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Becoming First White Resident

Barbara Thompson was a young Scottish woman who had migrated to Sydney with her parents and then eloped to Moreton Bay at the age of 16. With her sailor husband and a few others, Thompson took a small vessel to the Torres Strait, aiming to salvage material from a wrecked ship, but they were driven onto rocks by a storm and wrecked themselves. Her husband and their other companions drowned, but Thompson was pulled from the water by a man named Boroto who was part of an islander turtling party also caught in the storm. Thompson was adopted as the returned granddaughter of a man named Pequi and his eldest wife, and lived with his extended family among the Kaurareg people of Morolug (today known as Price of Wales Island).¹ In 1848 and 1849, a scientific ship named the *Rattlesnake* made two visits to the Torres Strait; on the second of these visits, Thompson introduced herself, having spent about five years living in the strait. Some members of the *Rattlesnake* party had met some of the same islanders the previous year and were already on familiar and friendly terms (Thompson had been ill with a fever on this occasion).² The ship remained alongside the island for several weeks and Thompson lived on board, spending much of her time talking with the young naturalist Oswald Brierly, who made a detailed record of their conversations. Thompson's adoptive kin wanted her to stay with them, but she decided to return to Sydney with the *Rattlesnake*, stating simply, 'I am a Christian'.³

1 Moore, *Islanders and Aborigines at Cape York*, 7–8.

2 Ibid., 160. She had also attempted to make contact with another ship, but hesitated, thinking that her adoptive family might try to stop her, and then had failed in leaving her attempt too late.

3 Ibid., 80.

Brierly had arrived in Australia in 1842 to help Benjamin Boyd establish his whaling station at Twofold Bay on the south coast of New South Wales. Brierly expected to be terrified of the Aboriginal people there, but soon learned to enjoy being in the bush sketching and painting, and began to interact with the Aboriginal people who moved around Twofold Bay. He made a particularly strong friendship with a man he called Toby from whom he learned some of the local language, and with whom he travelled inland and mixed with groups of Aboriginal people up into the Monaro region. An active colonist, Brierly saw himself as engaged in a process of civilising a new land and integrating it with the economy of the British Empire, but he was also sensitive, open-minded and respectful towards Aboriginal people.⁴ When he decided to join the survey expedition, Brierly was already well prepared to be a sympathetic, interested and skilled listener for Barbara Thompson and the many Kaurareg people who added to the story of her rescue and residence with them.

Brierly's notes on his conversations with Thompson, together with his daily journal in which he recorded the frequent visits of the islanders to the *Rattlesnake*, provide an intimate account of Thompson's adoption, some of the ways in which she navigated her new life, and her prolonged farewell. He recorded Thompson's words as far as he was able (whether he understood her meaning or not), as she spoke a combination of working-class Scottish English and Kaurareg language. Thompson's speech often erupts from Brierly's commentary in his journal, her voice heard more and less directly. On 23 October 1849, Thompson told Brierly: 'Since I left them, one of the gins has taken my *pota* out of my *lie* and wears it round her neck and at night they have a cry for me in the camp as if I were dead'. In this and other cases, clarification and confirmation came from Thompson's Kaurareg kin. About a month later, a group of women came by canoe to visit Thompson (whose Kaurareg name was 'Giom'); one of them took hold of her hand and showed her a shell that had belonged to her, which the other woman now wore around her neck as a memento, saying "'Giom, ye noosa eena"—"Giom this is yours".⁵

The situation of mutual friendship and trust created an island between the shores of Thompson's two lives. She was not abruptly thrust into someone else's chafing clothes, as Morrill was, but made her own dress out of the *Rattlesnake* party's spare handkerchiefs, which she proudly showed to her

4 McKenna, *Looking for Blackfellas' Point*, 120–24.

5 Moore, *Islanders and Aborigines at Cape York*, 121, 169 (original emphasis).

Kaurareg kin.⁶ The ship seems to have been a culturally ‘safe’ space, if humour and discussion of good-natured disagreement are anything to go by. Brierly was given a Kaurareg name, ‘Tarrka’, that, like Thompson’s name, ‘Giom’, belonged to someone who had died; he recorded in his journal being teased by the islanders about whether he intended to return to them as well.⁷ Thompson felt able to talk about her maintenance of cultural difference from her adoptive people; she laughed at the Kaurareg rules about women not speaking to their father-in-law and men to their mother-in-law, and told everyone ‘that we always spoke to our father and mother-in-law in our country’. She had given the Kaurareg women an opportunity to express horror over Thompson’s birth culture—they had apparently exclaimed, ‘the white people: they have no mother-in-law and no shame’, but their affection for her was not diminished.⁸ There was no haste to make public an account of her experiences. Brierly’s notes were not made with a view to publication, and it seems he never sought to bind this record of her story into the corset of an orderly narrative. Although his journals were very much a part of his identity and activity as a scientific man and colonist, his now published notes remain full of meanings far richer than colonising narratives or scientific classifications.⁹

Sketch of a Residence is written in the first person, commencing: ‘I, James Morrill, was born on the 20th May, 1824 ... near Maldon ... where my mother and father were also brought up from childhood before me’. Yet, his was not the only voice in his account. Compared with Brierly’s journals, *Sketch of a Residence* is an opaque text; the processes of recollection, communication, misunderstanding and revision are smoothed over within the closely woven published narrative. Brierly noted where each conversation took place, the parties present, what the atmosphere was like, and often wrote down his own questions as well as Thompson’s answers. By contrast, in the case of Morrill’s collaboration with Edmund Gregory, we have no idea how many times the two men met, how formal or otherwise their meetings were, how they went about their task, and to what extent they established a rapport.

6 Ibid., 90.

7 Ibid., 87, 92.

8 Ibid., 172.

9 McKenna, *Looking for Blackfellas’ Point*, 130.

Morrill was literate and, in ideal circumstances, may have been able to be an active collaborator, reading over drafts and suggesting corrections. However, he may have found it difficult to make himself understood. Without expressly referring to their interviews, Gregory recalled that when he arrived in Brisbane Morrill was ‘shy, especially at first, and was not communicative ... the knowledge of his own language came back to him very slowly’.¹⁰ Pelletier, after placing his French at the back of his mind for the same interval, conversed with the French consul in Sydney with the greatest difficulty:

Putting his hands to his ear like a horn when trying to understand, and when trying to respond ‘he put one hand above his eyes and looked into the distance, as if he would have liked to discover the person to whom he had to reply’.¹¹

A comparable gulf of understanding between Morrill and Gregory can be glimpsed in the third chapter of *Sketch of a Residence*, in which a sense of frustration is almost palpable in their characterisation of Birri-gubba language:

[It] is very guttural in sound and extremely limited in power of expression. Of course they have no means of teaching [it] but by imitation and memory, assisted by their wants ... The language is very irregular, and seems to me totally impossible to systematise ... in any way.

A vocabulary of about 75 words is offered. After naming the elements, parts of the body and a number of animals, it ends abruptly with ‘Enugedy—enough, that will do’.¹²

Speaking in Rockhampton, Morrill had apparently named his clan or tribe ‘Baeaberuggedy’ and claimed that ‘every peak or mountain has its own particular name ... I could give the names of many places which I learn have been recently discovered by the whites’.¹³ Yet, *Sketch of a Residence* includes very few place names; further, in his Cardwell journal of the following year, Morrill referred very generally to ‘natives’ and ‘blacks’ in the parlance of his re-adoptive community. It is possible that

10 Morrill’s diary or journal remains in the private collection of the Jack family, Morrill’s descendants via his marriage with Eliza Ann Ross. It was reproduced in the Bowen Historical Society’s 1964 publication. Gregory, *Sketch of the Residence of James Morrill*, 17.

