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ON..... 20 July 2004.....

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Sec. Research Graduate School Committee

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## ERRATA

- Page v, line 20: "Menghetti" for "Manghetti"
- Page 21, footnote 104: "experiences" for "experience"
- Page 28, line 18: "edited her letters for publication" for "arranged her letters under publication"
- Page 32, line 6: "settlers and labourers and amount of land for sale" for "settlers, labourers and land on sale"
- Page 53, line 3: "attitude not only appeared in" for "attitude did not only come to surface in"
- Page 53, line 11: "As was suggested earlier" for "As it was shown earlier"
- Page 53, line 12: "selves" for "self"
- Page 53, line 13: "receive the same kind of education as men" for "receive the kind of education that men did"
- Page 69, line 10: "with" for "under"
- Page 71, line 16: "fields" for "topics"
- Page 71, line 26: Delete: "Their emphasis on"
- Page 80, line 7: "Foott" for "Foot"
- Page 81, line 13: "description of" for "description about"
- Page 86, line 11: Delete: "and in 1839 in Queensland"
- Page 89, line 8: "Fairly" for "considerably"
- Page 90, line 23: "seemed preferable" for "seemed more preferable"
- Page 102, line 25: "required" for "demanded"
- Page 103, line 23: "milieu" for "millieu"
- Page 108, line 14: "much" for "considerable"
- Page 113, line 24: "deprived them of" for "deprived them from"
- Page 114, line 17: "It was difficult for women to find churches" for "It was difficult for women not to find churches"
- Page 121, line 28: "regard Australia as their true home" for "regard Australia their true home"
- Page 132, line 15: "transplanted to" for "transplanted in"
- Page 134, line 18: "William Gilpin" for "Gilpin William"
- Page 135, line 26: "were" for "was"
- Page 146, line 11: "as a result" for "a result"
- Page 164, caption: "In this picture the male and female hunters are chasing" for "The male and female hunters depicted on this picture are chasing"
- Page 172, caption: "Garret & Co.: Tracked! (1884)" for "Garret & Co.: Tracked!"

Page 174, line 19: "made for" for "made way for"

Page 174, footnote 760: "(Ward Lock, 1978 – First published in 1894)" for "(Ward Lock, 1978)"

Page 175, footnote 762: "(Mulini Press, 1998 – First published in 1857)" for "(Mulini Press, 1998)"

Page 176, footnote 766: "Ernest Giles" for "Ernst Giles"

Page 177, caption: "Bush fire in Australia (188?)" for "Bush fire in Australia"

Page 177, caption: "have much more than" for "have much than"

Page 177, footnote 768: "in her servant's care" for "at her servant's care"

Page 186, line 15: "time frame" for "time framework"

Page 187, line 17: "knowledge of" for "knowledge on"

Page 189, line 28: "Louisa Meredith" for "Louisa"

Page 194, line 6: "Anne" for "Ann"

Page 194, line 25: "the leaves' colouring" for "its colouring"

Page 202, line 19: "vines" for "vine"

Page 204, line 4: "scientific" for "botanical"

Page 206, line 18: "a magpie" for "another colourful bird"

Page 207, caption: "Australian pets (1876)" for "Australian pets"

Page 223, line 14: "extent to" for "extent by"

Page 239, line 14: "a pistol" for "pistol"

Page 241, caption: "in foreground (1818?)" for "in foreground"

Page 248, line 10: "lying idle" for "laying idle"

Page 248, line 26: "described it" for "described them"

Page 254, line 13: "suggested she have" for "suggested her to have"

Page 259, footnote 1113: "(Mulini Press, 1998 – First published in 1857)" for "(Mulini Press, 1998)"

Page 260, line 7: "figures" for "figure"

Page 261, line 1: "symbol in [sic]" for "symbol in"

## ADDENDUM

Page 13: Add to footnote 64: "The 'new woman' was of course a reaction against the earlier ideal of the 'perfect lady'."

Page 58, line 17: Add: "There is of course a difference in purpose and intended audience between the more factual travel books written by Bannister and Mossman as a record of recent experiences and events and the memoirs of someone like Curr, written later in life and therefore being more personal and retrospective."

Page 75: Add to footnote 343: "The book may have been intended to cash in on English interest in the gold fields."

Page 169, line 27: Add: "It is interesting to note that the girl's clothes are the same colour as her surroundings."

Page 171, line 17: Delete: "For the sake of propriety, though, the indigenous man is shown dressed in European clothes." Add: "It is not clear from the picture whether the Aboriginal man is clothed just for propriety or because he is a police tracker or stockman."

**Gentlewomen in the bush: A historical  
interpretation of British women's personal  
narratives in nineteenth-century rural Australia**

**By**

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# Table of contents

PREFACE .....	III
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	V
STATEMENT .....	VI
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	VII
ABSTRACT .....	VIII
INTRODUCTION .....	I
CHAPTER ONE – BACKGROUND.....	4
INTRODUCTION.....	5
LITERATURE REVIEW .....	5
THE VICTORIAN GENTLEWOMAN .....	12
THE QUESTION OF EMIGRATION TO AUSTRALIA.....	16
THE SPREAD OF SETTLEMENT .....	21
MAPS.....	35
CONCLUSION .....	45
CHAPTER TWO – NON-FICTIONAL WRITING ABOUT AUSTRALIA .....	46
INTRODUCTION.....	47
WOMEN AND WRITING .....	47
DIARIES AND LETTERS .....	59
PERSONAL NARRATIVES.....	67
CONCLUSION .....	74
CHAPTER THREE – DOMESTIC LIFE IN THE BUSH.....	76
INTRODUCTION.....	77
HOUSING .....	78
THE SERVANT PROBLEM .....	84
WORK.....	91
<i>Housework</i> .....	93
<i>The Governess</i> .....	99
THE LACK OF FEMALE COMPANY .....	103
CHILDBEARING.....	108
RELIGION.....	114
THOUGHTS OF HOME.....	120
GENTILITY IN THE BUSH.....	123
CONCLUSION.....	128
CHAPTER FOUR – WAYS OF SEEING THE BUSH.....	130
INTRODUCTION.....	131
LANDSCAPE DESCRIPTION.....	132
SEEING THROUGH ENGLISH EYES.....	143
THE BUSH AS A RECREATIONAL GROUND .....	157
THE BUSH AS A THREAT.....	167
CONCLUSION .....	182
CHAPTER FIVE – FLORA AND FAUNA.....	183
INTRODUCTION.....	184

NATURAL HISTORY .....	184
FLORA AND FAUNA .....	194
WOMEN AND ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS .....	210
THE GARDEN .....	221
CONCLUSION .....	225
<b>CHAPTER SIX - THE ABORIGINES .....</b>	<b>227</b>
INTRODUCTION .....	228
WRITING ABOUT THE ABORIGINES .....	228
WAYS OF SEEING THE ABORIGINES .....	233
<i>Perceptions of Aboriginal Peoples</i> .....	233
<i>Perceptions of Aboriginal Women</i> .....	244
RELATIONSHIPS .....	251
<i>Everyday Contact</i> .....	251
<i>Can They Ever Be Civilised?</i> .....	260
CONCLUSION .....	273
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>275</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>279</b>

## Preface

This thesis tells the story of some British women who settled down and started a new life on the other side of the world in the nineteenth century. It recounts how these Victorian gentlewomen found their new country and what they made of the surrounding environment and the indigenous people.

Throughout my candidature I could not help feeling a bond with these daring and adventurous women who left the safety and security of their home to experience the unknown and strange beauties of a continent roughly 20,000 km away. I am also a European woman and as such a stranger to Australia. When I arrived in this country in 2001 almost everything was new to me and I had to adapt to an entirely different cultural and natural environment. Discovering the peculiarities of this country was a truly wonderful experience that enriched my personality in many ways. I learnt a great many things about the Australian culture and way of life thanks to my conversations with the locals of Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Canberra. My extensive travels on the east coast offered me a variety of landscapes and native flora and fauna. For me the most spectacular part of Australia is the outback landscape of the Northern Territory. Uluru, the Olgas and Kakadu National Park are truly awesome destinations. The virgin rainforests of northern Queensland, the Great Barrier Reef, the Whitsundays and Tasmania's rolling green countryside were some of the other highlights. I was thrilled to see native animals such as kangaroos, koalas, possums, wombats and kookaburras while bushwalking. I was even lucky enough to see rare cassowaries and lyrebirds in the wild.

I recorded my travel adventures and daily life on the pages of my letters home – just as the colonial women did 150 years ago. Even though there seems to be considerable differences between my life and the life of colonial settlers I could nevertheless identify with their concerns. In many ways my life was much easier because the Melbourne of today is a bustling metropolis with all the comforts of the twenty-first century whereas these Victorian women had to face rather rough and primitive conditions in the nineteenth century. Furthermore, I am not a migrant and thanks to modern technology and machinery, I could ease my homesickness with occasional visits to Hungary.

This thesis is therefore the result of not only my academic interest in colonial history but also my curiosity in the life of some fellow women who underwent this experience many years before me. My research as well as my personal experience suggest that making such a move does

involve tremendous sacrifices and certain hardships. It is by no means easy to leave everything and everybody behind and start a new life in a strange place. But I am happy that I came. Despite the inconvenience of loneliness, isolation, a series of cultural misunderstandings that arose out of my lack of familiarity with Australian society, it was still worth it. Without this experience there would always have been a kind of void in my life. I am positive that I will cherish the experience and memory of my three years in Australia for the rest of my life.

## Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my supervisor **Prof. John Rickard** for his guidance and helpful suggestions all throughout the research process. His ideas and constructive criticism helped to shape my way of understanding colonial history. He drew my attention to colonial women's life-writings by recommending I read *The Letters of Rachel Henning*. I became spellbound after the first page and even now after hundreds of similar narratives, I still look back on Rachel Henning's letters as one of the most fascinating books I have ever read. Even though I was at first against the idea of doing my thesis on colonial women it turned out to be a rewarding choice. I am also grateful for the help I received from my associate supervisor **Dr. David Dunstan**, and **Prof. Marian Courtley** who assisted me with her comments in the Confirmation Seminar in May 2002.

This thesis would not have been possible without the generous financial support of Monash University. I applied for a number of scholarships both in Europe and Australia but Monash University was the only organisation that considered me worthy for a grant. Without the Australian Government-sponsored **International Postgraduate Research Scholarship** and Monash University's **Monash Graduate Scholarship** I would not have been able to commence my postgraduate studies in Australia. I would also like to express my gratitude to the **Postgraduate Centre on the Clayton Campus** for providing me first with a carrel, and then with an office and a computer in the final year. I am also grateful to **Dr. Anya Woods** for proofreading the thesis and providing me with useful suggestions concerning my use of English and punctuation.

My thanks are also due to **Dr. Diane Manghetti**, **Dr. Russell McGregor**, **Dr. Robert Imre** and **Dr. Dorottya Holló** of ELTE University, Budapest, for introducing me to Australian history and culture. And last but not least my thanks go to my Mum (**Anyu**) and Dad (**Apu**) for their continuous support throughout the past few years. I could not have survived without their letters and phone calls here in Melbourne. I am also grateful for the support and encouragement I received from family, friends, colleagues and several other people both in Hungary and Australia who helped me realise my life-long dream of studying and living overseas.

## Statement

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university, and to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signed:

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature.

Ildikó Dömötör

## List of Illustrations

Picture 1 – John Robert Dicksee: A Primrose from England.....	150
Picture 2 – Emily Bowring: Kangaroo Hunting.....	164
Picture 3 – Frederick McCubbin: Lost (1886).....	170
Picture 4 – Garret & Co.: Tracked.....	172
Picture 5 – Louisa Atkinson: The bush fire.....	175
Picture 6 – Samuel Calvert: Bush fire in Australia.....	177
Picture 7 – Elizabeth Gray: Ferntree Gully.....	198
Picture 8 – Louisa Anne Meredith: Native wildflowers including Sturt's desert pea, Christmas bell.....	200
Picture 9 – Louisa Atkinson: Spotted pardalote, Scarlet honeyeater, Superb blue wren and Striated pardalote.....	205
Picture 10 – Samuel Calvert: Australian pets.....	207
Picture 11 – Sophia Campbell's watercolour painting "Australian Landscape, Natives and Kangaroo in Foreground.....	241
Picture 12 – Louisa Atkinson: The Aborigines.....	259
Picture 13 - Augustus Earle: Natives of N.S. Wales as seen in the streets of Sydney.....	264

## Abstract

This thesis discusses female British settlers' lives in colonial rural Australia. In particular, it examines the changes Victorian gentlewomen had to undergo to survive in the bush. Many women were expected to contribute to the running of their household, but rather than refusing to do so they learnt to appreciate their hard physical work. Women were aware that by doing the housework themselves their gentility was challenged. For this reason they redefined their notions of respectability in a way that included some work. Their loss of idleness liberated gentlewomen who found it rewarding to step outside the restrictions of the private sphere of life. Colonial life also empowered these women in the sense that they could do such things in Australia that were often denied of them in Britain. At the same time a sense of courage was also required because it was not easy to disregard public expectations.

Many colonial women informed their home audience of the peculiarities of their new life on the pages of their letters. Some women even ventured in the public realm of men by publishing their colonial accounts. Besides describing the novelties of their domestic life, many women also sought to depict the Australian colonies in terms of their botanical and ethnographical diversity as well as their history and social development. Nineteenth-century Australia was a fascinating place in many respects: pioneer settlers were opening up new areas for British settlement, the continent's unique flora and fauna offered natural historians a virgin territory for research, and the indigenous Australians gave emerging ethnographers new scope for study. Even though colonial women's social position and educational background did not allow them to make significant contributions to contemporary science, some of them made noteworthy achievements. Their written accounts are therefore remarkable not in the history of scientific and anthropological research but in the way women sought to assert their growing interest and presence in public discourse.

Colonial women's texts differ considerably from men's accounts. The depiction of private life, family relationships and domestic concerns take up a substantial part of female narratives. Social historians find a wealth of information in these books about the way colonial women led their life in rural Australia. Rather than describing the progress of colonial society, the pastoral expansion of the settlers, the political system and the dispossession of the indigenous Australians, women, on the other hand, emphasised their daily life and their appreciation of the surrounding environment. Their life-writings draw attention to the challenges women had to face and overcome in the new geographical, botanical, economic and social environment.

## Introduction

This thesis examines Victorian gentlewomen's experience of life in rural Australia. The impact of colonial experience on the everyday life and opportunities of female settlers will be the focus of this research. It will discuss how the writing of personal narratives helped Victorian gentlewomen construct their colonial self. One aim of this research is to find out in what ways female narratives differed from those of their menfolk. I seek to elucidate the distinctive qualities of colonial gentlewomen's personal texts. The life-writings of British settlers and native-born colonists are also analysed to identify what changes these women had to undergo in their effort to adjust and cope with the new circumstances. Letters, diaries, journals, reminiscences, recollections, memoirs and travel books provide the main primary source for this research but examples are also drawn from fiction, poetry and painting.

The last few decades of the twentieth century have witnessed a re-evaluation of Australian social history that has sought to incorporate the experience of female colonists. While much research has been done on female settlers' experience of life, their ways of seeing the environment and the indigenous Australians have received less attention. This thesis tries to fill this gap by giving a voice to colonial women in the issues of landscape appreciation and appraisal of the Aboriginal people.

This thesis investigates the female life experience and the feminine perspective on the Australian colonies. It seeks to find out the extent to which the colonial circumstances required British gentlewomen to make adjustments to and changes in their lifestyle. English values of gentility and respectability are taken as the starting point. Women's life-writings are examined to find out how much the ideals of Victorian womanhood had to be sacrificed in the Australian bush. Issues to be considered will include not only the drawbacks to migration but also the opportunities that the colonies offered for people from the Old World. I seek to answer to what extent and in which areas well-bred women in the colonies drifted away from articulated ideals of Victorian womanhood.

The thesis is based on primary materials that relate the lives of British gentlewomen in the period between the early 1820s and the late 1890s. A major aspect of the selection process was that each work had to be written by a female colonist. Biographies were therefore used only as secondary sources. The research focuses primarily on published autobiographical accounts but

several unpublished materials were also located and studied.<sup>1</sup>

This research is embedded in Victorian theories of domestic ideology and gentility. Domestic ideology prescribed different spheres of interest for men and women. While men were to dominate the public world, women were to devote their entire life to the private world of home and family.<sup>2</sup> Notions of gentility influenced the way of life and thinking of many women throughout the nineteenth century. The colonial experiences of female settlers will be measured against these Victorian ideals.

Five major aspects of Victorian gentlewomen's colonial self are discussed here. The thesis begins with a brief analysis of the notion and main characteristics of the ideal Victorian gentlewoman. Chapter One will also deal with the motives that made women leave the United Kingdom in the nineteenth century. Their arrival and place of settlement will be considered in the context of the geographical spread of each colony. This background information will be essential in understanding the great variety of experiences gentlewomen underwent at different times and in different parts of the colonies. Chapter Two will discuss the form of the primary sources. It will look at the genres of letter-, diary-, life- and travel-writings and will highlight the importance of writing for women. I will argue that writing their experience of colonial life enabled these women to analyse their colonial self. Chapter Three will investigate the local circumstances in which female colonists found themselves in the Australian bush. Here I will be looking at the conditions of life and what changes women had to face in order to survive and cope with their new mode of living. Chapter Four will analyse the aesthetic language colonial women used to describe the Australian bush and the kind of recreational activities they indulged in. Chapter Five will investigate the attitudes women had towards the Australian flora and fauna, while Chapter Six will examine colonial gentlewomen's perception of and relationship with indigenous Australians.

Colonial gentlewomen's personal accounts will be described from the above-mentioned perspectives with the aim of finding out how distinctive they were from the accounts of colonial men. Most prefaces in female narratives reveal a sense of embarrassment about venturing into the public sphere. These disclaimers suggest that many women felt uneasy about their personal narratives for a number of reasons. While they modestly emphasised the female point of view

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<sup>1</sup> Unpublished materials were drawn mainly from the La Trobe Library in Melbourne. Short visits to the Mitchell Library in Sydney, the Oxley Library in Brisbane and the National Library in Canberra enabled me to have a look at some of their archives, as well.

<sup>2</sup> Sue Rowley, "Things a bushwoman cannot do" in Susan Magarey, et al., eds, *Debutante Nation - Feminism contests the 1890s* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1993): 185.

and claimed to tell something new about the Australian colonies, they openly admitted that their texts were not to be judged against the high standards that male writers had previously set. This thesis will seek to answer to what extent their sense of inferiority and modesty was justified and whether or not they could indeed reveal something completely new and decisively different in their life-writings.

# Chapter One

## Background

## Introduction

The first section of this chapter will survey the kind of approaches other scholars and academics have used in their treatment of colonial women's personal narratives. This literature review will place my own research in the context of the existing scholarship and point to the gap that I intend to fill. The second section will outline the concept of the ideal Victorian gentlewoman. The texts analysed in this thesis are embedded in the Victorian social concept of the genteel mode of life. British and native-born gentlewomen's colonial experiences will be measured against these genteel ideals. The third section will introduce those women writers who are constantly referred to throughout this thesis. I will mainly concentrate on permanent settlers but some Australian-born and short-term residents will also be referred to. Most of the visitors and travellers will be introduced in later chapters. And lastly the fourth section will place colonial women's personal narratives in a historical and geographical perspective.

## Literature Review

The following literature review tries to map the kind of treatment and interpretation colonial gentlewomen's personal narratives have received. I will demonstrate the ways in which these autobiographical accounts were used to serve the interests of both the general and the academic audience. This section will also show that while a small body of scholarship exists that examines the topics dealt with in the individual sections of this thesis, few scholars have attempted to look at non-fictional writings by colonial women in Australia as a whole. This dissertation intends to fill this gap and wishes to contribute to the understanding of the experience of female colonists in rural Australia.

