the Chemical Society in 1841. These societies signalled the move towards specialisation and, ultimately, professionalisation. For further information on the initial banning of women from the Royal Geographical Society, see Morag Bell and Cheryl McEwan, “The Admission of Women Fellows to the Royal Geographical Society, 1892–1914; The Controversy and the Outcome,” *Geographical Journal*, vol. 162, no. 3 (1996), pp. 295–312.


4 Ibid., p. 11.

5 For details, see ibid.

6 Their secretary was General Pitt-Rivers.


8 Julie Evans, Patricia Grimshaw and Ann Standish asserted that ‘we have to look to the post-World War I period to find women with a legitimised status in the anthropological world. Evans, Grimshaw and Standish, “Caring for Country: Yuwalariaay Women and Attachments to Land on an Australian Colonial Frontier,” p. 17.


12 For an overview of some of the life of Theresa Walker (née Chauncy, later Theresa Poole), see Philip Lamotho Snell Chauncy, *Memoirs of Mrs Poole and Mrs Chauncy* [originally published as Memoires of Mrs. Chauncy by her Husband Phillip Lamoth Snell Chauncy ...: Written for the Instruction and Comport of their Eight Children.] (Kilmore: Vic.: Lowden Publishing, 1976 (1873)).


14 More than fifteen letters of correspondence are available: Benson, “Letters to and from A.W. Howitt.”


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Endnotes (continued)


18 Barwick, “And the Lubras are Ladies Now,” p. 54.

19 Mary Bennett, letter to Bessie Rischbieth, quoted in Lake, “Frontier Feminism and the Marauding White Man,” n.p.

20 Mary Montgomerie Bennett was the daughter of Robert Christison of Lammermoor Station, who was a member of the Anti-Slavery League. Bennett’s first book was a novelised biography of her father, which expressed a sympathetic view of cross-cultural relations with the Dalleburra people who lived on Lammermoor Station.


22 Barber, The Heyday of Natural History, p. 16.

23 Pratt, Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation, p. 33. Note that Pratt qualified this statement by adding, on p. 55: ‘the naturalist-heroes are not, however, women. No world is more androcentric than that of natural history (which is not, of course, to say there were no women naturalists)’.


26 Dalziell, “We Should Try, While There is Yet Time, to Gather All the Information Possible of a Race Fast Dying Out: Unsettling Sympathetic Women,” p. 339.

27 The phrase ‘survival of the fittest’ was first coined by Herbert Spencer, in The Principles of Biology, vol. 1 (London: Williams and Norgate, 1864).


31 For example, Dorothy Bennett claimed that Dr Scougall gave her little credit: ‘I’d virtually done all the collecting in Arnhem Land of both the Qantas exhibition and for the Art Gallery of New South Wales, but he never gave me credit for it. And I did all the recording and the knowledge’. Dorothy Bennett and Kay Goon, Transcript of Interview with Dorothy Bennett, recorded September and October 1995 by Kay Goon, NTRS 226 TS 971, Aboriginal Art Northern Territory 1950s, Tape 1, Northern Territory Archives, p. 14.


35 Brewster explained that ‘defamiliarisation reminds us of the inability of identity to remain identical to itself and of the fact that whiteness itself is a zone of indeterminacy’. Ibid.

36 Dyer, White, p. 4.
Endnotes (continued)

41 Dalziell, “‘We Should Try, While There is Yet Time, to Gather All the Information Possible of a Race Fast Dying Out’: Unsettling Sympathetic Women.”
44 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
47 This did not offset the fact that Hassell on several occasions referred to Indigenous people as childlike. Rather, an awareness of Indigenous proficiency and a subscription to their inferiority were simultaneous, either sitting comfortably within social expectations or simply coexisting.
49 Ibid., p. 77.
51 Dalziell, “‘We Should Try, While There is Yet Time, to Gather All the Information Possible of a Race Fast Dying Out’: Unsettling Sympathetic Women,” p. 56.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
Endnotes (continued)

60 Drake-Brockman, *Australian Legendary Tales, Collected by K. Langloh Parker*, v.


64 Peter Latz, who grew up at Hermannsburg, articulated it plainly: ‘I had two Aboriginal nannies, and by skin they were my mothers, substitute mothers. So the first five years of my life I actually spent more time with [my] Aboriginal mother than my white mother. Then the next – you know, from then on, I spent more time with Aboriginal playmates than with white playmates. So I grew up more Aboriginal than white’. Latz’s mother was one of the overlooked women arts workers who had ‘quite a bit to do with selling Alberts and [sic] paintings … she put quite a lot of effort into sending off art to be sold’. Peter Latz and Meredith Campbell, Transcript of an interview with Peter Latz, recorded by Meredith Campbell (Typed transcripts of oral history interviews, TS 819, Side A, Tape 1, pp. 6, 21. NTRS 226, Northern Territory Archives Service, Oral History Unit).


68 Ibid.


70 Nosepeg Tjupurrula was the first of the gracious and delightful hosts I had the privilege to meet. Narrabri Nakamarra and Nyurapaiya Nampijinpa in Kintore, Charlie Wallaby Tjungarrayi and Josephine Nangala at Kiwirrkurra, Steve and Archie Johnston in the gulf country, Tjumo Tjapanangka, Eubena Nampitjin and Lucy Yukenbari are just some of the people with whom I enjoyed longstanding relationships; all of them were or are (of those still alive) defined by this attitude. All revealed a strength of character and determination, along with the generosity and willingness to educate me into their worlds. Each was or is an empowered, colourful and dignified personality, very much in control of their world.


**Glossary**

- **baark**: kangaroo skin cloak for women
- **bail**: Pidgin for ‘no’ or ‘don’t’
- **booliah**: magic stone for rain making
- **barllee**: Armband consisting of three or four strands of wool
- **coomal**: possum
- **cooning**: baby or babies
- **coot**: bag
- **couburne**: totem
- **goondie**: shelter
- **geize**: spear
- **man carls**: bush fires
- **mia**: hut or shelter
- **mulgar**: clever man
- **noolburn**: man’s belt of spun hair or fur
- **nunghar**: native, man, husband
- **pardook, pardoak**: natives of tribes further inland
- **towran**: green parrot
- **Twertup**: place of dogs (dingoes)
- **wongie**: talk
- **woolgrum**: magical spirit creature
- **yardie**: important ceremonial discussion
- **york**: wife
- **yump**: tribal message stick or battle token
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