11 Anderson, *Pelletier*, 62.

12 Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, 20–22.

13 *Queensland Guardian*, 17 March 1863. He also claimed to have been able to speak eight dialects of the local language. Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, 14, 24.

Morrill's interviews with Gregory had persuaded him that the specific local vocabulary that he had used during his Birri-gubba adoption was neither useful nor useable for a re-adopted colonist.

The first person narrating voice in *Sketch of a Residence* is seductive; it is tempting to think we can hear Morrill speaking more or less freely to us.¹⁴ It seduced Noel Loos, who understood Morrill to be speaking through *Sketch of a Residence* with 'naive candour'. It also seduced Bruce Breslin who, even as he brought to life the precariousness and complexity of Morrill's situation, did not seem to think it would constrain Morrill's ability to express himself. Breslin cited Morrill's 'short struggle between the feeling of love I had for my old friends and companions and the desire once more to live a civilized life', as if these, unquestionably, were the words Morrill himself had chosen to represent his feelings.¹⁵ Yet, we must ask: how did this 'struggle' find expression in such an economical sentence? We might imagine that Morrill told Gregory of this farewell in a more awkward way, perhaps attempting to translate the impassioned dialogue that had taken place on that hillside or, perhaps guardedly, with a stoicism behind which Gregory glimpsed a deep sadness.

When Morrill's narrative voice describes 'the aboriginals among whom I have been living' as 'a fine race of people ... [but] treacherous, jealous and cunning',¹⁶ there are numerous possible relationships between these words and Morrill and Gregory, all of which are tied up with Morrill's loyalties and allegiances as he told his story. Did Gregory contribute these unflattering adjectives to fit in with his anticipated readers' prejudices? Did Gregory extract these words or sentiments from Morrill by asking

14 Breslin, *Exterminate with Pride*, 73, 76. Breslin discussed Morrill's adoption into Birri-gubba society alongside the narrative of Jukes's, *Narrative of the Fly* (1847), the latter being a leisurely exploratory drift up the coast, during which the officers interacted closely, and mostly on friendly terms, with Aboriginal people of the Burdekin region. No distinction was drawn between the different manner in which the two men arrived on that coast and the significance of Jukes's ability to depart at will. Loos, 'Frontier Conflict in the Bowen District', 16–17.

15 Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, 16. Breslin has since produced a new edition of *Sketch of a Residence* with a critical introduction, which considers with more subtlety how the contemporary reader might hear what Morrill meant to say in his narrative. Breslin, *James Morrill*. Iain McCalman, who sought to listen to Morrill through his published narrative, sheds some light on his experiences. McCalman, *The Reef*.

16 Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, 17. In the second edition, Gregory altered this statement to one that more plausibly reflected Morrill's experience in southern Queensland: 'The aboriginals among whom James Murrells had been living so long, he describes as a vastly superior race of people to any he had seen in the southern part of the colony, physically, and as to general appearance. Nevertheless, they are treacherous, jealous and exceedingly cunning'. Gregory, *Sketch of the Residence of James Morrill*, 18.

whether he had always understood Birri-gubba politics, or whether he had not felt safe to take a Birri-gubba wife? Did Morrill himself realise that his status as a re-adopted colonist would be enhanced by separating himself from the Birri-gubba? If he had been reviving his reading skills on recent back issues of Brisbane's chief newspaper, *The Courier*, he may have encountered discussion inspired by Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* that could easily have prompted a disavowal of his own Aboriginality. One jocular article proposed an experiment in which certain Sydney gentlemen might be stripped of the 'advantages of the tailor and hatter' and left in the wilds of Africa for 10 or 15 years—what would a naturalist say 'as to their exultation above the inferior races of mankind, or even above the gorilla?'¹⁷ The newspaper report of the interview at Rockhampton cited Morrill describing his adoptive people as 'cunning, thievish, and treacherous'. This time, the claim was connected with Morrill's offers to mediate, guide and interpret, and he may have uttered these words in an effort to make himself indispensable, carving a niche for employment and bargaining power by claiming that the Aboriginal people and politics of the region would be incomprehensible to anyone but himself.¹⁸

William Buckley, living in the new settlement at Port Phillip in circumstances similar to Morrill's, was described by writer and historian Barry Hill as a:

Desperate defender of [his] indigenous affiliations ... as a go-between on the frontier of the sheep run that would destroy his clan ... What happened next? Buckley, faced with the tragedy of white invasion, fled to Hobart, to live a quiet life as a white man.¹⁹

The fullest account of Buckley's experiences living with the Wathaurong people was produced in Hobart in 1852, 20 years after his 'return to civilisation', in collaboration with a long-time friend, John Morgan. While the narrative is partly shaped by Morgan's concerns,²⁰ Morgan played a vital role in assisting Buckley to weave a rich tapestry of memory around the relationships, imperatives, satisfactions and fears of his time with (and, at times, avoiding) his adoptive people as they moved across their

17 *The Courier*, 28 January 1863; 5 January 1863. For an account of these debates see Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors*, 22–25, 39–46.

18 *The Courier*, 11 March 1863, 2; *Queensland Guardian*, 17 March 1863.

19 Hill, 'Crossing Cultures', 116–20.

20 McDonald, *The Extraordinary Tale of William Buckley*.

country around Port Phillip.²¹ Buckley had been much less forthcoming in earlier interviews. The Reverend Langhorn described Buckley as ‘difficult’ and did not bother to publish the results of his interviews with him; several others decided that Buckley was simply a dunce with nothing worthwhile to say.²²

As Morrill conversed with Gregory, they were establishing a level of trust. Surprise attacks and brutal reprisals continued in and around Birri-gubba country, and the Birri-gubba crowded into ‘safe’ areas away from the settlements, all movements rendered strategic.²³ From his first appearance, Morrill was expected to participate in the thrust of colonisation by divulging information. One of the earliest reports of his appearance in *The Courier* was confident that:

This happily reclaimed savage should, if possessed of ordinary intelligence, and not brutalised by protracted association with the blacks, be an invaluable assistant to parties opening up the terra incognita of the north to the ... historian of the customs and manners, and to the scientific world in general ... to learn the secrets of native unhallowed rites and procure an all-authentic memorial of a race rapidly disappearing from the face of the world.²⁴

E. B. Kennedy, an adventurer and writer who met Morrill in 1864, later recalled that Morrill seemed shy and unable to express himself clearly. However, Kennedy, who was serving in the native police force at the time, had just returned from a patrol of Birri-gubba country. His eagerness to learn more about the region may well have seemed predatory.²⁵ We can hardly imagine that Morrill spoke entirely freely in any of his interviews, amid the clamour of questions. Are they cannibals? Do they

21 Buckley many times separated from and reunited with the Aboriginal people who adopted him, living a lonely existence for many weeks or months before once again being thoroughly bound up in the affairs of the community. At one stage, he made his escape with a heavy heart, as many of his closest friends and ‘protectors’ were killed by another group. Alone, he moved to a place on the Karaaf River where he had previously built a small hut and, without means to hunt for kangaroo on his own, started to make a weir to catch fish as the tides turned; he also continued to harvest roots as his adoptive people had taught him. After an interval, some people approached who he soon found ‘belonged to the tribe of my old friend: my tribe, I may say’, who congratulated him on his fish traps, and with whom he camped and travelled again until the killing of a young man by another group who had joined them. Buckley was sent as a messenger to inform the kin of the deceased and remained with them until he found their mourning practices too alienating, at which point he returned to the Karaaf River. Morgan, *The Life and Adventures of William Buckley*, 60–70.