One of the best starting points of research in this area is the two-volumed bibliographic guide to nineteenth-century Australian life-writings by Kay Walsh and Joy Hooton. Their *Australian Autobiographical Narratives*<sup>3</sup> provides an excellent bibliography of both male and female writers with a brief summary of each book and its time span. Joy Hooton's bibliography of Australian autobiographies in *Stories of Herself When Young* is another brilliant compilation of manuscripts and published books with a focus on women only.<sup>4</sup> While other such

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<sup>3</sup> Kay Walsh, et al., *Australian Autobiographical Narratives* (Hereafter AAN) (Canberra: Australian Scholarly Editions Centre, University College of New South Wales, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Joy Hooton, *Stories of Herself When Young – Autobiographies of childhood by Australian women* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1990): 395-417.

bibliography guides exist<sup>5</sup> these two works represent the most comprehensive lists of personal narratives.

The last few decades have seen an emerging interest in the lives of nineteenth-century Australian women and as a result many books were written to highlight their presence in the colonies. Nance Donkin's book *The Women Were There*<sup>6</sup> aims to demolish the myth of colonial Australia as a male-dominated society. *Mary of Maranoa*<sup>7</sup> by Eve Pownall focuses on pioneer women in particular. Both of these books seek to introduce some female characters into the colonial scene. Eve Pownall notes in the preface of her narrative that 'this book is a record of the part played in the making of Australia by some of the women who stood with their menfolk on the threshold of districts and eras'.<sup>8</sup> These accounts are biographical and celebratory and rely on women's personal narratives such as their letters, diaries and reminiscences.

Other books about colonial women aim to show not only their presence in Australia but also the way they contributed to Australian culture. An early collection was edited by Louise Brown. *A Book of South Australia – Women in the first hundred years*<sup>9</sup> is a truly pioneering collection of extracts of letters, reminiscences, as well as fiction and poetry. Not only is it a tribute to the pioneers but it also celebrates the women pioneers in particular. Amanda Nettelbeck claims that this publication 'pays tribute to women's role as helpmates to pioneer men'.<sup>10</sup> Susanne de Vries also compiled a collection of biographies of high-achieving colonial women in *Strength of Spirit – Pioneering women of achievement from First Fleet to Federation*.<sup>11</sup> She points out in the Introduction that 'the stories in this book are both a homage to, and a celebration of, the lives of twenty extraordinary women from our past'.<sup>12</sup> However, these books are not truly analytical of their subjects. Rather, they simply present women's personal narratives to marvel at them.

<sup>5</sup> See for example Maggie Weidenhofer, ed., *Colonial Ladies* (South Yarra: Currey O'Neil, 1985): 118-119; and Patricia Clarke, et al., eds, *Life Lines: Australian women's letters and diaries 1788 to 1840* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1992): 246-249. See also Bruce Bennett, et al., eds, *Western Australian Writing, a Bibliography* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1990), which points out some narratives describing women's impressions of Western Australia.

<sup>6</sup> Nance Donkin, *The Women Were There – Nineteen women who enlivened Australia's history* (Melbourne: Collins Dove, 1988).

<sup>7</sup> Eve Pownall, *Mary of Maranoa – Tales of Australian pioneer women* (Sydney: F.H. Johnston, 1959).

<sup>8</sup> Pownall, *Mary of Maranoa* Preface - unpaginated.

<sup>9</sup> Louise Brown, et al., eds, *A Book of South Australia – Women in the first hundred years* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1936).

<sup>10</sup> Amanda Nettelbeck, "South Australian settler memoirs" *Journal of Australian Studies* No. 68, (2001): 103.

<sup>11</sup> Susanna de Vries, *Strength of Spirit – Pioneering women of achievement from First Fleet to Federation* (Alexandria: Millennium Books, 1995).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 9. Her earlier collection of female biographies also has a telling subtitle that emphasises the achievement of some female colonists. Susanna de Vries-Evans, *Pioneer Women Pioneer Land – Yesterday's tall poppies* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1987).

Apart from biographical sketches that aimed to identify some of the women from the colonial period, another way of presenting some fragments of women's lives was through the publication of books that included extracts from diaries and correspondences. Helen Heney's *Dear Fanny*<sup>13</sup> and *Life Lines*<sup>14</sup> by Patricia Clarke and Dale Spender intend to show some moments in women's lives. These collections draw their materials from a variety of sources and their main attraction lies in their presentation of the diversity of female experiences. Maggie Weidenhofer's *Colonial Ladies*<sup>15</sup> is another collection of short extracts that are grouped around several headings aiming to present certain aspects of colonial life. Elizabeth Webby's collection *Colonial Voices*<sup>16</sup> contains excerpts from both male and female narratives that aim to give an insight into colonial life. Extracts from male and female narratives in Eric Rolls' *Visions of Australia – Impressions of the landscape*<sup>17</sup> place the emphasis – as its title reveals – on how colonists responded to the Australian landscape. Some editors compiled anthologies of Australian women writers of both fiction and non-fiction. Lynne Spender's *Her Selection*<sup>18</sup> and Dale Spender's *Australian Women's Writing*<sup>19</sup> both contain short excerpts of colonial gentlewomen's personal narratives.

For the purposes of this research, full-length and complete personal records were of more value. Lucy Frost's *No Place for a Nervous Lady*<sup>20</sup> is also a collection of diaries and series of letters whose manuscripts are less accessible to the general public. Several other editors have brought nineteenth-century women's manuscript diaries, correspondence and recollections into print in the past few decades, sometimes in the interest of family history. Peter Cowan published his great-great-grandmother Eliza Brown's correspondence from the Swan River Colony to England,<sup>21</sup> while Irene Taylor published her great-aunt Sophy Taylor's letters covering one year

<sup>13</sup> Helen Heney, ed., *Dear Fanny – Women's letters to and from New South Wales, 1788-1857* (Rushcutters Bay, NSW: Australian National University Press, 1985).

<sup>14</sup> Clarke, *Life Lines*.

<sup>15</sup> Weidenhofer, *Colonial Ladies*.

<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Webby, ed., *Colonial Voices – Letters, diaries, journalism and other accounts of nineteenth-century Australia* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1989).

<sup>17</sup> Eric Rolls, ed., *Visions of Australia – Impressions of the landscape 1642-1910* (South Melbourne: Lothian Books, 2002).

<sup>18</sup> Lynne Spender, ed., *Her Selection – Writings by nineteenth-century Australian women* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1988): Excerpts are taken from the personal narratives of Georgiana Molloy, Louisa Anne Meredith, Annie Maria Baxter, Annabella Boswell and Rachel Henning.

<sup>19</sup> Dale Spender, ed., *The Penguin Anthology of Australian Women's Writing* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1988): Excerpts are taken from the personal narratives of Georgiana McCrae, Louisa Anne Meredith, Ellen Clacy and Rosa Praed.

<sup>20</sup> Lucy Frost, ed., *No Place for a Nervous Lady* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1984).

<sup>21</sup> Peter Cowan, ed., *A Faithful Picture: The letters of Eliza and Thomas Brown at York in the Swan River Colony 1841-1852* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1991): 15.

in her life, first on board the ship *Candahar* and then in Adelaide between 1851 and 1852.<sup>22</sup> There is a tendency for these works, too, to be purely celebratory – a response to the dearth of women in earlier accounts.

There are many books that provide brief biographies of colonial women such as *Pen Portraits*,<sup>23</sup> but critical analysis of these non-fictional accounts are scarce. A pioneering study in this field is the collection of short essays in *The Peaceful Army – A memorial to the pioneer women of Australia 1788 – 1938*.<sup>24</sup> These essays – mainly biographical – pay tribute to those women who contributed to colonial society in some way. Dale Spender's *Writing a New World: Two centuries of Australian women writers*<sup>25</sup> is a historical cataloguing of some two hundred Australian women writers. The strength of this book lies in its presentation of women's contribution to Australian fiction and non-fiction and is an excellent reference book in the extent of its coverage and historical context. Another collection entitled *A Bright and Fiery Troop – Australian women writers of the nineteenth century*<sup>26</sup> seeks to provide critical analysis as well as biographical details of colonial women writers of fiction and non-fiction.

Literary historians have also looked at these narratives with interest. Some of them characterise these letters and diaries as a form of artistic expression and, in the genre of non-fiction writing, often treat them as a literary rendering of personal histories. Robert Dixon contributed a chapter on non-fictional narratives to *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia*.<sup>27</sup> The most comprehensive literary treatment of nineteenth-century autobiographical narratives is found in *Stories of Herself When Young*, where women's childhood experiences are the central theme of the book.<sup>28</sup> There is a separate section in *The Literature of Western Australia* where Peter Cowan describes the personal narratives of several Western Australian women writers and argues that these texts provide a crucial insight into the understanding of colonial life.<sup>29</sup>

Colonial women's personal narratives give an insight into their lives and for this reason

<sup>22</sup> Irene C. Taylor, ed., *Sophy Under Sail* (Sydney: Hodder and Stoughton, 1969).

<sup>23</sup> Patricia Clarke, *Pen Portraits – Women writers and journalists in nineteenth century Australia* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1988).

<sup>24</sup> F.S. Eldershaw, ed., *The Peaceful Army – A memorial to the pioneer women of Australia 1788 – 1938* (Sydney: Arthur McQuitty, 1938).

<sup>25</sup> Dale Spender, *Writing a New World: Two centuries of Australian women writers* (London: Pandora, 1988).

<sup>26</sup> Debra Adelaide, ed., *A Bright and Fiery Troop – Australian women writers of the nineteenth century* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1988).

<sup>27</sup> Robert Dixon, "Public and private voices: Non-fictional prose" in Laurie Hergenhan, ed., *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1988): 126-138.

<sup>28</sup> Hooton, *Stories of Herself When Young*.

they are often used as historical sources. Several books and book chapters that describe women's attitudes to work, family and their daily life are often based on their life-writings. Alison Alexander's *Wealth of Women*<sup>30</sup> describes many aspects of women's daily life using the letters, diaries and memoirs they wrote. Fanny Barbour's diary is mentioned in *Australians 1888* to illustrate the way some well-to-do women spent their free time.<sup>31</sup> Women's life-writings often serve to demonstrate the kind of life which outstanding or ordinary women led in the nineteenth century. Denton Prout and Fred Feely's book *Petticoat Pioneers – Australia's colonial women* is a good case in point.<sup>32</sup>

Rural life is the subject of many studies. In *Pioneer Women of the Bush and Outback*<sup>33</sup> Jennifer Isaacs touches briefly on some of the themes that I am going to pursue in this thesis such as the development of settlers' homes, their experimental use of native ingredients in their diet, the emotional and physical hardship of isolation, the joys of picnics and dangers of bushfires, floods and drought. Delys Bird seeks to analyse women's personal narratives with a view to learning about their experiences of bush life. In her article she deals with such topics as women's isolation, their sense of freedom, and relationship with the servants and the indigenous Australians. While her comments and observations are fascinating, her scope of materials is sadly limited to suit the available space of a journal article.<sup>34</sup>

The issue of female gentility is discussed in Emma Jane Curtin's PhD thesis "In Awe of Mrs Grundy: British gentility and emigrant gentlewomen in Australia, 1830-1880." While the scope of Curtin's study resembles mine in its concern with the changing perceptions of female gentility, her research relies on a different set of materials. Apart from a small selection of letters, diaries and memoirs she makes use of novels and lawsuits. She analyses the concept of female gentility in a wider context and touches on the situation of gentlewomen in rural Australia only in one chapter. Furthermore, her thesis is not concerned with colonial women's contact with

<sup>29</sup> Peter Cowan, "Diaries, letters, journals" in Bruce Bennett, ed., *The Literature of Western Australia* (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1979): 1-48.

<sup>30</sup> Alison Alexander, et al., *A Wealth of Women – Australian women's lives from 1788 to the present* (Sydney: Duffy & Snellgrove, 2001).

<sup>31</sup> Graeme Davison, et al., eds, *Australians 1888* (Broadway, NSW: Fairfax, Syme & Weldon Associates, 1987): 287-288. An American example is the *Frontier Women* by Julie Roy Jeffrey. She uses the diaries of native-born and migrant women to recreate the conditions and the way women tried to adjust to their new circumstances on the American West in the middle of the nineteenth century. Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women – The Trans-Mississippi West 1840-1880* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1979).

<sup>32</sup> Denton Prout, et al., *Petticoat Pioneers – Australia's colonial women* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1977).

<sup>33</sup> Jennifer Isaacs, *Pioneer Women of the Bush and Outback* (Willoughby, NSW: Lansdowne Press, 1990).

<sup>34</sup> Delys Bird, "Born for the Bush": An Australian women's frontier" *Australian and New Zealand Studies in Canada* Vol. 2, (1989): 1-16.

the environment.<sup>35</sup> Emma Floyd's article is another brief examination of gentlewomen's attitudes to their life in rural Australia.<sup>36</sup> She also considers emigrant women's colonial life in the context of English notions of gentility. Penny Russell's book *A Wish of Distinction – Colonial gentility and femininity*<sup>37</sup> is a thorough analysis of the colonial concept of female gentility in the urban context of Melbourne society.

Social historians also find a wealth of information in women's non-fictional works. John Archer surveys the development of colonial houses in his book *Building a Nation*.<sup>38</sup> As an architectural historian he is chiefly interested in the description of the settlers' abode at various stages of their colonial existence. B.W. Higman in his survey of *Domestic Service in Australia*<sup>39</sup> also cites personal narratives in support of his arguments about the situation of servants and about the mistresses' relationships with their employees.

Travel writing is another genre that deals with the presentation of the experience of overseas life. Several studies describe the form and peculiarities of nineteenth-century travel literature such as Sara Mills's *Discourses of Difference*<sup>40</sup> and Mary Russell's *The Blessings of a Good Thick Skirt*.<sup>41</sup> There are several other books that give a brief historical overview of the possibilities that existed for lady travellers but they usually focus on the achievements of a few famous lady travellers. Chiefly biographical information rather than critical analysis characterises some of the books on lady travellers. A good case in point is *Travelling Ladies*<sup>42</sup> by Alexandra Allen and a recent example is Barbara Hodgson's *No Place for a Lady – Tales of adventurous women travellers*.<sup>43</sup> After a brief introduction Hodgson tells the story of a few lady travellers grouped around geographical areas. There is surprisingly little written about those women who travelled to Australia. There is a short section on Oceania where Hodgson mentions Mary Ann Parker, Louisa Anne Meredith, Ellen Clacy, the Hill sisters, Lady Annie Brassey and Marianna North.<sup>44</sup> Douglas Sellick's book *Venus in Transit – Australia's women travellers 1788-*

<sup>35</sup> Emma Jane Curtin, "In Awe of Mrs Grundy: British gentility and emigrant gentlewomen in Australia, 1830-1880" (PhD thesis, La Trobe University, 1995): Chapter 8 is concerned with rural life.

<sup>36</sup> Emma Floyd, "Without artificial constraint: Gentility and British gentlewomen in rural Australia" in Rita S. Kranidis, ed., *Imperial Objects* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998): 85-107.

<sup>37</sup> Penny Russell, *A Wish of Distinction* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994).

<sup>38</sup> John Archer, *Building a Nation – A history of the Australian house* (Sydney: William Collins, 1987).

<sup>39</sup> B.W. Higman, *Domestic Service in Australia* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2002).

<sup>40</sup> Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference – An analysis of women's travel writing and colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>41</sup> Mary Russell, *The Blessings of a Good Thick Skirt – Women travellers and their world* (London: Collins, 1986).

<sup>42</sup> Alexandra Allen, *Travelling Ladies* (London: Jupiter, 1980).

<sup>43</sup> Barbara Hodgson, *No Place for a Lady – Tales of adventurous women travelers* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2002).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 137-156.

1930<sup>45</sup> is a pioneering collection of short extracts that focus on the Australian experiences of some female travellers. Jan Bassett's anthology of Australian travel literature *Great Southern Landings*<sup>46</sup> contains references to only a handful of female travellers. *The Virago Book of Women Travellers*,<sup>47</sup> on the other hand, does not even mention any female travellers to Australia.

A great number of scholars have analysed individual women and their works. Colonial writers like Louisa Atkinson,<sup>48</sup> Eliza Brown,<sup>49</sup> Rachel Henning,<sup>50</sup> Georgiana McCrae,<sup>51</sup> Georgiana Molloy<sup>52</sup> and Louisa Anne Meredith<sup>53</sup> seem to be some of the most widely discussed authors of non-fiction. Their literary, historical and botanical output is mentioned in numerous studies. It is also quite usual to compare and find parallels with other pioneer female settlers and writers such as Catharine Traill in Canada and Lady Barker in New Zealand.<sup>54</sup> Another interesting aspect of colonial women's accounts is the way they compare to and differ from colonial men's texts. Delys Bird<sup>55</sup> and Joy Hooton<sup>56</sup> are two scholars who sought to compare women and men's life-writings but this aspect occupied only a small section of their research. They stated what they saw as the main characteristics of women's personal narratives but they did not examine the range of texts in the light and depth I am going to do.

This literature review has argued that scholars used Victorian gentlewomen's life-

<sup>45</sup> Douglas R.G. Sellick, ed., *Venus in Transit – Australia's women travellers 1788-1930* (North Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2003).

<sup>46</sup> Jan Bassett, ed., *Great Southern Landings – An anthology of Antipodean travel* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>47</sup> Mary Morris, et al., eds, *The Virago Book of Women Travellers* (London: Virago Press, 1996).

<sup>48</sup> See for example Graham White, "Louisa Atkinson: Celebrant of the colonial landscape" *Southerly* No. 1, (1991): 113-126.

<sup>49</sup> See for example Delys Bird, "Women in the wilderness: Gender, landscape and Eliza Brown's letters and journal" *Westerly* Vol. 36, No. 4, (1991): 33-38.

<sup>50</sup> See for example Paula Hamilton, et al., "'Watering geraniums and feeding dogs': The letters of Rachel Henning" *Journal of Australian Studies* No. 19, (1986): 84-95; and Anne Lear, "Spot the Lady: Rachel Henning finds herself in the bush" *Women's Writing* Vol. 8, No. 3, (2001): 391-402.

<sup>51</sup> See for example Brian Matthews, "Australian colonial women and their autobiographies" *Kunapipi* Vol. VII, No. 2-3, (1985): 36-45.

<sup>52</sup> See for example Jessica White, "Efflorescence: The letters of Georgiana Molloy" *Hecate* Vol. 28, No. 2, (2002): 176-190.

<sup>53</sup> Kordula Dunscombe, "In the service of infinite and glorious creation: The nature writing of Louisa Anne Meredith" *Papers: Explorations into children's literature* Vol. 8, No. 2, (1998): 16-30; Tim Bonyhady, "Louisa" in Tim Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth* (Carlton South: Miegunyah Press, 2000): 127-157; Judith Johnston, "One woman's testimony: Louisa Anne Meredith's Notes and Sketches of New South Wales" in Caroline Guerin, et al., eds, *Crossing Lines – Formations of Australian culture* (Adelaide: Proceedings of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature Conference, 1995): 40-45; Judith Johnston, "Urbanising the colonial space: Louisa Anne Meredith's Over the Straits: A visit to Victoria (1861)" *Nineteenth-century Feminisms* No. 3, (2000): 25-41.

<sup>54</sup> See for example Dorothy Jones, "Ladies in the bush: Catharine Traill, Mary Barker and Rachel Henning" *SPAN* No. 21, (1985): 96-120; and Judith Johnston, "'Woman's testimony': Imperialist discourse in the professional colonial travel writing of Louisa Anne Meredith and Catherine Parr Traill" *Australian and New Zealand Studies in Canada* No. 11, (1994): 34-55.

