

[Home](#) > [Vincent Buckley Special Issue \(2010\)](#) > [Hatherell](#)

Essays in Poetry, Mainly Australian: Vincent Buckley and the Question of the National Literature

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Abstract

Vincent Buckley's *Essays in Poetry, Mainly Australian* (1957) was Buckley's major contribution to the formation of an Australian literary canon, particularly one fit for study in the newly emerging academic discipline of Australian literature. This essay examines *Essays* in the context of both contemporary debates about Australian literature and culture, and the broader religio-cultural approach evident from Buckley's critical writing about Anglo-American literature and criticism as well as his Australian work. It argues that Buckley's ambivalent attitude to Australian literature, and the academic teaching of this literature, needs to be considered in the light of his anxieties about the status and role of romantic and post-romantic poetry in a modern world characterised by a lack of belief in transcendent values.

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[TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

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[Indexing metadata](#)
[Notify colleague*](#)
[Email the author*](#)
[Add comment*](#)

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