22 Sayers, ‘Introduction’, ix–xi.

23 Breslin, *Exterminate with Pride*, 71–72.

24 *The Courier*, 27 February 1863.

25 Kennedy, *Seventeen Years amongst Queensland Blacks*, 353.

practice polygamy? Have they any permanent residences at all? Do they have any beliefs or superstitions? These are the kinds of questions that Morrill seems to have faced, each interested in measuring the *difference* of the Birri-gubba—their savagery—in a way that was intertwined with the colonists' lust for their land. Loos observed that the question of religion emerged strongly in the 1861 Select Committee inquiry into the native police force, the apparent lack of 'religious susceptibilities' among Aboriginal people justifying the suspension of 'normal European standards of behaviour' in dealing with them.²⁶

On the question of religion, Morrill was quoted, somewhat contradictorily, as stating that 'they observe no religious ceremonies. When their children arrive at puberty, or perhaps before, they mark them with the symbols of their tribe'.²⁷ The question of religion seems to have been one that was difficult to answer. *Sketch of a Residence* created a similar contradiction; it stated that 'they have no written language whatever, and very little tradition', before relating the Birri-gubba understanding of the moon as a human being, sometimes encountered on fishing expeditions, whom the tribes caught and threw into the sky to save from harm.²⁸ If Morrill self-edited his account of Birri-gubba life ways according to concerns about his own and his adoptive people's safety, he perhaps did so according to Birri-gubba obligations surrounding knowledge. With an eye to the secret and sacred dimensions of Indigenous knowledge, Stéphanie Andersen asked whether Barbara Thompson's very frankness with Brierly indicated a lack of appreciation of the authority structures surrounding Kaurareg teachings. Conversely, Morrill's apparently selective rendition of Birri-gubba traditions and beliefs may be interpreted as a commitment to maintaining significant knowledge conventions.²⁹

The newspaper report of Morrill's interview at Rockhampton claimed to be 'nearly verbatim ... indeed, our readers will have here the *ipsissima verba* of the narrator'—that is, his precise words, the only difference being

26 Loos, 'Frontier Conflict in the Bowen District', 84–86.

27 *Queensland Guardian*, 17 March 1863.

28 Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, 20.

29 Anderson, *Pelletier*, 54–55. For example, Martin Nakata discussed the tensions involved in contemporary efforts to integrate Indigenous knowledge into scientific practice. Scientific capitalism remains, in some respects, predatory with Indigenous knowledge 'merely another resource for potential profit'. Even the most sincere efforts can result in separating Indigenous knowledge from its context in collective ownership, regulated by oral conventions and, in some cases, laws of sacred and secret knowledge, and in the detachment of this knowledge from holistic concepts, instead, separating it into components delineated by the categories of Western science. Nakata, *Savaging the Disciplines*, 182–88.

their presentation in the form of a narrative rather than the free-flowing conversation in which they were uttered.³⁰ Gregory may have taken a similar line of liberty with, and fidelity to, the spoken word in presenting *Sketch of a Residence*. Certainly, hesitation and ambivalence were erased, and suggestion and interpolation were kneaded to create a coherent, smooth whole. We could accuse Gregory of having created a barrier to more genuine insights into Morrill's Aboriginal life, or his feelings on leaving it, by engaging in this activity. Yet, the pamphlet that the two men produced was, perhaps, largely a coagulation of what Morrill did want Gregory, and the world, to know. Arguably, it was a 'tactical' collaboration in which Gregory helped Morrill to say what could be said (i.e., what it was possible to say) about his experiences.³¹ In any case, it helped Morrill to create a dignified, reasonable persona through which he could make a plea on behalf of the Aboriginal people of the region that might be heard by readers:

It will perhaps be pardonable in me if I refer to a suggestion thrown out by a correspondent in the *Courier* newspaper, to the effect that the natives who were so kind to me should be dealt with in a similar manner, as those who succoured Burke, Wills and King ... almost their last wish to me was with tears in their eyes that I would ask the white men to let them have *some* of their *own* ground to live on. They agreed to give up all on the south of the Burdekin River, but asked that they might be *allowed* to retain that on the other, at all events that which was no good to anybody but them, the low swampy grounds near the sea coast.³²

Morrill died in October 1865 at the age of 41. Gregory wasted no time in releasing a second edition of *Sketch of a Residence*, in which he bumped Morrill aside as author. *Sketch of the Residence of James Morrill among the Aborigines of Northern Queensland for Seventeen Years ... by Edmund*

30 *Queensland Guardian*, 17 March 1863. Similarly, John Morgan noted in his preface to William Buckley's story: 'In giving the history of a life in the first person ... I have endeavoured to express the thoughts of a humble, unlearned man, in that language of simplicity and truth which, in my mind, is best suited to the subject'. Morgan, *The Life and Adventures of William Buckley*, xx.

31 Penny van Toorn identified 'tactical' advantages for contemporary Indigenous storytellers in collaborating with sympathetic non-Indigenous writers in terms of control and in getting their messages across to an audience; such advantages must be acknowledged alongside any concerns about the 'authenticity' of the results of collaborative endeavour. van Toorn, 'Indigenous Australian Life Writing', 17.

32 Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, 24 (original emphasis). The letter to *The Courier* he refers to may have been the one by 'Reader', published 12 March 1863, 2. It may have been Gregory's idea to appeal to it as a way of linking Morrill's proposal with respectable public opinion. It is notable, though, that 'Reader' seemed to be suggesting that the Birri-gubba people be compensated with a consignment of useful items, rather than with an agreement about land.

Gregory, seems to have rolled off the press barely a month after Morrill's last breath.³³ In his new preface, Gregory claimed that the story had 'long' been out of print, and that it had been 'necessary to re-write it'. His rewriting was slight but not without significance. He began with the correction of Morrill's name: 'James Murrells, not Morrill, was born on the 20th May 1824'; apparently, 'seventeen years' isolation in the bush, had taken from him the power to re-call his own name with accuracy'. Communications from Essex, or from the customs officials in Sydney, had evidently corroborated Morrill's correct identity too late for inclusion in the first edition. Gregory then rewrote the brief first chapter in the third person, before resuming the original narrative, claiming 'the rest ... will be read with greater interest in [Morrill's] own words'.³⁴

In translating part of the story into the third person, Gregory may have been reclaiming a text he felt *he* had written in the first place. The boundary between first and third person, at least in this second edition, was closely related to marketability—a yarn such as this owed much of its appeal to the 'I'. Gregory's 'authority' resurfaced at the end of the second chapter, at which point he provided an account of the final years of Morrill's life, concluding with the obituary that had appeared in the *Port Denison Times*.³⁵ Morrill 'the man' was dead, and now, symbolically, so was the Morrill 'the author'.

Castaway stories have been understood as a genre providing the 'mythic fuel' of the 'expansive imperialist thrust of the white race', reflecting, inspiring and legitimising the possession and control of new lands.³⁶ Morrill himself may only have participated in one exploratory expedition and helped the townsfolk of Bowen to feel at home in their new environment by making its features seem familiar.³⁷ However, his story has had a long life after his death. In his 1865 edition, Gregory omitted

33 Advertisements for a new volume on 'the life and experience of James Morrill' that could be purchased direct from the Courier General Printing office appeared under the heading 'Published This Day' in the classifieds pages of *The Brisbane Courier*, 27–29 November 1865. My references to this second version are to the 1866 edition. Ferguson indicates that the 1865 and 1866 editions were very similar. The 1866 edition was most likely a reprinting (perhaps indicating a high level of demand). Ferguson, *Bibliography of Australia*, 779–81.

34 Gregory, *Sketch of the Residence of James Morrill*, 3, 5.

35 *Ibid.*, 16–18.