<sup>55</sup> Bird, "Women in the wilderness" 35.

<sup>56</sup> Hooton, *Stories of Herself When Young* 89.

writings in different ways and for different purposes. I will also describe settler women's colonial life, and praise and critique their achievement and contribution to knowledge. I will treat women's personal narratives as historical documents and will try to reconstruct their world including these women's perception of the bush and the indigenous Australians. Furthermore, I will analyse how colonial women were affected by the migration experience and to what extent they had to modify their ideals of gentility to survive in rural Australia. I also wish to compare colonial men and women's personal narratives to determine if there was a distinctive style of women's writing in the nineteenth century. My analysis will seek to add new light to the understanding of colonial women's personal narratives in that, firstly, it will take into account a much larger selection of primary materials and, secondly, it will analyse them in a much wider context. This approach will therefore result in a more complex picture about the situation of colonial women in rural Australia.

### The Victorian Gentlewoman

Those women who understood themselves to be gentlewomen had a clearly defined role to perform in the nineteenth century. They lived in a world of their own where they knew what was expected of them. They led their lives according to certain rules that instructed them how they were expected to live and behave in specific situations.

Women and men led gender-specific lives in Victorian Britain. Judith Godden claims that 'women in the nineteenth century lived in a world which allocated different spheres of interest and activity to each sex, and this resulted in separate sub-cultures'.<sup>57</sup> There was a distinction between the public and private realms of life. Men lived in the public world whereas women belonged to the private world of the home. Women's responsibilities were defined inside the house from where they were expected to derive self-fulfilment while remaining largely ignorant about the events of the outside world. Men, in contrast, performed public functions and were expected to play an active role in worldly events. This separation of the two genders on the basis of their expected realms of influence is known as 'separate spheres'.<sup>58</sup>

The ideology of domesticity evolved with the rise of the middle class that took place between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries in England. It could be seen as a religious society's answer to the challenges and demands of a capitalist economy. It could also be argued

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<sup>57</sup> Judith Godden, "A new look at pioneer women" *Hecate - A Women's Interdisciplinary Journal* Vol. V, No. 2, (1979): 13.

that the division between the public and private realm was the result of British society's quest for equilibrium. Deborah Gorham suggests that

The cult of domesticity helped to relieve the tensions that existed between the moral values of Christianity, with its emphasis on love and charity, and the values of capitalism, which asserted that the world of commerce should be pervaded by a spirit of competition and a recognition that only the fittest should survive. By locating Christian values in the home, and capitalist values in the public world of commerce, the Victorians were able to achieve an efficient moral balance. The home became a shelter for religious values, in their widest context including the values associated with personal relationships; the world of commerce could thereby be absolved from the necessity of acting on Christian principles. Moreover its moral barrenness became bearable, because the idealisation of the home meant that, at least in theory, some refuge from the harsh public world was possible.<sup>59</sup>

Many Victorian gentlewomen accepted their domestic place and rejoiced in their families. Christiana Blomfield's letter from Dagworth on the Hunter River perfectly illustrates one woman's view of her own domestic bliss. In her letter dated 2 April 1830, Christiana wrote to her sister about her family and the education of her sons and noted that 'We go on just in the same quiet way, never happier than we are together. Thomas goes out but seldom, and I the same, for I never see any place I like so well as my own peaceful home, good husband, and affectionate children.'<sup>60</sup> Christiana was clearly rejoicing in her family and appreciated her place in the private sphere. This separation of the different spheres of influence was, however, an ideal and not everybody conformed to it. This thesis will argue that many colonial gentlewomen sought to step into the perceived world of men while at the same time wishing to preserve their social position as gentlewomen.

The concept of the gentlewoman offered a 'model of femininity'<sup>61</sup> in nineteenth-century England. This ideal was known as the 'perfect wife' at the beginning of the century.<sup>62</sup> During the Victorian period the notion of the 'perfect lady'<sup>63</sup> prevailed that gave way to the 'new woman' by the end of the century.<sup>64</sup> The term 'lady' was often replaced by 'gentlewoman'. In this context the ideals of 'ladylike behaviour' were often referred to as 'terms of gentility'.<sup>65</sup> Martha Vicinus suggests that the 'ideal was most fully developed in the upper middle class'<sup>66</sup> but it existed to a lesser degree among the middle and the lower middle class, as well.

<sup>58</sup> Sue Rowley, "Things a bushwoman cannot do" in Susan Magarey, et al., eds, *Debutante Nation – Feminism contests the 1890s* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1993): 185.

<sup>59</sup> Deborah Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (London: Croom Helm, 1982): 4.

<sup>60</sup> Eve Buscombe, ed., *The Blomfield Letters Covering the Period 1799 to 1845* (Sydney: Eureka Research, 1982): 68.

<sup>61</sup> Martha Vicinus, "Introduction: The perfect Victorian lady" in Martha Vicinus, ed., *Suffer and Be Still – Women in the Victorian age* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973): ix.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Barbara Rees, *The Victorian Lady* (London: Gordon & Cremonesi, 1977): 15.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

The concept of the 'perfect lady' did not lend itself easily to definition. Barbara Rees argues that 'there was in the Victorian age a remarkable degree of uniformity of conduct among ladies, whether the wives of doctors, on the fringes of the middle class when the era began, or of belted earls. What was essential was that one's conduct, resulting from proper feelings, should be proper.'<sup>67</sup> In addition to proper conduct, there was also 'a generally agreed upon set of possessions and circumstances, a "paraphernalia of gentility" that formed the material base'<sup>68</sup> of the genteel family. Martha Vicinus offers another definition and describes the 'perfect lady' by way of her lifestyle. She suggests that

before marriage a young girl was brought up to be perfectly innocent and sexually ignorant. The predominant ideology of the age insisted that she have little sexual feeling at all, although family affection and the desire for motherhood were considered innate. Morally, she was left untested, and kept under the watchful eye of her mother in her father's home. [...] Once married, the perfect lady did not work; she had servants. She was mother only at set times of the day, even of the year; she left the heirs in the hands of nannies and governesses. Her social and intellectual growth was confined to the family and close friends. Her status was totally dependent upon the economic position of her father and then her husband. In her most perfect form, the lady combined total sexual innocence, conspicuous consumption and the worship of the family hearth.<sup>69</sup>

Richard Altick claims that idleness was Victorian gentlewomen's chief characteristic. These women led a secluded life that disavowed taking an active part in any profession or trade.<sup>70</sup> Gentlewomen were afraid of taking paid employment because in this way they would have undermined the Victorian ideal of the true lady.<sup>71</sup> But gentlewomen were not completely without work in the sense that they had certain tasks and activities to perform. 'Accomplishments' was the term given to describe the kind of activities that filled the greater part of gentlewomen's daily life. These women were encouraged to pursue some accomplishments that included needlework, sketching, watercolour painting, music and flower arrangement. In addition to these genteel pursuits the rest of their time was taken up by supervising the household staff, doing charity work and visiting. Their activities were limited to these polite accomplishments because contemporary opinion held that female brains were not capable of intellectual work.<sup>72</sup>

The 'perfect lady' was not expected to earn money and work for her own living because her husband 'reigned lord and master'.<sup>73</sup> This principle was also valid in the colonies as Mary

<sup>66</sup> Vicinus, "Introduction" ix.

<sup>67</sup> Rees, *The Victorian Lady* 13.

<sup>68</sup> Gorham, *The Victorian Girl* 9.

<sup>69</sup> Vicinus, "Introduction" ix.

<sup>70</sup> Richard D. Altick, *Victorian People and Ideas* (London: J.M. Dent, 1974): 51.

<sup>71</sup> Jeanne Peterson, "The Victorian governess: Status incongruence in family and society" *Victorian Studies* Vol. XIV, No. 1, (1970): 10.

<sup>72</sup> Altick *Victorian People and Ideas* 51-52, 54.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

Cowle noted:

It was unheard of for a lady to do her own work. [...] No girl ever dreamt of working while her father was alive and if there were unmarried daughters most fathers managed to leave them enough to keep them even if it were only genteel poverty and they could keep one maid.<sup>74</sup>

Only a few opportunities existed for gentlewomen to earn some money and teaching was one of them. Mary Cowle pointed out that 'in the few cases where a gentleman died leaving his family penniless, the daughter could do nothing but go out as governesses or teach music, nothing else was "*Comme il faut*". As for a well bred girl going into an office or taking up some other occupation, well of course it was not even thought of.'<sup>75</sup> Respectable women could earn their living by working as schoolmistress or governess but, as Altick shows, they were frequently seen as failures.<sup>76</sup> Writing was seen as another possible way for middle-class women to achieve financial independence.

The rigid English class structure was transplanted to the Australian colonies but as Stuart MacIntyre argues 'with the establishment of equality before the law, the end of transportation, the advent of democratic self-government, and spread of property-ownership, such formal barriers yielded. [...] Absence of deference became a hallmark of colonial society.'<sup>77</sup> The colonies offered the prospect of social mobility and many colonists were encouraged in this belief by nineteenth-century emigration propaganda: the colonies were depicted as places where servants could become employers of servants. Domestic service was therefore seen by many as a 'bridging occupation'. Higman argues that domestic service was 'not viewed as a prelude to alternative types of paid employment, but rather as a step along the way to marriage, motherhood and private domesticity'.<sup>78</sup> Jane Isabella Watts recorded the story of one servant in South Australia in the 1840s:

The lady's maid who dressed her [mistress's] hair so artistically, and occasionally got a slipper thrown at her head for her pains, if less expert than usual, was quickly dismissed, becoming a few years afterwards herself, in this 'topsy-turvy' land, the mistress of a troop of servants in one of the largest houses in the colony.<sup>79</sup>

Autobiographical works are testimonies to the way colonial gentlewomen responded to the more fluid class relations in the colonies. Female employers seemed to be frustrated by the

<sup>74</sup> Mary Cowle was born at Woodloes 11 kilometres away from Perth in 1874. Her family moved to a house in Perth in 1882 but later lived at Claremont on fifty acres of land. She recalled in 1932 that they lived 'exactly the same way as upper class English people'. Those in her social network conducted homes with numerous servants. She described the role of the lady between the late 1870s and early 1890s in Perth. Mary Cowle, "Childhood recollections of Mary Cowle (née Bird)" in *The Bird Family and Woodloes* (Perth: Canning District Historical Society, 1985): 7-8.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>76</sup> Altick, *Victorian People and Ideas* 55-56.

<sup>77</sup> Stuart MacIntyre, "Class" in Graeme Davison, et al., eds, *The Oxford Companion to Australian History* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1998): 130.

<sup>78</sup> Higman, *Domestic Service in Australia* 260-263.

fact that people who received wages would regard themselves as their equals or even their superiors. Emma Macpherson spent only fifteen months in New South Wales in the late 1850s but she acknowledged that this was a problem that affected the whole country. She formed the opinion that 'now-a-days, there is no one who has lived a short time either in towns or in the interior of Australia but must feel that here "the servant is greater than his lord", and that the former confers an obligation on the latter by entering his service'. On the whole, though, she looked at this situation as 'none the less disagreeable'.<sup>80</sup>

But it was not only the servants who wanted to improve their social position. W.K. Hancock remarked that 'men do not emigrate in despair, but in hope'.<sup>81</sup> Many emigrants believed that the colonies could offer more opportunities for them than England. James Henty, a pioneer Victorian settler, argued to his brothers that 'immediately we get there we shall be placed in the First Rank in Society, a circumstance which must not be overlooked as it will tend most materially to our comfort and future advantage'.<sup>82</sup>

The Victorian gentlewoman was a complex female ideal. When people migrated to the Australian colonies they took notions of gentility with them. This thesis will show how British gentlewomen went about negotiating with these ideals in their colonial life.

### The Question of Emigration to Australia

Free settlers began to arrive in Australia after the first convict settlement but their numbers were negligible until the 1820s.<sup>83</sup> Many gentlewomen came out in the period between 1820 and 1900 and they arrived free and mostly unassisted.<sup>84</sup> This section will discuss their reasons for settling in Australia.

Women usually had little say in decision-making in the Victorian family structure where decisions were mostly made by men. There were a few women who initially did not support the idea of emigration: Georgiana McCrae was one of them. She was born in London in 1804 as the illegitimate daughter of George, Marquis of Huntly. She later lived in Scotland where she

<sup>79</sup> Cited in *Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>80</sup> Emma Macpherson, *My Experiences in Australia – Being recollections of a visit to the Australian colonies in 1856-7. By a Lady* (London: J.F. Hope, 1860): 180-181. Rachel Henning observed the same trend in her letter in 1874. She wrote that in 'republican countries [...] "Jack is as good as his master", and much more in his own estimation'. David Adams, ed., *The Letters of Rachel Henning* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1963): 267.

<sup>81</sup> W.K. Hancock, *Australia* (Brisbane: Jacaranda Press, 1966): 39.

<sup>82</sup> Cited in G.C. Bolton, "The idea of a colonial gentry" *Historical Studies* Vol. 13, No. 51, (1968): 318-319.

<sup>83</sup> James Jupp, *Immigration* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1998): 9.

<sup>84</sup> Ruth Teale, *Colonial Eve – Sources on women in Australia 1788-1914* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1978): 64.

married Andrew McCrae in 1830.<sup>85</sup> Andrew did not succeed financially in Britain and decided to migrate to Australia together with his brothers and sisters. Georgiana's journal suggests that she was not very enthusiastic about this plan. She noted in September 1838 that 'it is irrevocably decided that we are to sail for Sydney per *Royal Saxon* from Gravesend November 13.' It reads as if she had absolutely no say in the matter whatsoever. Andrew eventually left for the colonies on that ship but Georgiana and the children's health did not permit them to sail until 1841. The family eventually settled down in Melbourne.<sup>86</sup>

In a few cases, however, women were the driving force behind emigration. Eliza Brown was a woman who strongly influenced and encouraged her husband to migrate to Western Australia. Thomas Brown explained to his father-in-law his reasons for coming to the Swan River in a letter on 21 December 1850. He admitted that he was satisfied with his life in England where he lived in prosperity and comfort. He emphasised that it was his wife's miserable condition and her constant yearning for a warmer climate that made him consider the possibility of setting up a new home in the colonies. It was Eliza who set her eyes on the Swan River where they eventually arrived with their two children in 1841. Eliza was then thirty years old. She strongly believed that her family would succeed in Australia and she held to this belief throughout all their difficulties in the 1840s.<sup>87</sup>

Mary Thomas was another woman who argued in favour of emigration. Her letter reveals that she was supportive of her husband's intention to settle down in the colonies. She explicitly stated her reason for emigration to South Australia in a letter to her brother George Harris in Southampton dated 14 October 1838. In the first place, she argued that her husband's health required a change of climate and Australia seemed to be an ideal place for improving one's health. Secondly, their house was in poor condition and would have required a lot of money to repair it. Thirdly, she wanted to see her sons as property owners. She noted that 'these were the principal reasons which made me encourage rather than otherwise Mr Thomas's inclination to become a landholder in this new Province'. Her wording puts Thomas as the initiator of the family's colonial enterprise but the earlier sections of the letter were written in the first person singular and reveal Mary's personal ambitions. She wrote that 'I hoped [my husband's health] might be improved by a sea voyage' and when she was considering her sons' future prospects she admitted that 'I flattered myself [...] that they might become at some time or other possessed

<sup>85</sup> Norman Cowper, "Georgiana Huntly McCrae" *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Hereafter ADB) Vol. 2: 160-161.

<sup>86</sup> Hugh McCrae, ed., *Georgiana's Journal - Melbourne 1841-65* (Melbourne: Angus & Robertson, 1966): 1.

of considerable property'.<sup>88</sup> Contemporary notions of a woman's place required that her husband take charge of the family matters. Women were supposed to be submissive rather than active members of the family and Mary's insistence that it was her husband who encouraged the family's migration fits well into contemporary notions of a woman's place.<sup>89</sup>

Mary Thomas's wish that her sons might become landholders in the colonies was a reflection of the fact that English society valued land as the benchmark of one's social standing; the ownership of land was therefore a crucial aspect of the colonial enterprise. Land was more widely accessible in the colonies than in Britain and thus the colonies offered social betterment. An anonymous male Queensland settler noted that

There is in the breast of almost every man a desire to be the possessor of a freehold of his own. In Great Britain, this is for most an impossibility. There society appears to be fast dividing itself into two classes as far as farming is concerned, large land owners and land occupiers. It is in the Colonies or the United States that the man who wishes to live on his own land and see his family do the same must look for the accomplishment of his wishes.<sup>90</sup>

It was widely believed that the acquisition of land in the colonies could lead to a higher social position; social ambition was another highly motivating incentive for emigration.

Furthermore, many colonists believed that it was their destiny to take possession of the colonial land. Darwin's theory of the 'Survival of the fittest' dominated contemporary thinking and was seen as justifying the dispossession of the Aborigines.<sup>91</sup> The settlers argued that the seemingly stronger and more civilised English society had to expand its territory because the Aborigines were perceived as a weak race on the verge of extinction. They also believed that since the indigenous Australians did not cultivate the land in the European sense of the word it was their duty to make the best out of it. Mary McConnel recollected talking to a native woman in Queensland who stretched out her arm and told her that all the land around belonged to her. Mary admitted that 'it did seem hard to have it all taken from them, but it had to be'. She explained that 'they cultivated nothing; they were no use on it'.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Cowan, *A Faithful Picture* 129-130.

<sup>88</sup> Evan Kyffin Thomas, ed., *The Diary and Letters of Mary Thomas 1836-1866: Being the early days of South Australia* (Adelaide: W.K. Thomas, 1915): 91.

<sup>89</sup> Chapter Two will show that lady travellers who ventured to Australia by themselves were another group of women who made their own decisions.

<sup>90</sup> An eight years' resident, *The Queen of the Colonies; or, Queensland as I knew it* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1876): 183.

<sup>91</sup> Darwin's theory will be further discussed in Chapter Six.

<sup>92</sup> Mary McConnel, *Memories of Days Long Gone By: By the wife of an Australian pioneer* (Brisbane?: M McConnel, 1905): 43. Emma Macpherson was also aware of Aboriginal ownership of the land in the late 1850s but argued that the 'interests of humanity and the cause of civilization and progress justified our taking possession of [...] the soil'. Macpherson, *My Experiences in Australia* 236-237. William James Woods remarked, that 'Personally I never doubted that England had a moral right to occupy Australia. It was very thinly peopled by the blacks; but if they had been tenfold more numerous they could never have developed the resources of the country, which undoubtedly were intended by the Creator for development. It was for the good of the human race that England

A considerable proportion of the gentlewomen were young or still single when they came out to Australia. Fanny Macleay came out in 1826 when she was 34 years old. She was still single and followed her family to Sydney when her father Alexander Macleay was appointed Colonial Secretary of New South Wales.<sup>93</sup> A strong sense of family ties often induced gentlewomen to follow the rest of their family to the colonies. Rachel Henning's chief objective was to keep house for her bachelor brother Biddulph. Rachel was born at Bristol in 1826, the eldest daughter in the family, and when her mother died in 1845 Rachel looked after her three sisters and younger brother. Biddulph's health was greatly diminished by scarlet fever and he sought a new life in a better climate in Australia. He sailed for Sydney in 1853 and Rachel joined him and her other sister a year later. They lived at Appin, 16 kilometres south of Campbelltown in New South Wales, but Rachel did not like Australia and soon returned to England.<sup>94</sup>

A small group of single gentlewomen undertook the long voyage to Australia in the hope of better work opportunities and marriage. Some of them came out as assisted migrants. Emigration societies were set up such as the National Benevolent Emigration Society, the Society for the Employment of Women and the Female Middle Class Emigration Society.<sup>95</sup> The Female Middle Class Emigration Society, under the leadership of Maria Rye, sent about 150 governesses to Australia between 1861 and 1885.<sup>96</sup>

A number of women followed their hearts and accepted a life in the colonies when they went out to marry their fiancés. Sophy Taylor lived in Middlesex in the 1840s where she got to know Edward Cooke. He sailed to South Australia in 1847 in the hope of a better life there and Sophy promised to join him as soon as possible. Her father resisted the idea of losing the daughter who acted as a mother to his orphaned children, but she eventually boarded a ship bound for Adelaide in July 1851.<sup>97</sup> Mary McMaugh also sailed to Australia in 1849 with the purpose of marrying her fiancé, Jack, who had built a homestead on the Upper Macleay River in New South Wales. Shortly after her arrival in Sydney, Mary travelled to Port Macquarie to meet him. They immediately got married and made the long journey to their new home. The marriage turned out to be a good one and they had nine children. She was filled with grief when Jack was

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should colonise this Southern Continent.' William James Woods, *A Visit to Victoria* (London: Wyman, 1886): 41.

<sup>93</sup> Beverley Earnshaw, et al., eds, *Fanny to William - The letters of Frances Leonora Macleay 1812-1836* (Sydney: Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, Macleay Museum, University of Sydney, 1993): vi.

<sup>94</sup> Margaret Caldwell, "Rachel Henning" *ADB* Vol. 4: 378-379.

<sup>95</sup> Peterson, "The Victorian governess" 20.

<sup>96</sup> Kerryn Goldsworthy, "The space of spinsterhood: Letters to the Female Middle Class Emigration Society 1862-1882" in Caroline Guerin, et al., eds, *Crossing Lines - Formations of Australian culture* (Adelaide: Proceedings of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature Conference, 1995): 123.

<sup>97</sup> Taylor, *Sophy Under Sail* 7-30.

accidentally killed and left her with nine young children.<sup>98</sup>

It was not unusual for many newlyweds to come out soon after their wedding. Ada Cambridge was born at St Germans, Norfolk, in 1844 and married a clergyman, George Frederick Cross, in 1870. Later that year they sailed for Melbourne. Her autobiographical work *Thirty Years in Australia*<sup>99</sup> recounted their experience of life in seven Victorian parishes. They first lived in Wangaratta, then moved to Yackandandah in 1872, Ballan in 1875, Coleraine in 1877, Bendigo in 1883, Beechworth in 1885 and then to Williamstown in 1893.<sup>100</sup>

Some women came out to the colonies as wives of colonial officials. Lady Mary Broome stayed in Western Australia for a few years from 1882 while her husband was Governor of Western Australia. Mary was born in 1831 in Jamaica where her father worked as the last island secretary. She married Captain Barker at the age of twenty-one and on his death she married Frederick Broome in 1865. Broome tried his fortune as a settler in New Zealand but he failed. With better prospects as a government officer he held the posts of colonial secretary in Natal and Lieutenant-Governor of Mauritius before his Australian appointment.<sup>101</sup> Like Lady Broome, Lady Jane Franklin lived in Van Diemen's Land from 1837 to 1843 during her husband's term of office as Lieutenant-Governor of Van Diemen's Land. She was born in 1791 in London and became second wife to Sir John Franklin in 1828.<sup>102</sup>

The improvement of health was another common incentive for moving to the colonies. Janet Millett was a pastor's wife whose husband Edward was suffering from 'tic douloureux' - an extremely painful neurological disorder that caused convulsive face-twitching. He was treated by leading English physicians but without any result. The Milletts decided to sail to Western Australia in the hope that the sea voyage and the warmer climate might improve his health. They left England in 1863 and Edward served as an Anglican chaplain in York for five years. In her narrative, Janet called that parish Barladong. Edward's health did not improve, however, and they returned home in 1869 where he died seven years later. Janet published her recollections of Western Australian life in 1872 under the title of *An Australian Parsonage or, The settler and the savage in Western Australia*.<sup>103</sup>

British gentlewomen left their homeland for Australia for a variety of reasons. Most of

<sup>98</sup> Mary McMaugh, *Pioneering on the Upper Macleay* (Sydney: Mitchell Library, 1922): 1-2, 15.

<sup>99</sup> Ada Cambridge, *Thirty Years in Australia* (London: Methuen, 1903).

<sup>100</sup> J.I. Roe, "Ada Cambridge" *ADB* Vol. 3: 334-335.

<sup>101</sup> Alexandra Hasluck, "Mary Anne Broome" *ADB* Vol. 3: 250-251.

<sup>102</sup> Frances Woodward, "Lady Jane Franklin" *ADB* Vol. 1: 411-412.

<sup>103</sup> Mrs Edward Millett, *An Australian Parsonage or, The settler and the savage in Western Australia* (Nedlands, WA: University of Western Australia Press, 1980): Introduction by Rica Erikson, unpaginated.

the time they submitted themselves to the wishes of their husbands and followed them out to the colonies. While women did not have much influence on decision-making some gentlewomen nevertheless encouraged and supported their husband's colonial enterprise. These women showed much initiative and were willing to make sacrifices in the interest of their families.

### The Spread of Settlement

The aim of this section is to provide the historical and geographical context of colonial expansion. Placing these gentlewomen on the map will help us to understand what kind of circumstances they faced during their colonial enterprise, particularly in terms of whether they were residing on the frontier or in settled areas. With the expansion of settlement the frontier was gradually receding. The sheer size of the continent implied that there were always areas to be explored and settled. Colonisation progressed rapidly and towards the end of the nineteenth century there were fewer regions without European influence. This brief outline of the history of each state will also serve to place the colonists in a time framework. I intend to show that while decades separated the period early Victorian and late Queensland colonists wrote about, they underwent similar experiences because they were describing a similar phase of settlement and colonisation in the history of these two colonies. While Victoria was first settled in the late 1830s, certain sections of northern Queensland were not opened up before the 1860s and 70s. Both emigrant and native-born women will be considered.<sup>104</sup> Lady travellers will be excluded from this section and will be introduced in later chapters.

#### **New South Wales**

New South Wales was established as a penal colony in 1788 but the settlement was limited by the boundaries of a mountain range. In 1813 Gregory Blaxland, William Lawson and William Wentworth managed to cross the Blue Mountains. Bathurst was founded shortly after a road was constructed over the mountains. This good pasture land of the New England Tableland and Liverpool plains attracted a lot of settlers. By 1821 the population of New South Wales numbered 39,000 people of whom 22,000 were convicts.<sup>105</sup>

Christiana Blomfield was an early colonist. She was born in Surrey, England, in 1802. She was the daughter of Christiana Brooks and arrived with her family in Sydney as a twelve-

<sup>104</sup> I will later argue that the experience of migrant and colonial-born people were often different.

year-old-girl. She married Lieutenant Thomas Blomfield in 1820 and four years later they settled down on their land grant Dagworth, on the Hunter River about 30 kilometres from Newcastle. After the death of her parents in the mid 1830s she inherited their property Denham Court near Liverpool and returned to live there.<sup>106</sup> Christiana kept in touch with her English relatives through letters.<sup>107</sup> Kathleen Lambert arrived with her parents in Sydney in 1843. She attended a girls' boarding school and later worked as a governess at several country towns and stations. She also spent a lot of time at her brother's property at Wellington. Marrying late in life she moved back to England in the late 1880s.<sup>108</sup> She recalled her life in the book *The Golden South – Memories of Australian home life from 1843 to 1888* by 'Lyth'.<sup>109</sup> Emma Macpherson was only a temporary resident of New South Wales. She arrived with her husband in Sydney in 1856 and after a few months they moved to a station called Keera in the Gwydir district.<sup>110</sup> They returned home the following year where Emma compiled her reminiscences of colonial life under the title *My Experiences in Australia – Being recollections of a visit to the Australian colonies in 1856-7. By a Lady.*<sup>111</sup>

The life-writings of colonial-born women are also significant. Annabella Boswell was born in 1826 at Yarrows near Bathurst. Her father passed away when she was in her early teens and she went to live with various relatives in Bathurst, Parramatta, Lake Innes and Brownlow Hill.<sup>112</sup> She kept a daily journal throughout the years.<sup>113</sup> Louisa Atkinson was born at Oldbury near Berrima in 1834. She lived at Fernhurst at the Kurrajong Heights west of Sydney in her young womanhood where she often made excursions to the nearby bush. She published a series of nature articles in contemporary newspapers.<sup>114</sup> Her nature writings appeared as newspaper columns in the *Sydney Morning Herald* between 1861 and 1872. These sketches appeared under the title 'A Voice from the Country'.<sup>115</sup> Ellen Campbell was also a colonial-born woman. She spent her childhood on a station about five kilometres from the township of Carcoar in the

<sup>105</sup> Cedric Flower, *Illustrated History of New South Wales* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1981): 67-69.

<sup>106</sup> Clarke, *Life Lines* 97.

<sup>107</sup> Buscombe, *The Blomfield Letters Covering the Period 1799 to 1845*.

<sup>108</sup> AAN Vol. 1: 94-95.

<sup>109</sup> Kathleen Lambert, *The Golden South – Memories of Australian home life from 1843 to 1888* by 'Lyth' (London: Ward and Downey, 1890).

<sup>110</sup> AAN Vol. 2: 169.

<sup>111</sup> Macpherson, *My Experiences in Australia*.

<sup>112</sup> AAN Vol. 1: 23-25.

<sup>113</sup> Morton Herman, ed., *Annabella Boswell's Journal* (Melbourne: Angus & Robertson, 1965); and Annabella Boswell, *Annabella Boswell's Other Journal 1848-1851 called "Further recollections of my early days in Australia"* (Cook, ACT: Mulini Press, 1992).

<sup>114</sup> A.H. Chisholm, "Caroline Louisa Waring Atkinson" *ADB* Vol. 3: 59-60.

1850s<sup>116</sup> recalling her memories in the book *An Australian Childhood*.<sup>117</sup>

There were a few female colonists who lived on isolated stations – an experience which often implied pioneering circumstances. Sarah Musgrave was born at Burrangong Station near the site of the present town of Young. When her father died her mother remarried and went to live in Victoria. Sarah stayed with her uncle at Burrangong. She married Dennis Regan in 1852 and went to live with him at Bland Station. Six years later they moved back to Burrangong where Denis became the manager. He died in 1863 and Sarah married Thomas Musgrave two years later.<sup>118</sup> She recorded her experiences of pioneering life in her narrative *The Wayback*.<sup>119</sup> Henrietta Foott was born in Scotland of a distinguished family in 1822. When she was twenty years of age she married James Foott. They lived an extravagant life and as a consequence he squandered away most of his inheritance. They had to leave the country and arrived in Melbourne in 1853. From 1860 they resided at Jandra Station situated near Fort Bourke. In 1871 they moved to Sydney where James died a couple of years later.<sup>120</sup> Henrietta recalled her bush life in her book *Sketches of Life in the Bush, or, Life in the interior*.<sup>121</sup>

Jessie Lloyd was born near Launceston, Tasmania in 1843 but grew up in Melbourne. Her family returned to Tasmania when Jessie turned sixteen. She married George Lloyd in 1866 and later moved to Terembone Station. It was an isolated property on the Teridgerie Creek about 50 kilometres north-west of Coonamble in north-western New South Wales. Jessie died there in 1885. She wrote a series of articles in the *Illustrated Sydney News* between 1881 and 1883 under the pseudonym 'Silverleaf' on various aspects of station life.<sup>122</sup> Katherine Langloh Parker was born at Encounter Bay, South Australia in 1856. She grew up at Marra Station on the Darling in New South Wales. She moved to Adelaide in 1872 where she married Langloh Parker three years later. In 1879 they settled down at Bangate Station on the Narran River near Walgett, New South Wales. She was childless.<sup>123</sup> She recorded her experiences of life and relationship with the Aborigines at Bangate Station in the 1880s in her reminiscences that were later published under

<sup>115</sup> Ann Moyal, "Collectors and illustrators – Women botanists of the nineteenth century" in D.J. Carr, et al., eds, *People and Plants in Australia* (Sydney: Academic Press, 1981): 342-346.

<sup>116</sup> AAN Vol. 2: 36.

<sup>117</sup> Ellen Campbell, *An Australian Childhood* (London: Blackie, 1892).

<sup>118</sup> AAN Vol. 1: 117.

<sup>119</sup> Sarah Musgrave, *The Wayback* (West Wyalong: Bland District Historical Society and Young District Historical Society, 1984).

<sup>120</sup> Clarke, *Pen Portraits* 91-94.

<sup>121</sup> Mrs James Foott, *Sketches of Life in the Bush, or, Life in the interior* (Sydney: Gibbs, Shallard, 1872).

<sup>122</sup> Clarke, *Pen Portraits* 128-133.

<sup>123</sup> Marcie Muir, "Catherine Eliza Somerville Stow" *ADB* Vol. 12: 113-114.

the title *My Bush Book*.<sup>124</sup>

### Van Diemen's Land / Tasmania

Lieutenant John Bowen established the first settlement at the Derwent in 1803. It was later moved to Sullivan's Cove where Hobart Town was founded. Both convicts and free settlers began to arrive in Van Diemen's Land and by 1836 the population reached 43,000 of which 24,000 were free settlers.<sup>125</sup> The colony was later renamed Tasmania after Abel Tasman to erase the memory of its long history as a penal colony.

Elizabeth Fenton was an early settler. She was twenty-six years old and married to Captain Michael Fenton when she set foot in Van Diemen's Land in 1829. She and her husband settled down near New Norfolk and called their station Fenton Forest.<sup>126</sup> Annie Baxter was born in Devon in 1816 and married Andrew Baxter when she was eighteen years old. Andrew was an officer of the 50<sup>th</sup> Regiment that was to be stationed in Van Diemen's Land. Annie followed Baxter in 1834 to Van Diemen's Land where she experienced the town life of Hobart and Launceston until 1838. After his transfer to Sydney, Baxter resigned and took up land near Kempsey. They farmed at Yesabba Station north of Port Macquarie until 1844. Then they moved to Yambuck Station near Port Fairy, Victoria where they remained until 1849.<sup>127</sup> Annie was a prolific journal writer<sup>128</sup> and published her reminiscences of colonial life under the title *Memories of the Past: By a Lady in Australia*.<sup>129</sup>

Louisa Anne Meredith was perhaps Tasmania's most famous female writer of the colonial period. She was born in Birmingham in 1812 and married her cousin Charles in 1839. Soon after the wedding they left for New South Wales. She stayed at Bathurst while Charles was inspecting several sheep stations on the Murrumbidgee. After a few weeks they moved to Homebush near Sydney. Louisa described the native flora and fauna, colonial society and recalled her impressions of life in New South Wales in her hugely popular book *Notes and*

<sup>124</sup> Marcie Muir, ed., *My Bush Book – K. Langloh Parker's 1880s story of outback station life* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1982).

<sup>125</sup> Lloyd Robson, *A Short History of Tasmania* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1997): 10, 18.

<sup>126</sup> Mrs Fenton, *Mrs Fenton's Tasmanian Journal 1829-1830* (Adelaide: Sullivan's Cove, 1986): 7.

<sup>127</sup> R. Else-Mitchell, "Annie Maria Dawbin" *ADB* Vol. 1: 296-7.

<sup>128</sup> Lucy Frost, *A Face in the Glass – The journal and life of Annie Baxter Dawbin* (Melbourne: William Heinemann, 1992); and Lucy Frost, ed., *The Journal of Annie Baxter Dawbin July 1858 – May 1868* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1998).

<sup>129</sup> Annie Baxter Dawbin, *Memories of the Past: By a Lady in Australia* (Melbourne: W.H. Williams, 1873).

*Sketches of New South Wales during a Residence of that Colony from 1839 to 1844.*<sup>130</sup> The Merediths moved to Tasmania in 1840 and for some time resided in Cambria at Oyster Bay where Charles's father owned a property. They bought the adjoining estate Springvale and after the completion of the house they moved there in August 1842. When Charles's business dealings in New South Wales failed, they were declared insolvent. Unable to pay the interest on mortgages, Charles accepted the job of police magistrate at Port Sorell in 1844. He resigned in 1848 and they returned to Cambria.<sup>131</sup> Louisa wrote another book about Tasmania and her life there under the title *My Home in Tasmania, during a Residence of Nine Years.*<sup>132</sup>

### Queensland

The Moreton Bay Settlement was established as a penal colony in 1824 where the convicts laid the foundation of the future free settlement.<sup>133</sup> The first expansion of settlement happened on the Darling Downs. Patrick Leslie was the first squatter in this area and was soon followed by others. His brother George chose Canning Downs where he later settled down with his wife Emmeline. By the end of 1841 the Darling Downs were completely mapped out and were divided into forty-five runs.<sup>134</sup> Emmeline was born in 1828 in Vineyard Cottage near Sydney, the daughter of Hannibal Macarthur. She married George Leslie in 1847 and they went to live at Canning Downs, near Warwick in Queensland. Financial problems and George's failing health, however, necessitated a visit to England where he eventually died in 1860. Five years later Emmeline married again and made a short visit to Australia in 1868 with her second husband Captain Vigant Falbe, but they decided not to settle down there. She wrote her recollections two years before her death in 1911 in England.<sup>135</sup>

The next wave of settlement took place in the valleys of the Moreton region and the Brisbane River. David McConnel took up a run on the Upper Brisbane River in 1841 and called this property Cressbrook. He returned to Britain in 1847 where he married a Scottish woman,

<sup>130</sup> Mrs Charles Meredith, *Notes and Sketches of New South Wales During a Residence in that Colony from 1839 to 1844* (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1973).

<sup>131</sup> Sally O'Neil, "Charles and Louisa Ann Meredith" *ADB* Vol. 5: 239-240.

<sup>132</sup> Mrs Charles Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania, During a Residence of Nine Years* (London: John Murray, 1852).

<sup>133</sup> W. Ross Johnston, *The Call of the Land - A history of Queensland to the present day* (Milton, QLD: Jacaranda Press, 1982): 20-22.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>135</sup> Jane de Falbe, ed., *My Dear Miss Macarthur - The recollections of Emmeline Maria Macarthur (1828-1911)* (Kenthurst: Kangaroo Press, 1988): 7-10.

Mary, the following year.<sup>136</sup> They sailed to Queensland soon after the wedding. After a brief residence in Brisbane they first lived at Toogoolawah Station near Bulimba and later at Cressbrook, a station about 90 kilometres from Brisbane. Mary's health necessitated a trip back to Scotland in 1854 but they returned to Queensland eight years later, residing once again at Cressbrook until the 1870s.<sup>137</sup> Mary recalled her reminiscences in her book *Memories of Days Long Gone By: By the wife of an Australian pioneer*.<sup>138</sup> Her daughter, Mary Macleod Banks, published her childhood recollections of the 1860s and 1870s at Cressbrook in *Memories of Pioneer Days in Queensland*.<sup>139</sup> Rosa Praed was born at Bromelton on the Logan River in 1851 and grew up on her father's properties in the Logan and Burnett districts, at Cleveland and in Brisbane. She married Arthur Campbell Praed in 1872 and for two years they lived on Curtin Island near Gladstone. The couple moved to England in 1876.<sup>140</sup> Rosa was a novelist and compiled two books of recollections of her Queensland girlhood: *Australian Life: Black and white*<sup>141</sup> and *My Australian Girlhood: Sketches and impressions of bush life*.<sup>142</sup>

Queensland was separated from New South Wales and proclaimed a colony in 1859. The gold rush at Canoona, 160 km north of Gladstone, resulted in the foundation of Rockhampton and Gladstone in 1859. George Dalrymple made an exploration of the unsettled areas north of Rockhampton in the same year and as a result far-northern Queensland was gradually opened up. Dalrymple recommended the new pastoral district of Kennedy for settlement and Captain Henry Daniel Sinclair found a harbour in that region that he named Port Denison.<sup>143</sup> Biddulph Henning bought a property called Exmoor in that area and Rachel Henning lived there for three years after her return to Australia in 1862. After her marriage to Deighton Taylor she lived on the Myall River and later near Stroud and Wollongong in New South Wales.<sup>144</sup>

Lucy Gray was an early settler in northern Queensland. She came out with her husband and they bought Hughenden Station on the Flinders River. Lucy recorded two years of life there

<sup>136</sup> H.J. Gibney, "David Cannon McConnel" *ADB* Vol. 5: 133-134.