36 Green, *The Robinson Crusoe Story*, 1–3.

37 His obituary anticipates that the people of Bowen would feel the loss of him as one 'who was always ready to explain the use of a blackfellow's mysterious weapon, or the qualities ... of the various roots and plants found in the neighbourhood'. Gregory, *Sketch of the Residence of James Morrill*, 18.

Morrill's closing plea on behalf of the Birri-gubba and their neighbours for reciprocal good treatment and for a division of land. Instead, the second edition concluded with the formerly penultimate paragraph narrating the 'extinction' of the Birri-gubba people through 'destruction by the settlers and black police' and 'natural deterioration'.³⁸ In the first edition, this narrative of decline was tempered by an image of Mount Elliott as a place of 'safe asylum' for Aboriginal people, with an abundance of fresh water and food—a foothold in a future that may have given rise to ambivalent feelings in its readers. Some may have found it rather Arcadian, others may have lobbied for an intensified native police patrol of those nurturing slopes. In the second edition, Mount Elliott was no longer a refuge, and the descriptors 'thick scrub' and 'low and swampy' were removed, leaving the mountain simply 'well grassed and watered' like an inviting sheep run. The first edition's tentative references to gold were replaced by the statement 'he thinks it a gold bearing country'.³⁹

In producing a new edition, Gregory may have been responding to local readers who wanted a volume to remember Morrill by, enquiries from overseas and interest from other colonies. In his preface, Gregory remarked on the importance of the story for posterity: 'the narrative of the sufferings and strange incidents here recorded will be read with interest as long as Queensland is in existence'.⁴⁰ At this stage, though, the future of North Queensland was perhaps not so assured. In 1865, Governor Bowen compared the combat against Aboriginal forces in North Queensland to the Maori War in which 10,000 imperial troops were just then engaged.⁴¹ Loos and Breslin have shown how relentless Aboriginal attacks on stock, outlying stations and station workers drove pastoralism to its knees in the mid to late 1860s. A radical (if uneven) change in policy was necessary: the 'letting in' of Aboriginal groups to stations and towns to hunt, fish and camp from about 1868.⁴² The colony's government saw massive British and European immigration as the key to success; however, after a few

38 Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, 24; Gregory, *Sketch of the Residence of James Morrill*, 23.

39 Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, 24; Gregory, *Sketch of the Residence of James Morrill*, 23. The references to gold may have sparked a minor gold rush. 'The Sad, Bad, Mad but Sometimes Glad Old Days by A Survivor', *Truth* (Brisbane), 21 May 1916.

40 Gregory, *Sketch of the Residence of James Morrill*, 2.

41 Evans, *A History of Queensland*, 94–95.

42 Breslin, *Exterminate with Pride*, 82–84, 88–90. The native police detachments were moved to more newly settled areas, leaving the Burdekin settlers alone to defend their properties, families and employees. From a thorough perusal of the *Port Denison Times* from March 1864 to December 1874, Loos concluded that conflict in the region peaked between 1864 and 1868. Loos, 'Frontier Conflict in the Bowen District', 157–64.

sharp cycles of boom and bust, things seemed to be going backwards. As the decade rolled on, colonists fled drought and economic depression in the tens of thousands.⁴³ E. B. Kennedy, having himself departed the north after crossing paths with Morrill, implored readers of his London-published *Four Years in Queensland* to see a future for this colony:

Queensland is *bound* to advance, *cannot* be held back ... She will become a land not only flowing with milk and honey, but with wine also, and all the fruits of the earth. She has passed through a period of severe distress, but her present prospects point to a more prosperous state resting on a more secure basis.⁴⁴

If Morrill had been cautious about sharing his knowledge of the Birri-gubba with Kennedy and others for fear that his knowledge might be used against them, his reservations were well founded. Kennedy's representation of the Aboriginal peoples of North Queensland in this volume was damning: 'there is not a redeeming point in their whole character ... there is no savage in the world so thoroughly low and degraded'. Kennedy supported this thesis by citing *Sketch of a Residence* at length.⁴⁵

As Gregory published his second edition, compromise with Aboriginal groups may have begun to look like a rational as well as humane option in Bowen; however, it is doubtful that compromise would have inspired, either among local or international readers, the migration, labour and investment that would ensure the progress of the colony. From his comfortable position in Brisbane, Gregory had the leisure to assume the 'imperial correct' outcome for the settlement of North Queensland—that is, that it would grow and prosper. His second edition of Morrill's story, like Kennedy's book, functioned as a weapon in this war, attracting more investors, and more fortune seekers, as it helped them to imagine this new and wild land under their possession.⁴⁶

43 Evans, *A History of Queensland*, 83–90.

44 Along with unsuitable land laws and unsuitable men, part of the problem was depredations on stock by Aboriginal groups. He goes on to call on men of 'moderate capital and moderate tastes' to try their hand at agriculture in this land of promise. Kennedy, *Four Years in Queensland*, 1–2, 6, 70–71 (original emphasis).

45 *Ibid.*, 67, 82–87.

46 Richard Phillips characterised the writing activities of Ernest Favenc as bound up in the colonising process. Phillips, *Mapping Men and Empire*, 68.

As the nineteenth century wore on, the age of steam reduced the travel time between London and Brisbane to 45 days, and took explorers to what was widely perceived as the last frontier, Antarctica. People started to wonder whether the age of adventure had passed; maps of the world's continents had been filled up with names, and Australia, like Africa and Canada, had 'ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery'.⁴⁷ Was there anywhere in the world where one could still be truly lost? While Jules Verne turned to the fantastic in search of new *terra incognita*, the demand for true stories of adventure boiled over. In 1888, Ernest Favenc wrote a history of exploration in which the Australian interior was a known, mapped space; less than a decade later, he penned a boys' adventure story in which the same space was shrouded in mystery.⁴⁸ Impostor Louis de Rougemont appeared in London in 1898, claiming to have lived as a savage chief for over 30 years in the north-western corner of Queensland. He found a British public so insatiable for his story that he stole the limelight from *bona fide* explorers who wished to jump on the same bandwagon, a popular tour combining geographical, ethnographic and zoological revelation with sensationalism.⁴⁹ Sir George Bowen wrote to *The Chronicle* in support of the plausibility of de Rougemont's claims on the grounds that he had met James Morrill, who had lived with Aboriginal people for 17 years in his very own colony of Queensland.⁵⁰ Sir John Henniker Heaton, who was to set de Rougemont on the path to fame, had included Morrill's story in his *Australian Dictionary of Dates and Men of the Time*, published in 1879, and Marcus Clark had included it back to back with William Buckley's in *Old Tales of a Young Country* (1871).⁵¹ Although, in life, Morrill had barely entered this imperial circus ring as a 'wild white man', later in the century his story joined the ranks of adventurers, castaways and the strange and remarkable.

47 Phillips, *Mapping Men and Empire*, 3–7, citing Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*.

48 Phillips, *Mapping Men and Empire*, 6–7, 71, 77–79.

49 The dizzying career of de Rougemont and its propulsion by popular print media and scientific and entertainment tours is brought to life by Rod Howard in *The Fabulist*. According to Robert Dixon, Hurley and his multimedia travel circus entered (in the 1920s) a well-established arena of educational entertainment, in which maximum exposure via print media was combined with 'self-promotion and opportunistic contrivance'. Dixon, 'What Was Travel Writing?', 60.

50 Howard, *The Fabulist*, 95.

51 Heaton, *Australian Dictionary of Dates*, 7; Clarke, *Old Tales of a Young Country*, 185–95. Ironically, as Iain McCalman showed, it was access to these true stories that allowed de Rougemont to create a sensation at a scale unimaginable for either Morrill or Narcisse Pelletier. McCalman, *The Reef*.