<sup>137</sup> *AAN* Vol. 1: 101-102.

<sup>138</sup> McConnel, *Memories of Days Long Gone By*.

<sup>139</sup> Mary Macleod Banks, *Memories of Pioneer Days in Queensland* (London: Heath Cranton, 1931).

<sup>140</sup> Chris Tiffin, "Rosa Caroline Praed" *ADB* Vol. 11: 273-274.

<sup>141</sup> Mrs Campbell Praed, *Australian Life: Black and white* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1885).

<sup>142</sup> Mrs Campbell Praed, *My Australian Girlhood: Sketches and impressions of bush life* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1902).

<sup>143</sup> Ross Fitzgerald, *From the Dreaming to 1915 - A history of Queensland* (St Lucia: University of Queensland, 1982): 110-113.

<sup>144</sup> Margaret Caldwell, "Rachel Henning" 378-379.

in her journal between 1868 and 1870.<sup>145</sup> Mrs T. Holder Cowl was another pioneer settler of far-north Queensland. Normanton was first settled in 1868<sup>146</sup> and when she arrived there it had only forty inhabitants. Mrs Cowl spent three and a half years in the Gulf of Carpentaria from 1871 until March 1875. Her husband was in charge of the local Telegraph Station. She recorded her reminiscences in the pamphlet *Some of my Experiences During a Voyage to the Gulf of Carpentaria and Three Years' Residence at Normanton in the Early Seventies*.<sup>147</sup> A later resident of this area was Jane Bardsley. She was born in Copperfield, near Clermont in northern Queensland, in 1877 and was educated at All Hallows Convent in Brisbane from 1889 to 1894. She married Thomas Arthur Atherton at the age of eighteen and went to live with him at Midlothian Station north-east of Normanton from 1896 to 1901.<sup>148</sup> Constance Jane Ellis was born in 1860 in London and came out to Australia in 1889 on her own. For a few months she worked as a lady's companion at Kyabra Station, about 1100 kilometres west of Brisbane. She married Tom Ellis later that year and they lived a nomadic life in Queensland for about ten years until they settled down at Mt Morgan. She wrote her recollections in the early 1940s under the title *I seek adventure*.<sup>149</sup>

### Western Australia

The colony of Western Australia was annexed for Great Britain on the south head of the mouth of the Swan River on 2 May 1829 by Captain C.H. Fremantle. The first shipment of free settlers arrived in the middle of 1829. They first lived in huts and tents in the newly founded port of Fremantle before they moved to their grant of land. Proclamation was read on Garden Island on 18 June 1829 and the capital city of Perth was founded on 12 August 1829. Captain Stirling was the colony's first Lieutenant-Governor. By the end of 1830 about 1,500 settlers had set foot in the new colony. Land was offered to the early settlers 'in proportion to the value of the stock and farming equipment which they took with them'. They could also claim an additional 200 acres for every labourer they took with them. The young colony encountered several difficulties in the

<sup>145</sup> Lucy Gray, "Journey to Hughenden" *Queensland Heritage* Vol. 1, No. 1, (1964): 1-18; and Lucy Gray "Life on the Flinders River (1868-70)" *Queensland Heritage* Vol. 1, No. 2, (1965): 17-27.

<sup>146</sup> Henry Reynolds, et al., *The Aborigines* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002): 124.

<sup>147</sup> Mrs T. Holder Cowl, *Some of my Experiences During a Voyage to the Gulf of Carpentaria and Three Years' Residence at Normanton in the Early Seventies* (Brisbane: Besley & Pike, 1907).

<sup>148</sup> John Atherton Young, ed., *Across the Years - Jane Bardsley's outback letterbook* (North Ryde, NSW: Angus & Robertson, 1987): vii-xii.

early years. The authorities had problems with the system of land allocation, the soil - especially in the coastal areas - turned out to be poor and infertile and the hardwood forests were exceptionally difficult to clear for settlement. Twenty years after the first settlement there were only 6,000 people in Western Australia.<sup>150</sup>

Anne Whatley and her husband Dr John Whatley were among the earliest arrivals, landing on 22 October 1829 at Fremantle. They had to wait three months before they could proceed to their 1000 acres of land on the Swan River. Anne kept a diary in 1830 that was published in a scholarly journal a century later.<sup>151</sup> Georgiana Molloy was also among the early Western Australian pioneers. She was born in 1805 near Carlisle, Cumberland in England and married Captain John Molloy in 1829. Later that year they sailed for Western Australia. After a brief residence at the Swan River Settlement they soon took up land at the newly-founded settlement of Augusta in early 1830 where her husband worked as resident magistrate.<sup>152</sup> Augusta was on the banks of Flinders Bay near Cape Leeuwin and about 300 kilometres from Fremantle. A collection of her letters was published by her biographer Alexandra Hasluck under the title *Portrait with Background - A life of Georgiana Molloy*.<sup>153</sup> Eliza Brown arrived with her family in Western Australia eleven years later. She regularly informed her father of her life at Grass Dale in the Swan River Settlement throughout the 1840s. Her descendant Peter Cowan arranged her letters under publication in *A Faithful Picture*.<sup>154</sup>

A large-scale land settlement scheme was launched by the Western Australian Company in the late 1830s. The promoters were influenced by the teachings of Edward Gibbon Wakefield. His theories were also influential in the foundation of South Australia, as the next section will illustrate. The Western Australian Company intended to bring emigrants to the Australind district near Bunbury. The syndicate bought a large area of land near Koombana Bay. In their London office they planned the site of the town and divided the land into 100 acre farm sites. The first settlers arrived aboard the *Parkfield* in March 1841 with Marshall Clifton, the Resident

<sup>149</sup> Constance Jane Ellis, *I Seek Adventure - An autobiographical account of pioneering experiences in outback Queensland from 1889 to 1904* (Sydney: Alternative Publishing Co-operative, 1981): vii-viii.

<sup>150</sup> F.K. Crowley, *A Short History of Western Australia* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1959): 11-15.

<sup>151</sup> Canon Burton, "The diary of Anne Whatley" *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society* Vol. 1, No. 7, (1930): 21. Jane Dodds was another early settler. She was an English woman who arrived in the Swan River Colony with her family in 1830. They opened an inn at Guildford and took up farming as well. Some of her letters were published by Lilian Heal in her biography. Lilian Heal, ed., *Jane Dodds 1788-1844 - A Swan River Colony pioneer* (Sydney: Book Productions Service, 1988).

<sup>152</sup> Alexandra Hasluck, "Georgiana Molloy" *ADB* Vol. 2: 244-245.

<sup>153</sup> Alexandra Hasluck, *Portrait with Background - A life of Georgiana Molloy* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1960). See also W.G. Pickering, "The letters of Georgiana Molloy" *Western Australian Historical Society* Vol. 1, Part IV, (1929): 30-84.

Commissioner.<sup>155</sup> His entire family including his daughter Louisa were with him. Louisa recorded the events of the first few months at Australind in her journal.<sup>156</sup> Unfortunately, the Australind scheme collapsed a few years later when only a few purchasers left for Western Australia, the syndicate encountered financial difficulties and the chosen land site did not prove entirely suitable for farming.<sup>157</sup>

The earlier sections have already introduced two other Western Australian residents, namely Janet Millett and Lady Broome. Ethel Hassell was another. She was born in Albany in 1857 and married Albert Hassell at the age of twenty-one. They settled down at Jarramungup - an isolated sheep station north-east of Albany - where they lived between 1878 and 1886 before moving back to Albany. She combined her reminiscences with an ethnographical study of the Aborigines of the Jarramungup area in *My Dusky Friends*.<sup>158</sup>

## Victoria

Two failed attempts at settlement - the first at Sorrento in 1803 and the second at Western Port in 1826 - preceded the actual settlement of Victoria in 1834. Edward Henty and his family are credited with being the founding settlers.<sup>159</sup> They arrived in Western Australia in 1829 but because of the poor soil moved to Van Diemen's Land from where some of them ventured over to Portland Bay in 1834.<sup>160</sup> Stephen George Henty followed his brothers to Portland Bay in 1836 and he also took his young wife Jane with him. Jane Henty claimed to be the first 'white woman' in Victoria. She was born in Yorkshire in 1817 and arrived in Western Australia in 1832 where she married Stephen four years later. Jane wrote her brief *Old Memories* when she was eighty-four years old.<sup>161</sup>

Another very early female settler was Katharine Kirkland. She was born in 1808 in Scotland and married Kenneth Kirkland at the age of twenty-eight. They arrived in Hobart Town

<sup>154</sup> Peter Cowan, *A Faithful Picture*.

<sup>155</sup> Crowley, *A Short History of Western Australia* 16.

<sup>156</sup> Frost, *No Place for a Nervous Lady* 39-85.

<sup>157</sup> Crowley, *A Short History of Western Australia* 16. Isabella Ferguson and her family also arrived with this scheme. They set foot in December 1842. Her surviving letters were included in a biographical study by Prue Joske. Prue Joske, *Dearest Isabella - The life and letters of Isabella Ferguson 1819-1910* (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1989).

<sup>158</sup> Ethel Hassell, *My Dusky Friends - Aboriginal life and legends and glimpses of station life at Jarramungup in the 1880's* (East Fremantle: C.W. Hassell, 1975).

<sup>159</sup> Don Garden, *Victoria - A history* (Melbourne: Nelson, 1984): 17-23.

<sup>160</sup> Marnie Bassett, "Thomas Henty et al." *ADB* Vol. 1: 531-534.

<sup>161</sup> Jane Henty, *Old Memories* (Hamilton, VIC: Whitcombe & Tombs, 1902).

in 1838 and moved to Victoria the following year, settling at Trawalla, a station about 190 kilometres north-west of Melbourne. Leaving after two years, and after a short stay in Melbourne, they returned back to Scotland for health reasons in 1841.<sup>162</sup> Katharine published her reminiscences in *Chambers's Miscellany* in 1845.<sup>163</sup> Anne Drysdale was another early Scottish settler. She was born in 1792 and was a very unusual gentlewoman of her time in the sense that she farmed on her own account at home. She decided to migrate to the Port Phillip District for health reasons and arrived in Melbourne in 1840. She took up the Boronggoop run near Geelong where she farmed with her friend Caroline Newcomb until her death in 1853.<sup>164</sup>

Melbourne was founded in 1835. Georgiana McCrae recorded the early years of this settlement in her diary.<sup>165</sup> She first lived with her family in Bourke Street from 1841 to 1842. Later they moved to the Yarra River near Studley Park where they lived until 1845 before settling at Arthur's Seat on the Mornington Peninsula.<sup>166</sup> A later resident of Melbourne was Clara Aspinall who stayed with her brother Butler Cole Aspinall from 1858 to 1861.<sup>167</sup> She compiled her Victorian reminiscences under the title *Three Years in Melbourne*.<sup>168</sup>

Pastoral expansion was very quick and by the early 1840s most of western Victoria, with the exception of the dry Wimmera and Mallee regions and the rugged Otway region, were settled. The population of Victoria numbered 20,416 by the end of 1841.<sup>169</sup> Penelope Selby arrived with her family in 1840 and lived on a station about 40 kilometres from Melbourne until 1844 when they moved to Port Fairy. She described her new life in a series of letters to her family in England.<sup>170</sup> Sarah Midgley was a young woman from Yorkshire who arrived with her family at twenty years of age in 1851. They bought land three kilometres east of Koroit which they called Yangery Grange. It was situated halfway between Warrnambool and Belfast, which were at the time only small townships each consisting of about 350 people.<sup>171</sup> Sarah kept a diary there from 1851 to 1861.

<sup>162</sup> Jean Hagger, "Katherine Kirkland" *ADB* Vol. 2: 65.

<sup>163</sup> Katharine Kirkland, "Life in the bush" in Hugh Anderson, ed., *The Flowers of the Field - A history of Ripon Shire together with Mrs Kirkland's Life in the bush from Chambers's Miscellany, 1845* (Melbourne: Hill of Content, 1969): 173-214.

<sup>164</sup> Jean I. Martin and P.L. Brown, "Anne Drysdale and Caroline Newcomb" *ADB* Vol. 1: 330-331. These women were unusual as sole farmers. This group of women will be discussed in Chapter Three.

<sup>165</sup> Hugh McCrae, *Georgiana's Journal - Melbourne 1841-65*.

<sup>166</sup> Norman Cowper, "Georgiana Huntly McCrae" 160-161.

<sup>167</sup> *AAN*, Vol. 2: 5.

<sup>168</sup> Clara Aspinall, *Three Years in Melbourne* (London: L. Booth, 1862).

<sup>169</sup> Garden, *Victoria* 37.

<sup>170</sup> Frost, *No Place for a Nervous Lady* 151-188.

<sup>171</sup> H.A. McCorkell, ed., *The Diaries of Sarah Midgley and Richard Skilbeck: A story of Australian settlers 1851-1864* (Melbourne: Cassell, 1967): 2-6.

The Port Phillip District was separated from New South Wales and on 1 July 1851 the new colony of Victoria came into existence.<sup>172</sup> This year also witnessed the start of the Victorian Gold Rushes. The population tripled in the first three years and reached 236,798 in April 1854, and by 1861 half a million people were living in Victoria.<sup>173</sup> Several Victorian women recounted their experiences of life on the goldfields. They included Ellen Clacy who spent some time in Eaglehawk Gully in 1852 and published a very popular account of her experiences under the title *A Lady's Visit to the Gold Diggings of Australia in 1852-3*.<sup>174</sup> She was only twenty-two years old when she arrived with her brother Frederick.<sup>175</sup> She also published another book on Australia entitled *Lights and Shadows of Australian Life*.<sup>176</sup> Elizabeth Ramsay-Laye arrived with her husband in 1851 and they lived at the Forest Creek diggings for two years. Then they moved to Melbourne before they returned to England in 1859.<sup>177</sup> She recorded her experiences in the book *Social Life and Manners in Australia – Being the notes of eight years' experience by a resident*.<sup>178</sup> Mrs A Campbell was a Canadian woman who left Quebec with her family and arrived in Victoria in 1852. They lived in the Ovens goldfields for nine months where her husband worked as a police magistrate. They returned to Canada in 1854<sup>179</sup> where she published her recollections under the title *Rough and Smooth: Ho! For an Australian goldfield*.<sup>180</sup> Emily Skinner was perhaps the most experienced gentlewoman as regards life on the goldfields. She was born in 1832 in London and travelled to Melbourne to join her fiancé William in 1854. They lived in the Ovens diggings for a while and then moved to Woolshed where they remained until 1859. They later lived in Buckland and Beechworth in the 1870s.<sup>181</sup>

Another later settler was Katherine McKell. Katherine was a colonial-born woman whose parents came out from Scotland in 1841. She recalled her childhood in her book *Old Days and Gold Days in Victoria (1852 – 1873). Being the memories of a pioneer family*. She was born in 1851 at Bolwarrah Station in the vicinity of Geelong where her father worked as a manager. When she turned six they moved to their own station, the Lyons Bank Estate, that was situated

<sup>172</sup> Garden, *Victoria* 67.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>174</sup> Mrs Charles Clacy, *A Lady's Visit to the Gold Diggings of Australia in 1852-53* (Melbourne: Landsdowne Press, 1963).

<sup>175</sup> M. Rosalyn Shennan, "A goldfields adventurer" *Victorian Historical Journal* Vol. 71, No. 1, (2000): 34.

<sup>176</sup> Mrs Charles Clacy, *Lights and Shadows of Australian Life* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1854).

<sup>177</sup> *AAN*, Vol. 2: 220-221.

<sup>178</sup> Elizabeth P. Ramsay-Laye, *Social Life and Manners in Australia – Being the notes of eight years' experience by a resident* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1861).

<sup>179</sup> *AAN*, Vol. 2: 34.

<sup>180</sup> Mrs A. Campbell, *Rough and Smooth: Ho! For an Australian gold field* (Quebec: Hunter, Rose, 1865).

15 kilometres from Daylesford.<sup>182</sup>

### South Australia

South Australia was a unique British colony because it was founded by a parliamentary statute. The South Australian Act of 1834 established a colony based on the principles of Edward Gibbon Wakefield. The colony was meant to be self-supporting: the sale of land grants was to pay the passage money of poor emigrants. No convicts were to be brought to the new colony and the numbers of settlers, labourers and land on sale were strictly controlled.<sup>183</sup>

The very first colonists arrived in 1836. Mary Thomas was on the first emigrant ship with her family. She was born at Southampton in 1787 and married Robert Thomas in 1818.<sup>184</sup> She kept a diary and wrote several letters to her brother in England.<sup>185</sup> Her daughter Helen was only eleven years old when they arrived. She later got married and published her brief reminiscences under her married name, Mrs Helen Mantegani, in 1901.<sup>186</sup> Jane Isabella Watts was another early settler and she set foot in South Australia with her family in 1837. She was then a thirteen-year-old girl. She brought her reminiscences into print under the title *Memories of Early Days in South Australia*,<sup>187</sup> which was later revised and published under the new title *Family Life in South Australia Fifty-Three Years Ago Dating from October 1837*.<sup>188</sup>

Eliza Mahony was another early colonist who recorded her pioneer reminiscences. She was born in 1824 in Newry, Ireland, and arrived with her family in 1839, just three years after the foundation of South Australia. They were among the first settlers who founded the Gawler township on the banks of the North Para only a few weeks after their landing in Holdfast Bay. Her notebook was published in the *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australia* -

<sup>181</sup> Edward Duyker, ed., *A Woman on the Goldfields - Recollections of Emily Skinner 1854-1878* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1995): 1-4.

<sup>182</sup> Katherine McKell, *Old Days and Gold Days in Victoria (1852-1873). Being the memories of a pioneer family* (Melbourne: Edward A Vidler, 1924).

<sup>183</sup> James Main, "The foundation of South Australia" in Dean Jaensch, ed., *The Flinders History of South Australia - Political history* (Netley, SA: Wakefield Press, 1986): 1-4.

<sup>184</sup> Clarke, *Life Lines* 156-157.

<sup>185</sup> Thomas, *The Diary and Letters of Mary Thomas*.

<sup>186</sup> Mrs Helen Mantegani, "Recollections of the early days of South Australia from 1836" *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia - South Australian Branch* Vol. V, (1901-1902): 70-76.

<sup>187</sup> Jane Isabella Watts, *Memories of Early Days in South Australia* (Adelaide: The Advertiser General Printing Office, 1882).

<sup>188</sup> Jane Isabella Watts, *Family Life in South Australia Fifty-Three Years Ago Dating from October 1837* (Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 1978).