Gregory, now 64 years of age and overseer of the Government Printing Office at Brisbane, offered a third edition of Morrill's story to the public in 1896. He reminded readers that he had been involved in Morrill's 'return to civilisation' in no small way; he had raised a 'considerable sum' through the sale of the first edition of Morrill's narrative and had assisted Morrill in finding employment by drawing attention to his plight.⁵² The new title bristled with peril and adventure—*Narrative of James Murrell's ('Jemmy Morrill') Seventeen Years' Exile among the Wild Blacks of North Queensland, and His Life and Shipwreck and Terrible Adventures Among Savage Tribes; their Manners, Customs, Languages, and Superstitions; Also Murrell's Rescue and Return to Civilisation, by Edmund Gregory*. It had all the appearance of a shameless marketing strategy (though Gregory demurred that the new pamphlet was intended for 'private circulation').⁵³ Most significantly, it suggested that Morrill had been captured by the 'Wild Blacks' and then rescued from them.

Europeans had been writing and reading captivity narratives for centuries. Linda Colley estimated that thousands of men and women from Great Britain and Ireland alone had been captured on the shores of North Africa, on the Canadian frontier by the French or their American Indian auxiliaries, or in 'Black Holes' in Bengal, Mysore and elsewhere in India from the late seventeenth century. Those who returned, some after willingly converting to the captors' religion and marrying-in, produced an unknown number of narratives; captivity had become a convention.⁵⁴ Even as Morrill made his first appearances among the colonial public, the language of captivity readily mingled with acknowledgements of the kindness of his 'captors'.⁵⁵ It was almost as if the state of savagery itself had taken him captive—cruelty was not a precondition. The notion of captivity was convenient

52 Gibbney and Smith, *A Biographical Register*, 283–84; Gregory, *Narrative of James Murrell's*, iii. He was perhaps also prompted by the reflections of *The Brisbane Courier*, with which he continued to have an intimate connection, on historical matters in its jubilee year. *The Brisbane Courier*, 20 June 1896, 7–8.

53 Phillips, *Mapping Men and Empire*, 3–10; *The Brisbane Courier*, 18 September 1896, 5. He had sent copies to George Bowen, former governor, among others. *The Brisbane Courier*, 8 December 1896, 4. Public circulation was certainly achieved through the printing of the new edition in serial form in the 'Queenslander' columns of *The Brisbane Courier* between October and December 1896. *The Brisbane Courier*, 16 October 1896, 4.

54 Colley, 'Going Native, Telling Tales', 71–74.

55 See, for example, *Queensland Guardian*, 17 March 1863; *The Courier*, 29 April 1863, 3; *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 March 1863, 6. Similarly, Oswald Brierly and his companions, though they knew Barbara Thompson had been rescued by the Kaurareg and had seen first-hand how she had been adopted as part of the community, had difficulty avoiding the vocabulary of savage capture and civilised rescue when writing about her experiences. Darian-Smith, "'Rescuing" Barbara Thompson', 102–05.

in a number of ways. On the one hand, it absolved the captive, who could not be blamed for collaborating with the enemy or assimilating willingly into their society. At the same time, it projected violence and barbarism onto the native captors, helping to justify their extirpation.⁵⁶ Gregory addressed a 'new generation ... born and grown to manhood and womanhood' since Queensland was first 'excited' by this story.⁵⁷ This reading public was no longer the insecure settler population that Morrill's story had first appealed to, grappling daily with the realities of their war on the Aboriginal peoples of the region. However, as Henry Reynolds has observed, for continued colonial success there was an ongoing need to 'keep down' Aboriginal people, even as their labour and knowledge of the country became essential to many pastoral operations, and as they worked side by side with settlers and Pacific Islanders ('kanakas'), fishing, hunting, herding and farming in North Queensland.⁵⁸

Gregory thanked Archibald Meston for his assistance in preparing the new edition, observing that 'any work on the aborigines of this Colony would ... be wanting' without his stamp of approval. Meston was in Gregory's office at the time because his *Report on the Aborigines of Queensland* was in print there. The report, based on four months travel, mostly in far North Queensland, provided a patchy account of the state of Aboriginal contact with white settlers, the native police, and the largely Indonesian operators of the bêche de mer and pearl shell industries.⁵⁹ His recommendations fed directly into the *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897*. This Act established a protectorate over the Aboriginal population of Queensland, and endowed the government with extraordinary power over

56 Schaffer, *In the Wake of First Contact*, 78–80. Eliza Fraser's story had quickly become a 'captivity narrative in which she was subjected to torture and bondage at the hands of savage barbarians', a familiar story with widespread appeal across 'the high-minded Tory press and the sensational stories of the chap-books, ballads and fly-sheets'. Schaffer, *In the Wake of First Contact*, 22; Hoorn, 'Julie Dowling's Melbin', 201–12.

57 Gregory, *Narrative of James Murrell's*, iii.

58 Reynolds, *Frontier*, 63–71. Carl Lumholtz, a Norwegian zoologist touring Queensland in 1880, became interested in Aboriginal people partly through a visit to the farm of a Mr Gardiner on the Herbert River. He understood Gardiner to be one of the 'protectors of the blacks' in a context of continued bad relations in the 'uncivilised districts', and a benefactor in the exchange of Aboriginal labour for foodstuffs, utensils and the like. He depicted Gardiner as generally permissive, allowing Aboriginal people into the kitchen and allowing them to leave and enter his land at will, but also as maintaining a necessary level of control, drawing the line at them entering the living room, shooting over their heads to 'maintain discipline' at times, and instructing them in the rights and wrongs of civilised life. Lumholtz, *Among Cannibals*, 76–78.

59 Gregory, *Narrative of James Murrell's*, iii; Meston, *Report on the Aborigines of Queensland*. Gregory had also printed Meston's *Geographic History of Queensland*, and *Queensland Aborigines: Proposed System for their Improvement and Preservation* the previous year.

Aboriginal lives—only gradually lifted from the 1960s. Gregory’s preface to *James Murrells’ Seventeen Years’ Exile* represented the Aboriginal peoples of coastal Queensland as at once extinct and dangerous. He observed of Morrill’s rescue and adoption by Birri-gubba people:

There is now no possibility of such an experience being repeated. The Burdekin blacks have been civilised out of existence, and on no other part of the Queensland coast could a wrecked person remain among any native tribe without being killed, or speedily restored to his own people.⁶⁰

Indeed, under the terms of the 1897 Act, close relationships and cultural exchange would have been impossible. White–Aboriginal relationships were to be closely supervised by a new bureaucracy. The legitimate relation was to be one of employer with indentured labourer, with the state as the controlling third party. Aboriginal people who were not compliant, able-bodied workers would be relocated to a reserve. No unauthorised person classified as non-Aboriginal under the Act was permitted to enter those reserves.⁶¹ Although Meston emphasised the protection of Aboriginal people from exploitation and abuse (both by whites and unscrupulous men of the various ‘coloured’ races), and the Act itself exempted Aboriginal women lawfully married to non-Aboriginal men from its provisions, the Act was administered in the spirit of keeping the races ‘clean’ by keeping Aboriginal people away from whites and preventing miscegenation. Gregory, in his return to North Queensland’s moment of ‘first contact’ as the 1897 Act was drafted, provided a fascinating true story of entanglement and disentanglement, as the Act itself attempted to separate the lives of Indigenous and white Queenslanders.⁶² Of course, the aspirations of the Act were never fully achieved. Near the Burdekin River’s mouth, Aboriginal people lived around Airdale and Clare, supplementing traditional foods with payments for seasonal agricultural and domestic work and collecting blankets at the annual distributions at Ayr and Cape Bowling Green through the 1880s and 1890s. Though there was change around the turn of the century, partly because of the Act, many of these

60 Gregory, *Narrative of James Murrells*, iii.

61 *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897*, s11, 13–16, accessed 14 June 2018, aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/catalogue_resources/54692.pdf; Evans, ‘“Steal Away”: The Fundamentals’, 83–95; Blake, ‘Deported ... at the Sweet Will’, 52–53.

62 *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897*, s10; Blake, ‘Deported ... at the Sweet Will’, 53. I borrow the terms ‘entanglement’ and ‘disentanglement’ from Byrne, ‘The Ethos of Return’, 82–83.

people continued to live on the flats by Plantation Creek and at the local rifle range for decades to come, often together with members of the Melanesian community.⁶³

Meston documented the sad state of Aboriginal workers being paid in opium for their efforts, who were rendered ‘a mere semblance of humanity’ by the drug. Yet, he felt that contact with civilisation itself was no less deleterious to the Aboriginal constitution. He admired the strength and purity of Aboriginal men who had ‘held no intercourse whatever with white men’ and recommended they be left alone (pending the discovery of mineral resources on their land). However, those in the ‘settled districts’ seemed to have lost both integrity and resolve; in Meston’s view, they seemed to be collectively wasting away and so needed to be ‘collected’ onto reserves and treated ‘kindly’.⁶⁴ The Act was driven by the same strongly paternalist, and fundamentally racist, humanism that gave nineteenth-century middle-class readers an appetite for captivity stories.⁶⁵ *James Murrell’s Seventeen Years’ Exile* is tinted by a new admixture of racism and regret. Gregory grafted an expression of triumphant regret onto the first edition’s account of the *Spitfire* incident, in which two Aboriginal men were shot while apparently trying to tell the surveying party about Morrill:

Alas how much mischief may have been occasioned by similar attempts of our dusky friends trying to make themselves understood for the good of those to whom they wished to communicate!⁶⁶

Gregory would have had to turn Morrill’s story inside out to create a scenario of captivity; therefore, he did not attempt this. Contradicting the new title, in the body of the third edition, the narrator continued to express his gratitude to Aboriginal people for rescuing him and his fellow castaways from exposure and starvation, as he had in 1863.⁶⁷ Observant readers refused to accept captivity as a framework for the story. Matthew Fox, in his 1921 history of Queensland, protested that the relationship ‘between [Morrill] and his sable hosts was not that of captor and captive but was friendly to affection’.⁶⁸ It was this very friendliness that compelled Fox, Meston and others to continue to grapple with the question of

63 Kerr, *Black Snow*, 185–87.

64 Meston, *Report on the Aborigines of Queensland*, 2, 5.

65 *A Mother’s Offering to Her Children* (1841), quoted in Schaffer, *In the Wake of First Contact*, 23–24.

66 Gregory, *Narrative of James Murrell’s*, 24.

67 *Ibid.*, v.

68 Fox, *The History of Queensland*, 70.

Morrill's integrity as a white man. Was it possible for him to make a full return to civilisation after such a long association with a savage people and landscape?

According to Martin Green, Robinson Crusoe is put to a test with which his readers identify: 'Can he survive without the protections of his homeland culture ... And how can he imagine living with [savages], doing both them and himself good?'⁶⁹ Washed up on a deserted island, Crusoe furnished and fortified a cave. He kept a journal, domesticated wild goats and, when he finally encountered a savage, rescued him and taught him English and Christian virtues.⁷⁰ Morrill did not have a chance to become a 'castaway colonist' as so many fictional castaways did in Crusoe's wake, for he was washed up on a populous continent. Before he could take possession of the land, he was already being assimilated himself.⁷¹ After his near-death experience, Crusoe, the restless adventurer, was reborn in the mould of a responsible, sedentary, small-scale agriculturalist with a formidable petit bourgeois work ethic.⁷² Morrill was reborn a Birri-gubba man. That he failed to civilise or 'elevate' his adoptive people was noted during his lifetime. Murray-Prior wrote disapprovingly that 'many a white man in his position would have gained more influence over the savage, he would at least have manufactured the Bow and arrow'.⁷³ Nevertheless, Morrill's obituary referred to its subject as 'the pioneer white man in the North', and Carrington described him as the 'first resident in the district'. The adjectives 'white' and 'civilised' are clearly implied by Carrington; he had encountered many Aboriginal people who had lived in the area long before Morrill, but they did not qualify as 'residents' to his way of thinking. As Lorenzo Veracini demonstrated, settler historiography begins when industrious explorers, pastoralists and capitalists arrive and begin to possess the land through struggle. If the settler departs, or 'goes

69 Green, *The Robinson Crusoe Story*, 22.

70 De Foe, *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, 47–48, 56–62, 119–22, 167–81. Despite the endless variations in versions of the Crusoe story, Richard Phillips found Christian self-discipline and exertion in rational labour constant elements in the story. Phillips, *Mapping Men and Empire*, 31–33.

71 Weaver-Hightower, *Empire Islands*, xviii–xxi.

72 Phillips, *Mapping Men and Empire*, 31–33.

73 Murray-Prior, Private Letter Book, 19–20. James Bonwick judged William Buckley harshly on these grounds. Searching for Buckley's 'elevating influence' on the Wathaurong in the form of permanent housing, clothing and the like that he believed could have been fashioned from local resources, he exclaimed: 'alas! we see nothing of the kind ... the bricklayer sunk rapidly into the savage'. Bonwick, *The Wild White Man*, 3.

native', history ceases and the land plunges back into the 'Stone Age'.⁷⁴ The ongoing paradox of Morrill's 'residency' was that he lived as an adopted Aboriginal man for the greater part of his life in the region.

Some of the colonists who met Morrill thought they could detect a 'very faint taint which hangs about him, after so long a solitary association with savages'. Expecting signs, they scrutinised his appearance. A Rockhampton journalist gained a mixed impression of this 'black-white man': 'The man's face is not blacker than those of many men whose lives are spent in the bush under ordinary circumstances; but his body is very dark and much disfigured'.⁷⁵ In his second edition, Gregory provided a post-mortem description of Morrill: 'exposure to a tropical sun and climate had made his skin dark', and 'his eyes were sunken and he had a very wide mouth'. This description echoes the same account's physical characterisation of the Aboriginal people of Mount Elliott. Via verbal craniology, Gregory invited the reader to examine Morrill's head as a gauge of his assimilation to Birri-gubba society, and of his ability to recover from it.⁷⁶ In his third edition, 30 years later, Gregory added a scattering of interjections pointing out Morrill's loss of 'likeness to a civilised being' as he survived to live as an adopted Aboriginal man.⁷⁷ A late nineteenth-century theory about Australia's Aboriginal peoples posited that they themselves were castaways who, in finding little in the way of arable lands and useful tools where they washed up, had *become* hunters and nomads, or, finding nothing on this primeval continent that would encourage their advance out of this state, had simply remained that way while other races progressed to agriculture and industry.⁷⁸ How could their company do a lone white man any good?

This question remained pressing in the new century. Writing for an international audience in 1923, and informed by the frightening prospect of racial 'degeneration' (as well as the very incomplete results of his Aboriginals Protection Act after 25 years), Meston felt Morrill's story

74 Carrington, *Colonial Adventures*, 165; Veracini, 'Historylessness', 173–75.

75 *The Argus*, 18 May 1863, 6; *The Courier*, 11 March 1863, 3.