*South Australian Branch* in 1927.<sup>189</sup> Jane Sanders also arrived in 1839 with her family when she was nine years old. They settled down in Echunga Creek, a station 35 kilometres from Adelaide on the other side of the Mt Lofty Range. Her journal of the early years was published by the Pioneers' Association of South Australia in 1955.<sup>190</sup>

Mrs David Randall first set foot in South Australia in the early 1840s. After landing they spent a brief period in Adelaide before they moved to a station at Mount Crawford, 70 kilometres away from Adelaide. Her reminiscences were published by the Pioneers' Association of South Australia in 1939.<sup>191</sup> Alice Hughes recalled her childhood in her book *My Childhood in Australia – A story for my children*. She grew up on a South Australian station in the 1840s. Their house was called Goongoonattra and it was situated on the River Murray near Wellington, 100 kilometres from Adelaide.<sup>192</sup> Christina Smith arrived with her family in Greytown, Rivoli Bay South, in 1845 and spent the following thirty-five years there. She worked as a lay missionary and recorded her time with the local Aborigines in her book, *The Booandik Tribe of South Australia*.<sup>193</sup>

By 1846 the population of South Australia reached 22,390 people. Settlement was mostly confined to the Adelaide Plains and about sixty-five per cent of the settlers were living in and around Adelaide.<sup>194</sup> Sophy Taylor was a twenty-five-year-old woman from Middlesex in England who came out to Adelaide to marry her fiancé Edward Cooke in 1851. She regularly sent letters home to her family.<sup>195</sup> Sarah Conigrave was only a child when she arrived in Hobson's Bay, South Australia, with her family in 1853. They bought land on Hindmarsh Island opposite Goolwa and lived in tents before their house was completed. She published her childhood recollections *My Reminiscences of the Early Days* in 1938.<sup>196</sup>

<sup>189</sup> Eliza Sarah Mahony, "The first settlers at Gawler" *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australia – South Australian Branch* Vol. XXVIII, (1926-27): 53-54.

<sup>190</sup> C.S. Sanders, ed., *The Settlement of George Sanders and His Family at Echunga Creek, 1839-40 From the Journal of Jane Sanders* (Adelaide: Pioneers' Association of South Australia, 1955).

<sup>191</sup> Geo C. Morphett, ed., *Mrs David Randall's Reminiscences* (Adelaide: Pioneers' Association of South Australia, 1939).

<sup>192</sup> Mrs F. Hughes, *My Childhood in Australia* (London: Digby, Long, 1892).

<sup>193</sup> Mrs James Smith, *The Booandik Tribe of South Australian Aborigines: A sketch of their habits, customs, legends, and language. An account of the efforts made by Mr. and Mrs. James Smith to christianize and civilise them.* (Mount Gambier: South East Book Promotions, 2001).

<sup>194</sup> T.L. Stevenson, "Population change since 1836" in Eric Richards, ed., *The Flinders History of South Australia – Social history* (Netley, SA: Wakefield Press, 1986): 172, 175.

<sup>195</sup> Taylor, *Sophy Under Sail*.

## Northern Territory

There were several attempts at establishing settlements in northern Australia - Fort Douglas and Fort Wellington in the 1820s and Port Essington in the 1840s - but they all failed for various reasons. The inland explorations of John McDouall Stuart found some fine country in the region and the expansionist governors of South Australia, first Sir Richard MacDonnell and his successor Sir Dominick Daly, supported the annexation of the Northern Territory that eventually took place in July 1863. Alan Powell argues that the establishment of the first permanent settlement was the greatest achievement of the South Australian government.<sup>197</sup> Palmerston was later renamed Darwin.

This research looked at two personal narratives that were based on women's experiences of Northern Territory life. The first is a pioneering account by Harriett Daly. She was born in England in 1854 but grew up in South Australia where her father Bloomfield Douglas worked at senior administrative posts. In 1870 he was appointed the first Government Resident of the Northern Territory. They moved to Palmerston where Harriett lived until 1873 excluding a short interval in Adelaide where she married Dominick Daniel Daly in 1871.<sup>198</sup> Her book *Digging, Squatting and Pioneering in the Northern Territory of South Australia* recorded her family's early pioneering life in tropical Australia.<sup>199</sup>

Jeannie Gunn presented a later account, but the isolation and remoteness of Elsey Station provided similar pioneering conditions for her. She was born in 1870 in Melbourne. Together with her two sisters she opened a school for young ladies in Melbourne where she taught from 1889 to 1896. She married Aeneas Gunn on 31 December 1901 and soon after their marriage they left for the Northern Territory. Aeneas was appointed manager of Elsey Station, south of present-day Katherine on the Roper River. Jeannie spent only one year there because after the death of her husband she returned to Melbourne.<sup>200</sup> Jeannie produced two books based on her experiences of life at Elsey Station. In *We of the Never-Never*<sup>201</sup> she recorded her happy station

<sup>196</sup> Mrs James Fairfax Conigrave, *My Reminiscences of the Early Days - Personal incidents on a sheep and cattle run in South Australia* (Perth: Brokensha & Shaw, 1938).

<sup>197</sup> Alan Powell, *Far Country - A short history of the Northern Territory* (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 2000): 53, 61, 73-77.

<sup>198</sup> Barbara Murray, "Harriett Daly" *Northern Territory Dictionary of Biography* Vol. 1: 70-71.

<sup>199</sup> Mrs Dominic D. Daly, *Digging, Squatting and Pioneering in the Northern Territory of South Australia* (Victoria Park, WA: Hesperian Press, 1984).

<sup>200</sup> Janet Dickinson, "Jeannie Gunn" *Northern Territory Dictionary of Biography* Vol. 1: 135-137.

<sup>201</sup> Mrs Aeneas Gunn, *We of the Never-Never* (London: Hutchinson, n.d.).

life while *The Little Black Princess*<sup>202</sup> describes her relationship with the part-Aboriginal girl, Bett-Bett.<sup>203</sup>

### Maps

The following maps show the place of residence of the principal female settlers mentioned in this thesis. Dates and geographical information were collected in consultation with the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* and Kay Walsh, et al., *Australian Autobiographical Narratives*.

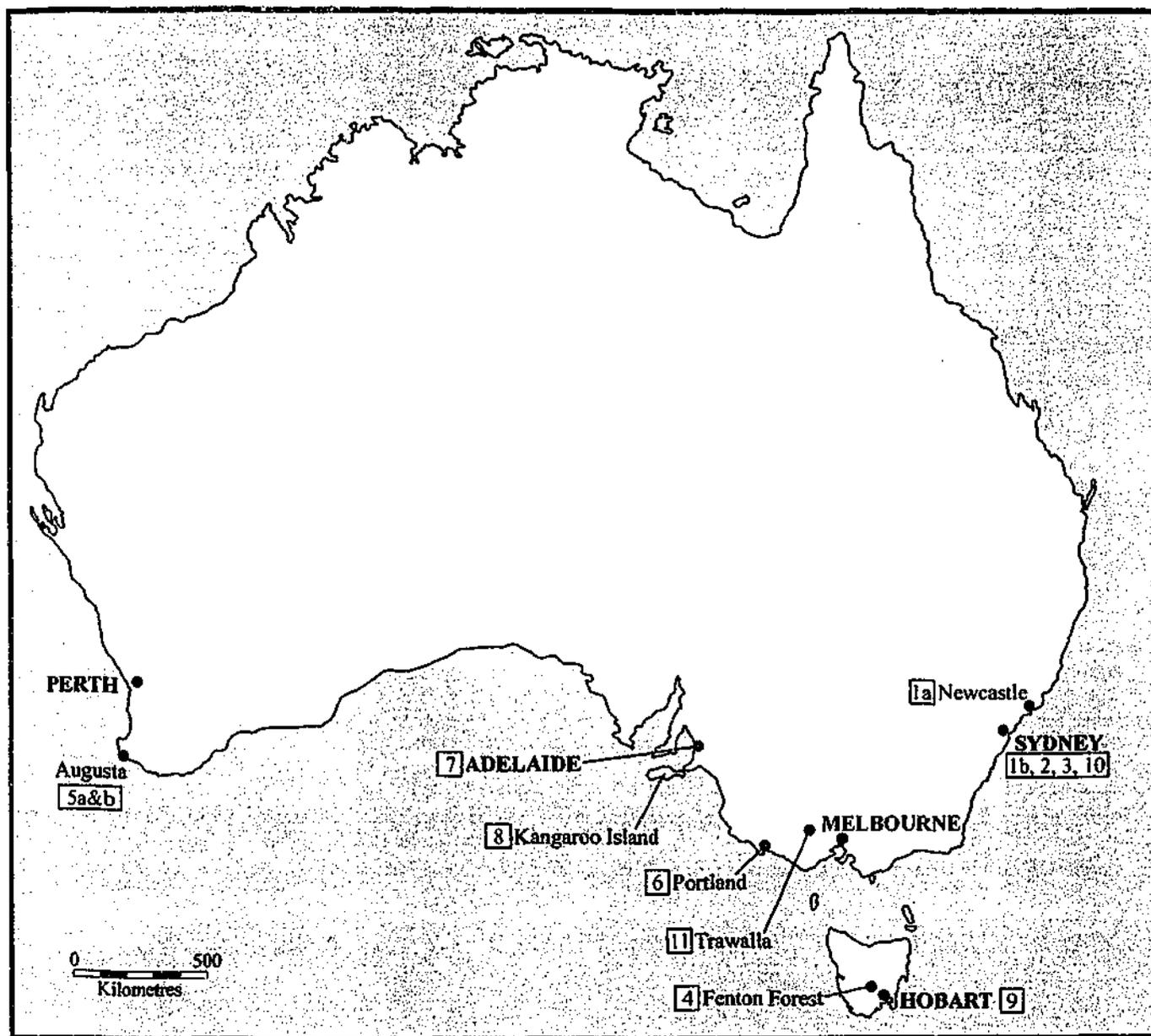
## Gentlewomen's narratives 1820 – 1840

1a 1b	Christiana Blomfield	She lived in <b>Dagworth</b> (32 km from Newcastle) from <b>1824 to 1835</b> and then in <b>Denham Court</b> (near Liverpool) from <b>1835 to 1839</b> .
2	Harriet King	She sent letters from the farm <b>Dunheved</b> (8 km from Penrith) between <b>1826 and 1829</b> .
3	Fanny Macleay	She lived in <b>Sydney</b> from <b>1826</b> until her death in <b>1836</b> .
4	Elizabeth Fenton	In her diary she wrote about her life in <b>Fenton Forest</b> (near New Norfolk) in <b>1829-1830</b> .
5a 5b	Georgiana Molloy	Her letters from <b>Augusta</b> (near Cape Leeuwin, about 300 km south of Fremantle) cover the period <b>1830-1839</b> . She moved to <b>Fair Lawn</b> , 100 km northwards in <b>1839</b> where she lived until her death in <b>1843</b> .
6	Jane Henty	She settled in <b>Portland</b> in <b>1836</b> .
7	Mary Thomas	Her diary, letters and reminiscences about her life in <b>Adelaide</b> cover the period <b>1836-1866</b> .
8	Jane Isabella Watts	She lived on <b>Kangaroo Island</b> from <b>1837</b> until <b>1839</b> .
9	Lady Jane Franklin	She lived in <b>Hobart</b> from <b>1837</b> until <b>1843</b> .
10	Louisa Meredith	She lived in <b>Homebush</b> , near Sydney from <b>1839</b> until <b>1840</b> .
11	Katharine Kirkland	Her reminiscences about her life on <b>Trawalla Station</b> (190 km north-west of Melbourne) cover the period <b>1839-1841</b> .

<sup>202</sup> Mrs Aeneas Gunn, *The Little Black Princess of the Never-Never* (Melbourne: Robertson & Mullens, 1957).

<sup>203</sup> Mrs Aenes Gunn did not reveal in her book that Bett-Bett's father was white. Katherine Ellinghaus, "Racism in the Never-Never: Disparate readings of Jeannie Gunn" *Hecate* Vol. 23, No. 2, (1997): 85.

*Gentlewomen's Narratives: 1820 - 1840*

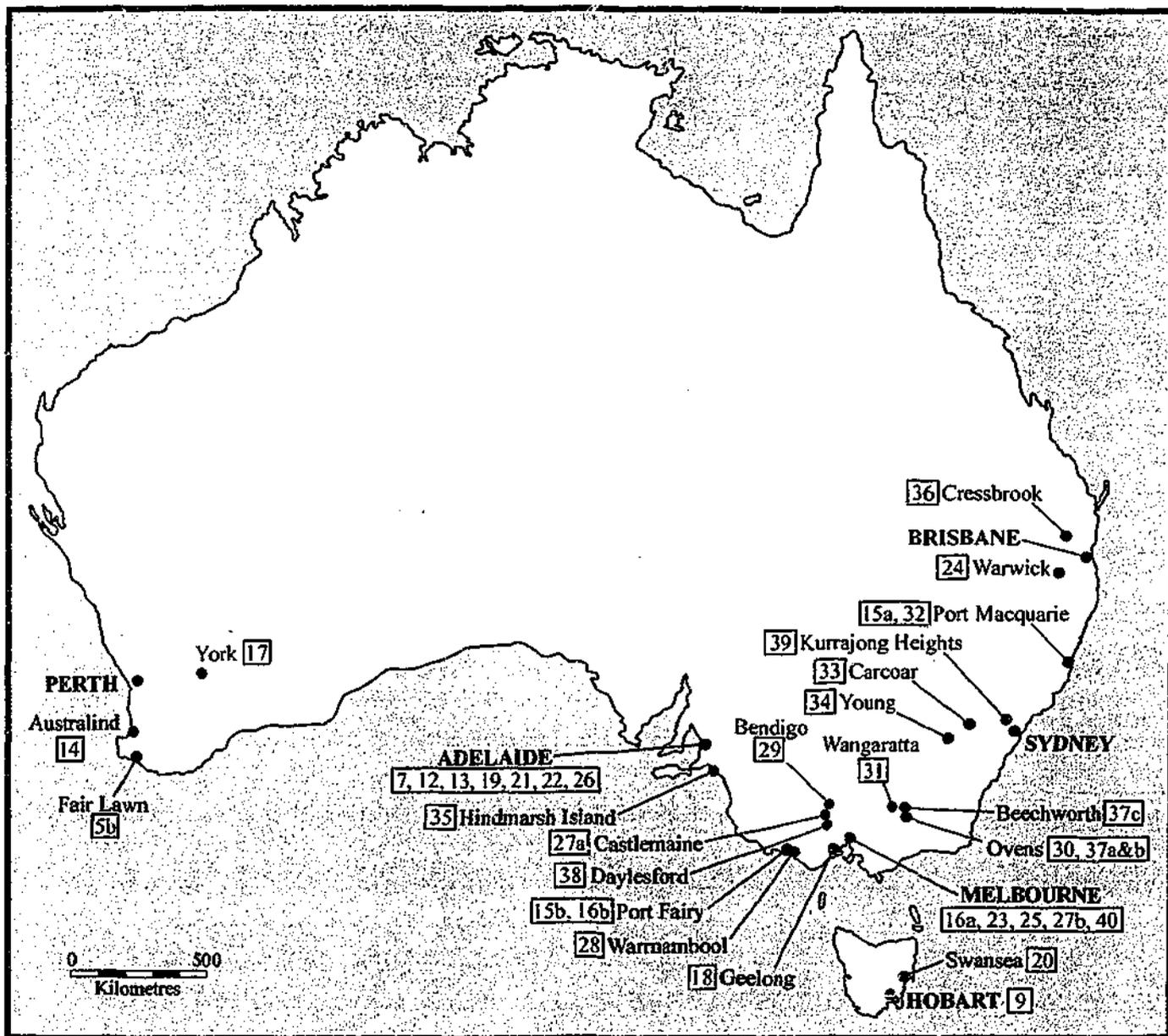


## Gentlewomen's narratives 1840 – 1860

7	Mary Thomas	Her diary, letters and reminiscences about her life in <b>Adelaide</b> cover the period <b>1836-1866</b> .
9	Lady Jane Franklin	She lived in <b>Hobart</b> from <b>1837</b> until <b>1843</b> .
5b	Georgiana Molloy	Her letters from <b>Fair Lawn</b> cover the period <b>1839 – 1843</b> .
12	Jane Isabella Watts	Her reminiscences of life in <b>Adelaide</b> cover the period <b>1839 – 1845</b> .
13	Jane Sanders	Her journal about life at <b>Echunga Creek</b> (35 km from Adelaide) covers the period <b>1839-1864</b> .
14	Louisa Clifton	Her diary about her life at <b>Australind</b> (near Bunbury) covers a few months in <b>1841</b> .
15a 15b	Annie Baxter	She lived in <b>Yesabba</b> (near Kempsey, north of Port Macquarie) from <b>1840</b> to <b>1844</b> . Then she moved to <b>Yambuck</b> (near Port Fairy) where she lived until <b>1846</b> .
16a 16b	Penelope Selby	She sent letters to her family in England first from a station on the <b>Yarra River</b> (40 km from Melbourne) from <b>1840</b> until <b>1844</b> when she moved to <b>Port Fairy</b> where she lived until her death in <b>1851</b> .
17	Eliza Brown	Her letters from <b>Grass Dale</b> (6 km from York) cover the period <b>1841-1852</b> .
18	Anne Drysdale	She lived on <b>Boronggoop Station</b> (near Geelong) from <b>1840</b> until her death in <b>1853</b> .
19	Alice Hughes	Her narrative of life at <b>Goongoonattra</b> (on the River Murray near Wellington, 100 km from Adelaide) recalls the <b>1840s</b> .
20	Louisa Meredith	Her reminiscences recall life at <b>Cambria</b> and <b>Springvale</b> (north of Swansea) in the <b>1840s</b> .
21	Eliza Mahony	Her narrative of life at <b>Gawler</b> (north of Adelaide) recalls the <b>1840s</b> .
22	Mrs D. Randall	Her reminiscences of life at <b>Mount Crawford</b> (70 km from Adelaide) recall the period from the <b>1840s</b> to the <b>1870s</b> .
23	Georgiana McCrae	Her journal covers her life first in <b>Melbourne</b> and later at <b>Arthur's Seat</b> (on the Mornington Peninsula south-east of Melbourne) from <b>1841</b> until <b>1865</b> .
24	Emmeline Macarthur	She lived in <b>Canning Downs</b> (near Warwick) from <b>1848</b> until <b>1851</b> .

25	Lucy Ann Edgar	Her narrative records life on a property at the <b>Junction of the Yarra Yarra and the Merri Creek</b> (5 km from Melbourne) between <b>1848 and 1851</b> .
26	Sophy Taylor	She sent letters from <b>Adelaide</b> from <b>1851</b> until her death in <b>1852</b> .
27a 27b	Elizabeth R. Laye	She resided in the <b>Forest Creek diggings</b> (Castlemaine) between <b>1851 and 1853</b> and then moved to <b>Melbourne</b> where she stayed until <b>1859</b> .
28	Sarah Midgley	Her diary recorded life at <b>Yangery Grange</b> (3 km east of Koroit, near Warnambool) between <b>1851 and 1861</b> .
29	Ellen Clacy	She lived in <b>Eaglehawk Gully</b> on the Bendigo goldfields in <b>1852-3</b> .
30	Mrs A. Campbell	She resided in the <b>Ovens diggings</b> (south of Myrtleford) in <b>1853-4</b> .
31	Mary Spencer	She lived on <b>Bontharambo Station</b> (near King River north of present-day Wangaratta) in <b>1854</b> .
32	Mary McMaugh	Her narrative recalls life on the <b>Upper Macleay</b> (north of Port Macquarie) in the <b>1850s</b> .
33	Ellen Campbell	In her narrative she recounted her life on a station 5 km from the township of <b>Carcoar</b> (south-west of Bathurst) in the <b>1850s</b> .
34	Sarah Musgrave	She recounted her life on <b>Burrangong</b> (near Young) in the late <b>1850s</b> .
35	Sarah Conigrave	Her reminiscences of life on <b>Hindmarsh Island</b> (south of Goolwa) cover the <b>1850s and 1860s</b> .
36	Mary McConnell	Her reminiscences recall life in <b>Cressbrook</b> (160 km from Brisbane) in the <b>1850s, 1860s and 1870s</b> .
37a 37b 37c	Emily Skinner	In her narrative she recalled the period <b>1854-1878</b> when she first lived in the <b>Ovens diggings</b> , then in <b>Buckland</b> (south of Ovens) and later in <b>Beechworth</b> .
38	Katherine McKell	Her narrative recalled her life on the <b>Lyons Bank Estate</b> (8 km from Daylesford) from <b>1855</b> until <b>1875</b> .
39	Louisa Atkinson	She lived on the <b>Kurrajong Heights</b> (west of Sydney) from <b>1857</b> until <b>1865</b> .
40	Clara Aspinall	Her narrative recorded life in <b>Melbourne</b> from <b>1858</b> until <b>1861</b> .

*Gentlewomen's Narratives: 1840 - 1860*

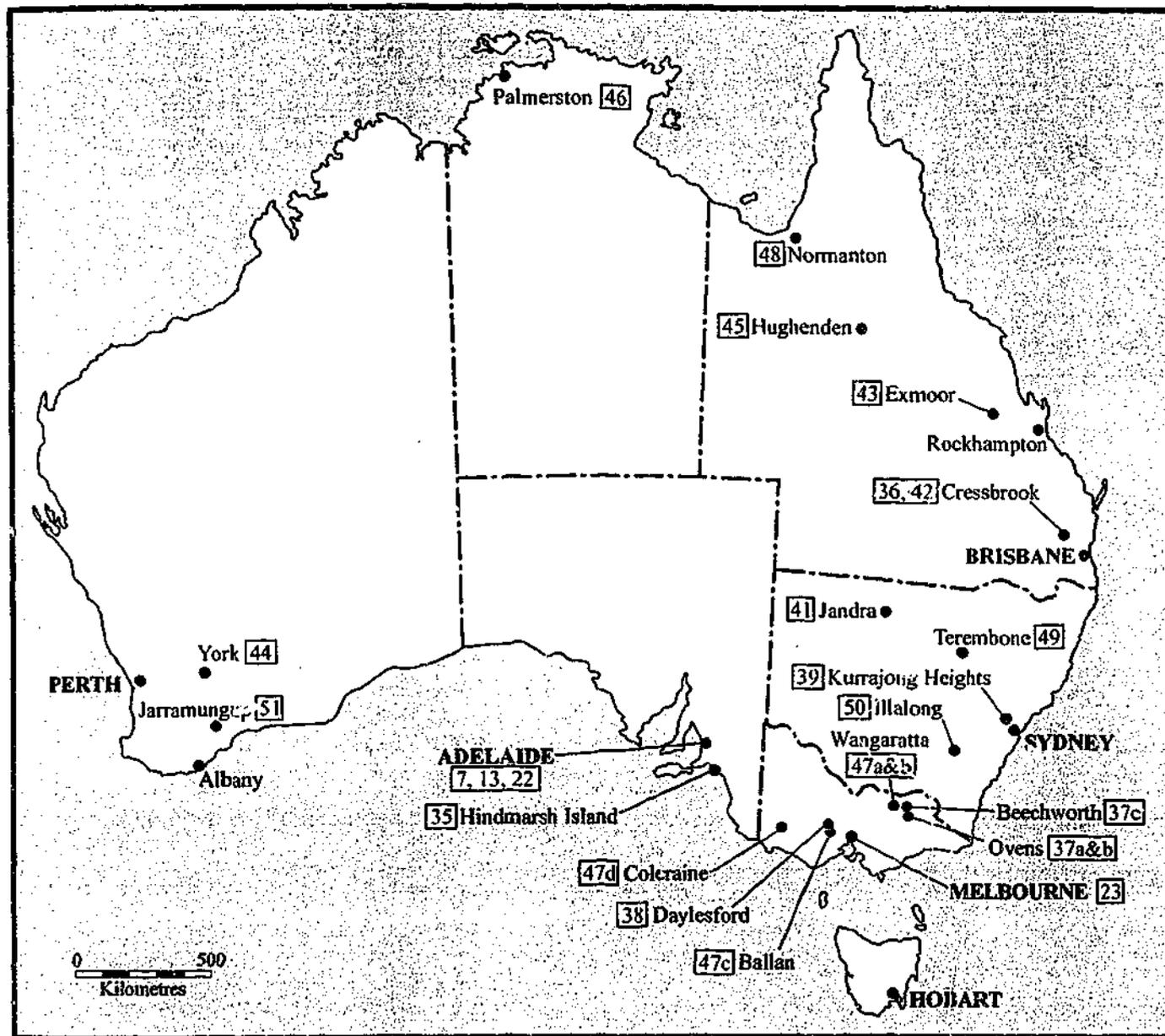


## Gentlewomen's narratives 1860 – 1880

7	Mary Thomas	Her diary, letters and reminiscences about her life in <b>Adelaide</b> cover the period <b>1836-1866</b> .
13	Jane Sanders	Her journal about life at <b>Echunga Creek</b> (35 km from Adelaide) covers the period <b>1839-1864</b> .
22	Mrs D. Randall	Her reminiscences of life at <b>Mount Crawford</b> (70 km from Adelaide) recall the period from the <b>1840s</b> to the <b>1870s</b> .
23	Georgiana McCrae	Her journal covers her life first in <b>Melbourne</b> and later at <b>Arthur's Seat</b> (on the Mornington Peninsula south-east of Melbourne) from <b>1841</b> until <b>1865</b> .
35	Sarah Conigrave	Her reminiscences of life on <b>Hindmarsh Island</b> (south of Goolwa) cover the <b>1850s</b> and <b>1860s</b> .
36	Mary McConnell	Her reminiscences recall life in <b>Cressbrook</b> (160 km from Brisbane) in the <b>1850s</b> , <b>1860s</b> and <b>1870s</b> .
37a 37b 37c	Emily Skinner	In her narrative she recalled the period <b>1854-1878</b> when she first lived in the <b>Ovens diggings</b> , then in <b>Buckland</b> (south of Ovens) and later in <b>Beechworth</b> .
38	Katherine McKell	Her narrative recalled her life on the <b>Lyons Bank Estate</b> (8 km from Daylesford) from <b>1855</b> until <b>1875</b> .
39	Louisa Atkinson	She lived on the <b>Kurrajong Heights</b> (west of Sydney) from <b>1857</b> until <b>1865</b> .
41	Henrietta Foott	She lived on <b>Jandra Station</b> (near Fort Bourke) from <b>1860</b> until <b>1870</b> .
42	Mary Macleod Banks	In her reminiscences of life in <b>Cressbrook</b> (160 km from Brisbane near the Upper Brisbane River) she recalled the <b>1860s</b> and <b>1870s</b> .
43	Rachel Henning	She lived in <b>Exmoor</b> (near Rockhampton) between <b>1862</b> and <b>1865</b> .
44	Janet Millett	She lived in <b>Barladong</b> (near York) from <b>1864</b> until <b>1869</b> .
45	Lucy Gray	Her journal recorded her life in <b>Hughenden</b> between <b>1868</b> and <b>1870</b> .
46	Harriett Daly	She lived in <b>Palmerston</b> (later known as Darwin) from <b>1870</b> until <b>1873</b> .
47a 47b	Ada Cambridge	She lived in <b>Wangaratta 1870 – 1872</b> . <b>Yackandandah</b> (east of Wangaratta) <b>1872 – 1875</b> .

47c		<b>Ballan</b> (east of Ballarat) 1875 – 1877.
47d		<b>Coleraine</b> (north-west of Hamilton) 1877 – 1883.
48	Mrs Cowl	She resided in <b>Normanton</b> from 1871 until 1875.
49	Jessie Lloyd	She lived on <b>Terembone Station</b> (50 km north-west of Coonamble) from the 1870s to the mid-1880s.
50	Rose Paterson	Her letters from <b>Illalong</b> (between Binalong and Yass) cover the period 1873 – 1888.
51	Ethel Hassell	She lived in <b>Jarramungup</b> (on the Gairdner River north-east of Albany) from 1878 until 1886.

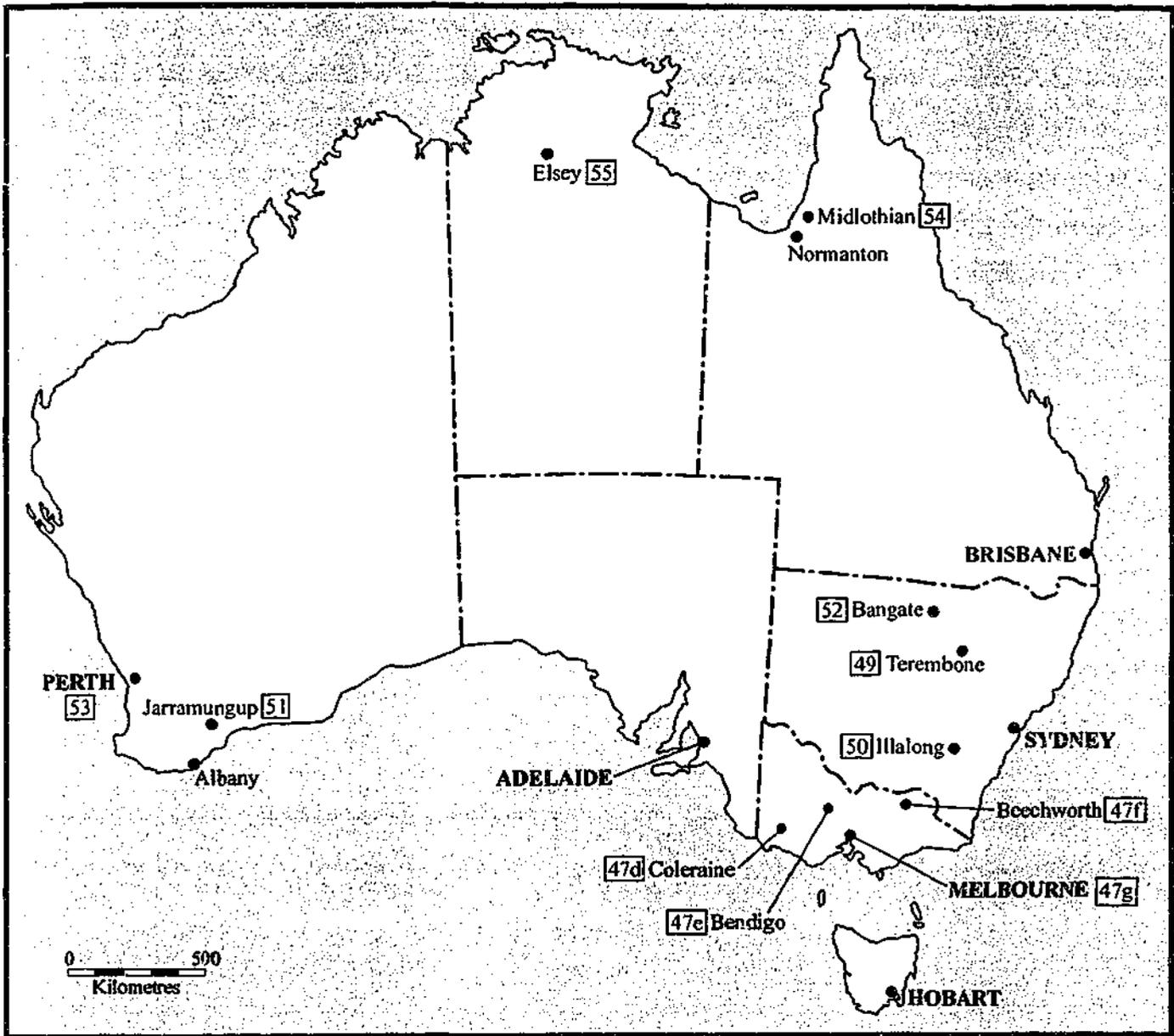
*Gentlewomen's Narratives: 1860 - 1880*



## Gentlewomen's narratives 1880 – 1900

47d 47e 47f 47g	Ada Cambridge	She lived in <b>Coleraine</b> (north-west of Hamilton) 1877 – 1883. <b>Bendigo</b> 1883-1885. <b>Beechworth</b> 1885-1893. <b>Williamstown</b> 1893-1903.
49	Jessie Lloyd	She lived on <b>Terembone Station</b> (50 km north-west of Coonamble) from the 1870s to the mid-1880s.
50	Rose Paterson	Her letters from <b>Illalong</b> (between Binalong and Yass) cover the period 1873 – 1888.
51	Ethel Hassell	She lived in <b>Jarramungup</b> (on the Gairdner River north-east of Albany) from 1878 until 1886.
52	Katherine Parker	Her reminiscences of life on <b>Bangate Station</b> (near Walgett) cover the period 1879 – 1901.
53	Lady Broome	She lived in <b>Perth</b> from 1883 to 1889.
54	Jane Bardsley	She lived in <b>Midlothian</b> (north of Normanton) from 1896 until 1901.
55	Jeannie Gunn	She lived on <b>Elsey Station</b> (south of Katherine) in 1902.

*Gentlewomen's Narratives: 1880 - 1900*



### Conclusion

Many gentlewomen left the British Isles for Australia in the nineteenth century. This thesis focuses on the life-writings of mainly English women but a few American, Canadian, Irish, Scottish and Welsh women's narratives will also be analysed. The majority of these women came from the middle and upper middle class but there were a few women from aristocratic backgrounds, as well. While the research concentrates chiefly on settler accounts, some narratives by short-term residents and travel writers have been included. Priority was given to published works because it was only possible to access a limited number of original manuscripts.

Victorian gentlewomen left their home country for a variety of reasons to start a new life in the Australian colonies, bringing with them a set of genteel ideals. Life in rural Australia, however, demanded adjustments and sacrifices, and as a consequence, the concept of English gentility had to be modified. The relaxation of genteel ideals also implied that a few aspiring lower-middle-class colonists could climb up the social ladder and regard themselves as part of the genteel class. There was a slight resentment against those with such social ambitions but this process came to be seen as a vital element of colonisation.

Many gentlewomen settled in isolated rural areas and some even on the frontier. The majority of female life-writings recorded the experience of life in the period between the 1840s and the 1880s and only a few dealt with the early pioneer years of the 1820s and 1830s. Certain areas of northern Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory were opened up for settlement only in the last decades of the nineteenth century and this thesis studied the narratives of a few women who witnessed this period. New South Wales and Victoria have always attracted the greatest number of settlers and this is also reflected in the number of published female life-writings.

# Chapter Two

*Non-fictional Writing*  
*about Australia*

## Introduction

This chapter seeks to explore how the practice of writing influenced the lives of British gentlewomen in colonial Australia. I will examine the various forms of writing that enabled colonial women to keep in touch with their relatives and friends at home as well as to record their lives in the colonies. The genres of diary, letter-, life- and travel-writings will be discussed with the intention of finding out how they assisted gentlewomen with the novel experience of colonial life.

Letters were the only means of communication before the advent of the telephone and gentlewomen continued to maintain social and family contacts through letters. This chapter will show what forms the Australian letters and diaries took, their significance in the life of the settlers and also their purpose. The experience of pioneering and colonial life prompted many female settlers to overstep the boundaries of gentility imposed on them in Britain as they ventured into publishing their memoirs, recollections, reminiscences and travel books. These women were aware that they were intruding into the public realm of men and therefore adopted different strategies to make their narratives seem a less dangerous and daring undertaking. This chapter will examine how some gentlewomen managed to make their voice heard in nineteenth-century Australia.

## Women and Writing

Life-writings take many forms. Scholars have categorised letters, diaries, reminiscences, recollections, memoirs and travel books under various headings. Leonie Kramer cites them as 'general' or 'non-fictional prose',<sup>204</sup> while Dale Spender uses the term 'personal chronicles'<sup>205</sup> and Suzanne Bunkers regards them as 'private writings'.<sup>206</sup> I shall use the terms 'life-writings' and 'personal narratives' to refer to colonial women's autobiographical texts. For the purposes of this research these works will be interrogated as historical documents that give a valuable insight into the private world of colonial gentlewomen.

Dale Spender claims that the minimal requirements for writing personal chronicles are a sense of self, time, literacy as well as pen and paper. She also considers the question of identity crucial in that women need to think of themselves as individuals to be able to express their

<sup>204</sup> Leonie Kramer, *From Fact to Legend* (Nedlands: University of Western Australia, 1982): 5.

<sup>205</sup> Dale Spender, "Journal on a journal" *Women's Studies International Forum* Vol. 10, No. 1, (1987): 3.

<sup>206</sup> Suzanne L. Bunkers, " 'Faithful friend': Nineteenth-century Midwestern American women's unpublished diaries" *Women's Studies International Forum* Vol. 10, No. 1, (1987): 8.

self.<sup>207</sup> Katie Holmes argues that writing was an exercise that could be considered an 'act of faith' in oneself. These women firmly believed that their life was interesting and important enough to document and looked to the future with the aspiration that their daily life might have significance beyond the actual time of writing.<sup>208</sup> For example, Sophy Dumaresq was confident that her friend Mrs Winn back in England enjoyed reading about her family and her daily life in Sydney in the early 1830s. Sophy was the daughter of the Earl of Lanesborough and married Henry Dumaresq in 1828. The couple arrived in Sydney the following year and moved among the social elite of Governor Ralph Darling and his wife. Sophy noted in her letter dated 20 February 1830 that 'I think I have employed more of the paper in writing abt. [sic] self than I ought to have done, but will not apologize because I am vain enough to imagine that the subject is not uninteresting to you my dearest Mrs Winn'.<sup>209</sup> It is evident from this short extract that Sophy had a clear sense of her own self and was willing to write about it.

The great majority of women, who had the material means and leisure time to indulge in the act of writing, came from a middle-class background. The reason why fewer working-class women wrote autobiographical accounts may be put down to their relative lack of education and their shortage of time. Katie Holmes points out that their circumstances did not encourage these women to think of their life as worth recording and they thus preferred oral communication to the written word.<sup>210</sup> David Vincent assumes that the shortage of autobiographical accounts by working-class women may be due to their lack of self-confidence and their exclusion from such working-class organisations as self-improvement societies that encouraged self-expression through various means. He also suggests that women silenced themselves because they trusted their husbands and other male members of the family to communicate their history to future generations.<sup>211</sup> As a consequence, very few accounts by working-class women are to be found. Sarah Davenport's memories,<sup>212</sup> Agnes Stoke's autobiography,<sup>213</sup> Emma Southgate's diary<sup>214</sup>

<sup>207</sup> Spender, "Journal on a journal" 3.

<sup>208</sup> Katie Holmes, *Spaces in her Day* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1995): xv.

<sup>209</sup> Patricia Clarke, et al., eds, *Life Lines: Australian women's letters and diaries 1788 to 1840* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1992): 105-108.

<sup>210</sup> Holmes, *Spaces in her Day* xiv.

<sup>211</sup> David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom - A study of nineteenth-century working class autobiography* (London: Europa Publications, 1981): 8-9.

<sup>212</sup> Lucy Frost, ed., *No Place for a Nervous Lady* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1984): 238-264.

<sup>213</sup> Helen Vellacott, ed., *A Girl at Government House: An English girl's reminiscences: 'Below stairs' in colonial Australia* (South Yarra: Curry O'Neil, 1982).

<sup>214</sup> Helen Vellacott, ed., *Diary of a Lady's Maid: Government House in colonial Australia* (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 1995).

and Mrs J. Allen's narrative<sup>215</sup> are among some of the small number of non-fictional works by working-class women that survive or were deemed to be worthy of printing by the publishing companies. These accounts suggest that these women wished to aspire to a certain state of gentility through writing.