76 Gregory, *Sketch of the Residence of James Morrill*, 17. For the 'sunken eyes' and 'broad mouths' of the Mount Elliott people, see p. 18. It is as if Morrill had been subject to a process of regression and evolution within his own lifetime. Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors*, 39–45.

77 Gregory, *Narrative of James Murrell's*, 1, 27.

78 A columnist for *The Courier* suggested that *Sketch of a Residence*, in providing details of the local language and customs, might support the belief that 'their forefathers had attained to a high state of civilisation and enlightenment when our own were steeped in ignorance and barbarism'. *The Courier*, 21 April 1863, 2. Edward Palmer, one of North Queensland's honoured pioneers, canvassed this possibility as he deliberated the question of the origins of the Aboriginal peoples in the 1890s. Palmer, *Early Days in North Queensland*, 215–16.

provided 'sure proof that the primeval savage wild man in all of us is terribly near the surface'. Combining Social Darwinism with snobbery, Meston declared William Buckley and four escaped convicts who had lived with Aboriginal people in southern Queensland to have been of the 'lowest type'—their failure was to avoid being *improved* by their association with Aboriginal society. By contrast, Morrill, an 'honest English yeoman', was made of the sort of dependable stuff that might be hoped to endure immutably; yet, it had not. The rather muted good news was that, along with these lesser men, Morrill appeared able to 'resume' the 'vener of civilization' once re-adopted.⁷⁹ If civilisation depended on whiteness, then its veneer remained thin in North Queensland through the 1920s and 1930s, maintained via strenuous lobbying of the labour movement for an end to Aboriginal work on sheep and cattle stations, and unremitting legal discrimination against Aboriginal and Melanesian populations. Ray Evans found that, by the 1930s, as much as a third of the state's Aboriginal population was confined on reserves and missions in a kind of 'eugenic quarantine'. Many Birri-gubba families were moved away from Bowen and Ayr at this time, including people who may have been Morrill's descendants.⁸⁰

It is difficult to judge how firmly Marcus Clark's tongue was planted in his cheek when he titled his rather humorous account of Morrill's story 'The First Queensland Explorer', for its protagonist had not set out to know a territory or route, and had not mapped, measured or claimed any new lands for the Crown.⁸¹ Morrill's status as 'first resident' was, perhaps, tinged with irony, suspicion or even contempt in the eyes of his contemporaries and later biographers as they put his story to the test. Yet, this repeated interlocution also offered him an opportunity to become an explorer-in-retrospect. He had, after all, returned to civilisation and reported on his discoveries, as the purposeful explorer Leichhardt failed to do, having disappeared, never to complete his second mission beyond the Darling Downs.⁸² Regardless of whether Morrill's civilised attributes

79 Meston, 'Wild White Men: Australian Instances', *World's News*, 27 October 1923. Stern traces the development of these notions into the inter-war years. Stern, *Eugenic Nation*, 14.

80 The recruitment of Melanesian labour for the sugar industry had ceased in 1904 and many Melanesians had been deported. Evans, *A History of Queensland*, 145, 170–71. Eddie Smallwood, in conversation with the author, 1 December 2010.

81 Clarke, *Old Tales of a Young Country*, 185–95; Phillips, *Mapping Men and Empire*, 74–75.

82 Erdos, 'Leichhardt, Friedrich Wilhelm Ludwig (1813–1848)'. Morrill's survival raised hopes that Leichhardt or some of his party may have also survived among Aboriginal people. Morrill himself promoted this view, and offered to accompany a search party. *Port Denison Times*, 10 June 1865, 2; Gregory, *Sketch of the Residence of James Morrill*, 17.

had been dormant or dulled during his 17 years with the Birri-gubba, he was the ‘first white resident’ because he could ‘see’ the country in a way that the Birri-gubba could not. Even if he did not satisfy the expectations of those who interviewed him at Rockhampton and elsewhere, Morrill could, to some extent (under cross-examination), translate the country and its people into the language of science, thereby bringing it into the realm of progress and the legal language of possession.⁸³

In the local landscape today, Morrill stands alongside the official explorers and discoverers of the region. Sinclair Place and Dalrymple Plaza occupy the central part of the foreshore at Bowen, commemorating the ‘discovery’ of Port Denison by the former, and the official founding of the town by the latter. At the north-eastern end of this landscaped foreshore sits Morrill Plaza, a small open space alongside the skateboard park. At the Flagstaff Hill interpretive centre, Morrill appears as a seafarer alongside captains Cook and Sinclair, and as one of the ‘early European observers’ of the Birri-gubba people.⁸⁴

In the light of truly essentialist ideas about racial difference, Morrill was not required to perform any pioneering act other than to *be* where he was. The *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, marking the death of Morrill and Eliza Jane Ross’s son in 1907, observed that the wreck of the *Peruvian* had brought white eyes to this coastline for the first time since Cook had named Cape Upstart from the deck of the passing *Endeavour*—that is, after an interval of precisely 76 years. Morrill had only to look on the country and it was claimed for his race.⁸⁵ Morrill held a pivotal place in Matthew Fox’s 1921 *History of Queensland* and his vision of North Queensland as a modern agricultural and industrial landscape. Fox imagined that, ‘hopeless of regaining civilization’, Morrill had given himself over to the rhythms of Aboriginal life, little knowing that progress was ‘bringing the advancing tide of pastoral settlement’ and the ‘reign of a superior race’ nearer. News of stray cattle and men on horses raised ‘the white man in Murrells [Morrill], and caused him to take command of the primeval

83 Weaver-Hightower, *Empire Islands*, 2–3. For an in-depth analysis of this aspect of Morrill’s story, see Dortins, ‘James Morrill: Shipwreck Survivor’, 67–88.

84 The Flagstaff Hill Interpretation Centre was built in about 2008, and the foreshore landscaping dates to 2009 or 2010. Volunteers at the Bowen Museum, in conversation with the author, 1 March 2012. The story is certainly seen as a defining story for the town. When part of Baz Luhrman’s *Australia* was being filmed nearby, the idea that a film might soon be made about James Morrill began to circulate. Henry Young, in conversation with the author, 23 November 2010; Robert Paul, in conversation with the author, 19 November 2010.

85 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 28 November 1907, 2.

being he had been for so long'. According to this account, Morrill's whiteness may have slumbered during his life with the Birri-gubba, but it slumbered like a seed ready to blossom with the arrival of the colonists; his cultural outlook may have changed in Birri-gubba company, but his biology continued to assert itself. An important part of Fox's story is that Morrill arrived at Bowen in 1863 to find a town on the spot where he had once built a gnyah.⁸⁶ The significance of this is not entirely clear. Fox may have meant that Morrill's gnyah-building was like the laying of a foundation stone or the raising of a flag; alternatively, it may simply have provided a satisfying end to Morrill's story, illustrating how far progress had taken the region. In any case, Morrill's presence in Fox's story lent a naturalness and inevitability to the advance of the pastoralists; in return, Morrill was able to bask in the retrospective glory of progress.⁸⁷

In an address to the Royal Historical Society of Queensland to mark Queensland's centenary in 1959, Sir Raphael Cilento and Clem Lack again conferred on Morrill the title of 'first white resident'. They also acknowledged "'Boraltchou" Baker ... the first white man to see the Darling Downs; "Moilow" Graham the first white man to live in the Tewantin area', and so on. Against the lingering doubt that Europeans could remain physically, mentally and morally vigorous in latitudes nearing the equator, one of Cilento's lifelong projects as a doctor was to establish the supremacy of white men in the tropics. In his mind, each of these pioneers-in-retrospect, regardless of whether they were castaways or escapees, had marked out new territory for their race. Morrill's one-man 'triumph in the tropics' was that he had not only endured full initiation, but also, Cilento and Lack fantasised further, exerted supremacy over his companions, 'having the virtual authority ... of a chief'.⁸⁸

To borrow a concept from Attwood and Doyle's analysis of stories about Batman's treaty with the Kulin peoples of Victoria, these supremacist histories can be understood as 'fictive' in two ways. First, the details

86 Fox, *The History of Queensland*, 69–70.

87 Weaver-Hightower found that castaway stories assist 'imperial expansion and control' by making it 'seem unproblematic and natural, like the innate processes of the human body'. Weaver-Hightower, *Empire Islands*, ix–xi. See also Doherty, *The Townsville Book*; Doherty, *The Bowen Book*.

88 Cilento and Lack, *Wild White Men of Queensland*, 25; Cilento and Lack, *Triumph in the Tropics*, xiii. Frank Reid, writing a highly sensationalised account of North Queensland a few years earlier, found Morrill a fully integrated part of the 'tribe', but did not suggest any form of 'chiefdom'. However, writing about Wini of Badu (a 'wild white man' of the Torres Strait who Barbara Thompson came in contact with), he developed a full-blown fantasy of malevolent overlordship, with Wini dominating the politics of the region until slain by the (in this account) heroic Frank Jardine. Reid, *The Romance of the Great Barrier Reef*, 54–59, 63–66.

they embroidered onto Morrill's story appear to have no basis in historical sources. Second, they created a myth that sought to reconcile a central contradiction within settler history in North Queensland—namely, that European settlers were the rightful possessors of land that very clearly belonged to the Indigenous inhabitants.⁸⁹ However, these histories were not only myth-making or legend-making, they were also bringing an immensely powerful (if not total) reality into being through Morrill's story.

Cilento's project was deadly serious; the integrity of the White Australia Policy depended on it. His work perpetuated a view of Aboriginal people as barely human.⁹⁰ Probably because he and Lack held the view that Morrill's very biology was different—superior—to that of the Birri-gubba people who adopted him, they did not have to worry about whether he had *become* savage via cultural assimilation, or stayed that way. This had deeply concerned Murray-Prior who feared that, despite consistent denial, Morrill had, in fact, tasted true barbarity during his time with the 'natives'; he suspected that Morrill had not only participated in the ritual cannibalism he described so vividly, but also that he had been irretrievably altered by it.⁹¹ Unperturbed by such fears, Cilento and Lack were free to indulge a rather steamy fascination with the ins and outs of 'going native'. They pictured Morrill's 'brawny torso burnt black by ... the hot northern sun', and imagined that he continued to participate in corroborees on the outskirts of town and that he died 'amid the grief-stricken wailing of a mob of blacks'. (Both would have been impossible given the campaign to keep Aboriginal people out of settled districts that continued for some years after Morrill's death; indeed, his obituary had speculated that 'could the Mount Elliot blacks learn that their pale-faced brother was dead, what howling and woe there would be'.)⁹²

Somewhat contradictorily, Cilento and Lack imagined that Morrill never relaxed his will to return to civilisation. In an act of mastery over the landscape that forms a typical feature of castaway stories, in their narrative,

89 Attwood with Doyle, *Possession*, 5–6.

90 Understanding Aboriginal people to have more in common with the 'local animals' than with other human beings, they argued that a comparison between Aboriginal society and culture and 'primitive civilisation' would be completely erroneous. Cilento and Lack, *Triumph in the Tropics*, 178–79.

91 Murray-Prior, Private Letter Book, 19–20.

92 Cilento and Lack, *Wild White Men of Queensland*, 25. Geoffrey Bolton also imagined that 'Aboriginals for many miles around came into town for a memorable mourning ceremony'. Bolton, 'Morrill, James (1824–1865)'. *Port Denison Times*, 1 November 1865, 2.

Morrill repeatedly climbed a mountain near Townsville in the hope of signalling a passing ship. Likewise, in a popular history of Townsville, published in 1952, Morrill also maintained a mountain-top ‘vigil’ on Townsville’s bluff, Castle Hill.⁹³ Morrill did not claim to have done so in *Sketch of a Residence*, nor do reports of his other interviews suggest that he frequently climbed a mountain to look out for ships. In fact, he suggested in his Rockhampton interview that his adoptive people often kept a close watch over him, preventing such individual investigative travel.⁹⁴ As locals point out today, Castle Hill would be an awkward place from which to spot a ship, unless it was to sail on the landward side of Magnetic Island. Instead (or nevertheless), a local yarn connects a nearby feature known as Jimmy’s Lookout to Morrill for the same purpose.⁹⁵

Locally, the bare essentials of the story seem to have circulated through the middle decades of last century. Loftus Dun, who grew up in Ayr, recalled hearing the story for the first time in about 1936, when he was in his teens working at the Kalamia sugar mill:

All I knew about it was there was a man who had lived with the Aborigines for some time, and got back with the white people, and that he had some connection with Ayr.⁹⁶

In 1937, the *Bowen Independent*’s ‘Early Bowen Memories’ column featured a story by Alex Miller who recalled being shown a ‘historical relic’ by a local pioneer in the early 1880s—the corner post of the outstation stockyard where Morrill had ‘made himself known as a white man’.⁹⁷ The burial place of Captain and Mrs Pitkethly had also begun to command some interest in connection with a number of possible graves about which locals were curious.⁹⁸ A story circulated too around a block of land that Morrill had purchased in Bowen. Apparently, when he went to bid on this lot, the other bidders stepped back, and they and the auctioneer allowed him to take it for the minimum price. Like Fox’s story about Morrill’s return to find a town where he once shared

93 Weaver-Hightower, *Empire Islands*, xviii–xix; Cilento and Lack, *Wild White Men of Queensland*, 25; Rapiet and Watson, *The Townsville Story*, 6.

94 *Queensland Guardian*, 17 March 1863; *The Courier*, 11 March 1863, 2.

95 Russell McGregor, in conversation with the author, 29 November 2010; Phillip Murray, in conversation with the author, 3 December 2010.

96 Loftus Dun, in conversation with the author, 16 February 2011.

97 *Bowen Independent*, 11 August 1937.

98 George Turner, ‘Is it the Grave of Captain Pitkethly and Mrs Pitkethly of the Barque “Peruvian”?’ *Cummings and Campbell’s Monthly Magazine*, March 1931, 53.

a gunyah, the purchase converted this place of loss into a landmark of Morrill's resocialisation with his own kind, and saw Morrill's landscape of exile from civilisation transformed into a place that he and his white descendants would experience as a land of security and plenty.⁹⁹ A sense of satisfaction or justice is still palpable when this story is told today; not only was it a block of land in his 'own country', now owned as private property, but it is said to be where Morrill was (chopping a possum out of a tree) when he heard that Captain and Mrs Pitkethly had died.¹⁰⁰ More than 150 years later, local history-makers are still bringing Morrill home.

99 J. E. Lott, 'Recollections', *Bowen Independent*, 10 September 1937. In July 1863, Morrill purchased a Bowen town lot for just over ten pounds. *The Courier*, 24 July 1863, 2. In the final chapter of *The Townsville Story*, Morrill returns triumphantly to buy a quarter-acre lot in the new settlement, huddled under the bulk of Castle Hill where he had kept his lookout. Rapier and Watson, *The Townsville Story*. As Ann Curthoys observed, in the Australian context, narratives based in the biblical tropes of Exile, Exodus and the Promised Land can be strangely entangled. Curthoys, 'Expulsion, Exodus and Exile', 5.

100 Dilys Maltby, in conversation with the author, 2 December 2010; Phillip Murray, in conversation with the author, 3 December 2010.

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