As shown in Chapter One, gentlewomen in the nineteenth century were educated to believe that their main domain was the home<sup>216</sup> and matters relating to the welfare of their family. The 'perfect lady', as Martha Vicinus terms the Victorian ideal, was a woman without an opinion of her own.<sup>217</sup> Female ignorance about the public domain of men was considered the norm and the rule. Louisa Geoghegan arrived in Melbourne in 1866. She was engaged to work as governess with the Hines family who owned Neuarpuir in the Wimmera district of western Victoria. Louisa noted in her letter to the Female Middle Class Emigration Society a year later that sheep were a constant issue at this house, but that well-bred women were excluded from such discussions. She wrote that 'there are no new daily topics - the standing one is sheep - in which ladies take no part - of course'.<sup>218</sup> She took it for granted that gentlewomen would not get involved in such conversations.

A few women, however, managed to step outside the private sphere. While there are many accounts that discussed only family matters - such as Mary Spencer's diary of her short stay in Victoria in the mid-1850s,<sup>219</sup> a number of them reflected on issues that revealed wider interests. Harriett Daly, for example, was fascinated by history and she brought up-to-date the history of the Northern Territory of South Australia in her reminiscences *Digging, Squatting and Pioneering Life in the Northern Territory of South Australia*.<sup>220</sup>

Colonial women considered knowledge of worldly affairs unwomanly and regarded it as an intrusion into the public domain of men. As a result, modesty and embarrassment were imprinted in their writing. When Eliza Brown discussed economic issues relating to their farm at Swan River, her long letter dated 14 December 1843 outlined the number and value of their

<sup>215</sup> Mrs J.S.O. Allen, *Memories of My Life: From my early days in Scotland till the present day in Adelaide* (Adelaide: J.L. Bonython, 1906).

<sup>216</sup> Richard D. Altick, *Victorian People and Ideas* (London: J.M. Dent, 1974): 54.

<sup>217</sup> Martha Vicinus also notes that despite the ideal Victorian lady not having any opinion, the heroines of contemporary novels did not conform to this ideal. Those who were 'spirited, even sharp-tongued' and who 'deviated from the narrow definition of femininity endorsed by the etiquette books' achieved popularity among the readers. Martha Vicinus, "Introduction: The perfect Victorian lady" in Martha Vicinus, ed., *Suffer and Be Still - Women in the Victorian age* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973): x.

<sup>218</sup> Patricia Clarke, *The Governesses - Letters from the colonies 1862-1882* (Melbourne: Hutchinson, 1985): 103-105.

<sup>219</sup> A. Cooper, ed., *Aunt Spencer's Diary (1854)* (Newtown: Neptune Press, 1981).

stock, the renting arrangements and the effects of depression on farmers. She also mediated between her father and husband in the issue of paying their debt. William Bussey had lent a substantial amount of capital to help set up Thomas Brown's pastoral enterprise in the Swan River Settlement at the beginning of the 1840s. Eliza wrote regularly to her father not only to let him know of their everyday doings but also to inform him of their financial circumstances. Her letters gave a precise and lively picture of every aspect of their colonial enterprise. Nevertheless, she felt obliged to confess her weakness in matters of financial importance that she regarded as male domain. She felt it necessary to remind her father in 1850 that she was only a woman. She begged him to

remember [that] I know nothing at all of money matters or business matters and am very dependant, never venturing to give an opinion about any thing except where my sweet children are concerned, making all as favourable as possible for them as regards instruction, order and innocent qualifications that do not entail expense.

Many women knew that they had to say such things even though they may not always have believed them. Eliza's excuses seem rather out-of-place since she carried out the bulk of correspondence and other financial arrangements with her father. In contrast, Thomas Brown's letters were short and often made reference to his wife's detailed letters. He began his postscript to Eliza's lengthy letter of 14 December 1843 by saying that 'I have little to add to the above'.<sup>221</sup>

With the passing of time many settler women acquired both an interest in and sufficient knowledge about the pastoral business. Christiana Blomfield expressed her lack of knowledge in issues relating to the land when she referred her correspondent to her husband Thomas. In her letter dated 4 October 1829 she mentioned the clearing of the land on their farm on the Hunter River in 1828 but added that 'I must leave Thomas to tell you all these sort of things; he can explain better than I can'. In later years, however, she gained more confidence in these matters and was able to write about the financial difficulties affecting their station. For example, her letter dated 5 February 1831 explained the influence of drought and flood on the price of crops, cattle and sheep.<sup>222</sup>

As shown in Chapter One, teaching and writing seemed the only two respectable ways for gentlewomen to earn a living. These women, however, felt embarrassed about having to earn money for their living. Louisa Anne Meredith started writing because she wished to supplement

<sup>220</sup> Mrs Dominic D. Daly, *Digging, Squatting and Pioneering in the Northern Territory of South Australia* (Victoria Park, WA: Hesperian Press, 1984): Chapter 1.

<sup>221</sup> Peter Cowan, *A Faithful Picture: The letters of Eliza and Thomas Brown at York in the Swan River Colony 1841-1852* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1991): 61-63, 120, 65.

<sup>222</sup> Eve Buscombe, ed., *The Blomfield Letters Covering the Period 1799 to 1845* (Sydney: Eureka Research, 1982): 63, 70.

her household income in Tasmania.<sup>223</sup> Jessie Lloyd also tried to earn some money by writing articles for the *Illustrated Sydney News* in the early 1880s when her family was short of money during the drought years at Terembone in New South Wales.<sup>224</sup> Pressing financial need, however, earned Fidelia S.T. Hill a prestigious first in the history of women in Australia, as her book was the first volume of verse to be published in Australia by a woman writer. Fidelia was born in Yorkshire in 1790 and arrived in South Australia in 1836. In the Preface she informed her readers that she had been requested by a prestigious bookseller in England to publish her verse but she achieved publication only in South Australia in 1840. She explained that her motives for doing so were 'the pressure of circumstances'. Her husband Robert lost his job as Deputy Storekeeper in Adelaide in October 1837 and found it difficult to get other employment. He later died and all these misfortunes led Fidelia to seek an income by writing. She put down her need for money as 'her only apology for intruding on the notice of the public'.<sup>225</sup> Fidelia's preface reads as if she considered the publication of her verse an improper step because she was under the impression that the seeking of publicity was a threat to status.

A great number of female authors in the nineteenth century concealed their identity and published their work anonymously or signed them 'By a Lady'. Jessie Lloyd published under the pseudonym 'Silverleaf'<sup>226</sup> and Emma Macpherson kept her name secret on the cover of her book of reminiscences but indicated that it was written 'By a Lady'.<sup>227</sup> Annie Baxter Dawbin's narrative *Memories of the Past: By A Lady in Australia*<sup>228</sup> is another example of this class. Barbara Rees argues that a woman 'felt reluctant to allow her name to appear in print, perhaps because to appear to wish to stand out in any way, to seek the limelight, was an immodest and therefore unladylike thing to do'.<sup>229</sup>

The publishing of books was another field where women feared that they were intruding into the public world of men. Mary Poovey argues that

Writing for publication [...] jeopardizes modesty, that critical keystone of feminine propriety; for it not only 'hazard[s] ... disgrace' but cultivates and calls attention to the woman as subject, as initiator of direct action, as a person deserving of notice for her own sake. Taken to its logical extreme, to write is to assume the initiative of creator, to imitate *the Creator*.<sup>230</sup>

<sup>223</sup> Patricia Grimshaw, "Female lives and the tradition of nation-making" *Voices* Vol. 5, No. 3, (1995): 35.

<sup>224</sup> Patricia Clarke, *Pen Portraits: Women writers and journalism in nineteenth-century Australia* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1988): 128-133.

<sup>225</sup> Fidelia S.T. Hill, *Poems and Recollections of the Past* (Adelaide: Barr Smith Press, 1996): v-xx, Preface.

<sup>226</sup> Clarke, *Pen Portraits* 130.

<sup>227</sup> Emma Macpherson *My Experiences in Australia - Being recollections of a visit to the Australian colonies in 1856-7. By a Lady* (London: J.F. Hope, 1860).

<sup>228</sup> Annie Baxter Dawbin, *Memories of the Past: By a Lady in Australia* (Melbourne: W.H. Williams, 1873).

<sup>229</sup> Barbara Rees, *The Victorian Lady* (London: Goron & Cremonesi, 1977): 102.

<sup>230</sup> Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984): 36.

Women therefore felt obliged to explain why they were writing for publication. Elizabeth Ramsay-Laye noted in her preface to *Social Life and Manners in Australia* that 'I do think it is quite necessary to explain my reasons for publishing some selections from a diary written during my stay in Victoria'.<sup>231</sup>

Gentlewomen appeared to be reluctant and unwilling to publish their work and often acknowledged their friends and family for encouraging them to write. Sarah Conigrave thanked her daughter for the idea of her book, *My Reminiscences of the Early Days*. She wrote in her Preface that

How I came to write these reminiscences was because my daughter Isla [...] was constantly asking me, after narrating my early life and experiences, to write a booklet about them. I told her I could not, but she was so persistent in her requests, that at last I consented to try, and this booklet is the outcome.<sup>232</sup>

Many women attributed the idea of their narratives to family members because in this way they could indicate that they were writing to please the private audience of their families. This strategy seems to have helped distance women from the seemingly shameful reason of any public motivation.

Women also wrote to reflect the female point of view. Emma Macpherson commented on the remarkable number of books on the Australian colonies in her recollections, *My Experiences in Australia*, but added that she could hardly find any that were specifically about the day-to-day life of its people. This was why she felt the need to put pen to paper in 1860 to record the female side of the story.

So much has been written of late years about the Australian colonies, that it may seem at first sight that there is nothing new left to write about. But all the works which I have seen, though of far higher pretensions than the little volume I venture to submit to the public, still appear to me to leave something untold. While they contain a large amount of information relative to Australia interesting and valuable to the statesman, the man of science, the merchant, and the emigrant, still, perhaps, they give but little notion of every-day life in the colonies, as it would appear from a lady's point of view.<sup>233</sup>

This thesis will seek to answer to what extent women writers succeeded in showing the female point of view. Could women really write about colonial Australia in a distinctly different way from men?

Nearly all women writers admitted the weakness of their writing and advised people in search of scientific and official accounts to consult other books because their narratives lacked

<sup>231</sup> Elizabeth P. Ramsay-Laye, *Social Life and Manners in Australia – Being the notes of eight years' experience by a resident* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1861): v. See also Mrs Charles Meredith, *Notes and Sketches of New South Wales During a Residence in that Colony from 1839 to 1844* (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1973): vii.

<sup>232</sup> Mrs J. Fairfax Conigrave, *My Reminiscences of the Early Days – Personal incidents on a sheep and cattle run in South Australia* (Perth: Brokensha & Shaw, 1938): 3.

<sup>233</sup> Macpherson, *My Experiences in Australia* v.

such details. Louisa Meredith noted in her Preface to *Notes and Sketches of New South Wales* that 'I cannot flatter myself with the idea of conveying information to those skilled in scientific detail'.<sup>234</sup> This apologetic attitude did not only come to surface in accounts prepared for publication. Eliza Brown apologised to her father for the poor quality of her letter dated 8 September 1843 when she wrote that 'I am sensible that this is a very ill written epistle, may I beg you will be so very kind as to excuse it, my interruptions have been numerous and time seems so short for my numerous avocations that to write it over again in neater style would be next to impossible'.<sup>235</sup>

The widespread practice of such prefaces at the beginning of the majority of gentlewomen's colonial narratives suggests that women felt such introductions necessary more for social reasons rather than an innate belief in their own insignificance. As it was shown earlier in this section these women strongly believed that their self and their experience of life were worth writing about. Women were also aware that they did not receive the kind of education that men did and therefore could not compete with them in many fields. From this point of view women's apologies are justified. In their narratives, on the other hand, they showed themselves as learned and acute observers of Australia. They were always ready to read extensively and use other sources when they felt that their existing knowledge or source of information was not satisfactory.

Many men wrote about their colonial experiences and some of their prefaces also reveal unease at the idea of the publication of personal recollections. Some men also needed encouragement to write<sup>236</sup> and their prefaces contain disclaimers.<sup>237</sup> Women seem to have used

<sup>234</sup> Meredith, *Notes and Sketches* vii. When friends first suggested to Emmeline Macarthur that she should write up her childhood memoirs she did not feel fully capable of that task. 'I have felt that I neither possessed talent or inclination to attempt to write'. On completion of her recollections she insisted that they were 'without literary merit'. Jane de Falbe, ed., *My Dear Miss Macarthur – The recollections of Emmeline Maria Macarthur (1828-1911)* (Kenthurst: Kangaroo Press, 1988): 13.

<sup>235</sup> Cowan, *A Faithful Picture* 54.

<sup>236</sup> James Hamilton arrived in Melbourne from Scotland in 1841 at the age of five and wrote about his pioneering experiences in western Victoria. He stated at the very beginning of his memoir that 'a number of friends have requested me to write a story of my experiences as a Victorian pioneer'. James C. Hamilton, *Pioneering Days in Western Victoria – A narrative of early station life* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1923): 5.

<sup>237</sup> Edward Curr was a Victorian pioneer who was born in Hobart in 1820. His father bought a run near present-day Heathcote and Edward managed it from 1841 to 1851. He recalled the impressions of those years in his book *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria* in 1883. In his preface he made a passing remark about his unease about putting his personal recollections into print but added that he was to give valuable pieces of information about the early years of settlement. He wrote 'an excuse for the publication of mere personal matters will, it is hoped, be found in the contrast their relation exhibits between the past and the present state of things in Victoria'. But despite his excuses his recollections were received well and taken seriously. Respected historians, such as A.G.L. Shaw, often relied on the data Curr provided in the writing of their history books. Edward M. Curr, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria then Called the Port Phillip District (from 1841 to 1851)* (Echuca: Rich River Printers, 2001): Introduction by Charles Fahey vi-viii, Preface iii. For another example see Samuel Mossman, et al., *Australia Visited and*

prefatory disclaimers for the double purposes of undervaluing their own work as well as emulating men's style of writing.

Women writers were keen to pinpoint in their published texts that their views were not isolated observations of a single individual but were supported by male authority, namely that of their husband. In 1872 Janet Millett was at pains to reassure her readers in her Western Australian recollections *An Australian Parsonage* that 'she gives her husband's opinions as well as her own'. As a chaplain working in the Government Establishment, he sounded like a reliable source of authority.<sup>238</sup> Women writers often relied on sources written by men in the compilation of factual materials. Maria Frawley notes that many women 'attempted to legitimise their own work by making frequent reference to what had already been "established" by previous (and most typically male) historians and travellers'.<sup>239</sup> When the Hill sisters made a visit to the Aboriginal community at Poonindie in South Australia, set up to provide educational and religious instruction for the Aborigines, they made use of a publication by the Bishop of Adelaide. The Hill sisters acknowledged their source of information in a footnote where they wrote: 'We have derived most of our information concerning the early history of the settlement from this interesting narrative.'<sup>240</sup> But men also made occasional references to other, perhaps more authoritative sources. William James Woods, a visitor to Victoria in the mid-1880s, for example, often turned to the works of other people and acknowledged his sources in footnotes.<sup>241</sup> Gentlewomen showed their familiarity with prestigious works written by men not only to support their writings but also to write in a similarly professional way.

There were a few women writers, however, who were confident in themselves and the observations and opinions they presented in their narratives. Christina Smith was a self-assured author. She claimed to have great authority on the customs, habits and legends of the Boandik tribe of south-east South Australia and was of the opinion that the thirty-five years that she had spent among them between 1845 and 1880 put her 'in a better position than anyone else in the colony to write a memorial of them'. She also hoped that her work would be of some use to

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*Revisited - A narrative of recent travels and old experiences in Victoria and New South Wales* (London: Addey, 1853): iii.

<sup>238</sup> Mrs Edward Millett, *An Australian Parsonage or, The settler and the savage in Western Australia* (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1872): vii.

<sup>239</sup> Maria H. Frawley, *A Wider Range - Travel writing by women in Victorian England* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994): 30.

<sup>240</sup> Rosamond Hill, et al., *What We Saw in Australia* (London: Macmillan, 1875): 182.

<sup>241</sup> William James Woods, *A Visit to Victoria* (London: Wyman, 1886) See for example 7, 19, 30, 36, 41.

future historians and philologists.<sup>242</sup>

With regard to readership, a private audience was the target of some female writers. Jane Isabella Watts' book, *Family Life in South Australia*, clearly stated that it was 'for private circulation only'. There is also a note inserted before the first page saying that 'the relatives of the writer will kindly not allow this book to go out of their possession, or to be read by strangers during her lifetime'.<sup>243</sup> Despite the public nature of her published reminiscences, Jane wanted to aim her work at a private audience only. She sought to conceal her embarrassment over the publication of her narrative.

Writing to a female audience seemed to be easily justified. Female writers often targeted other women because they feared that their womanly topics or their womanly handling of certain issues would not interest men. Or they simply doubted whether men would care to read the work of a woman writer. Mrs Harriet E. Clark's "Glimpses of life in far off lands as seen through a woman's eyes" clearly shows the writer's intention to recall the female side of the story. She accompanied her husband on a tour around the world in the early 1890s. They were an American couple from Boston and their chief reason for travel was to visit Christian mission stations. In her Introduction she stated that

It is with the hope that some of the experiences and observations of an American woman in strange lands may be interesting to her sisters in the home-land, that she has ventured to present these glimpses of life and scenes among the women and children of other countries than ours, as they appeared to her.<sup>244</sup>

Harriet was consciously writing to her fellow American women. Some women targeted a female audience for purely practical reasons. Clara Aspinall's comments on the subject of servants were probably read with a growing interest by many British women who were preparing for colonial life. Clara pointed out that 'I have written thus lengthily, and, I fear, wearisomely, on the subject of colonial servants, as I think that some (if any there be amongst my readers) who have a prospect of making their home in the colony may be interested in learning my experiences of them'.<sup>245</sup>

Many women wrote for a public audience even though they were not supposed to step outside the private domain. Louisa Meredith made it clear in her second Australian book *My Home in Tasmania* that she did not write for colonial readers as she felt that she could not say

<sup>242</sup> Mrs James Smith, *The Booandik Tribe of South Australian Aborigines* (Mount Gambier: South East Book Promotions, 2001): iii.

<sup>243</sup> Jane Isabella Watts, *Family Life in South Australia Fifty-Three Years ago Dating from October 1837* (Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 1978): unpaginated.

<sup>244</sup> Harriet E. Clark, "Glimpses of life in far off lands as seen through a woman's eyes" in Francis E. Clark, *Our Journey Around the World* (Hartford, Conn: A.D. Worthington, 1895): 593.

<sup>245</sup> Clara Aspinall, *Three Years in Melbourne* (London: L. Booth, 1862): 114-115.

anything new to them. She therefore intended her text for the 'general readers in England'.<sup>246</sup> It is interesting to note that she did not specifically state what part of English society she targeted, but presumably she had the respectable middle class in mind.

But most importantly, these women wrote for themselves. Writing was an essential element of their colonial existence. Delys Bird argues that

writing was a way to overcome the personal debilitation of emigration. That women continued to write at all is an indication of the compulsion to narrate and the need to communicate, thus to order and structure the strangeness of their new reality and construct a defined relationship with it. Their writing formalised the desire to connect the old life to the new, transforming a personal loss of identity through an economy of nostalgia.<sup>247</sup>

Writing also helped women shape their new identity as pioneer settlers and colonists. Gayle R. Davis claims in her analysis of nineteenth-century American frontier diaries that 'the very act of keeping a diary can be explored as a significant coping mechanism, through which the women adjusted to the hardships, freedom, and challenges of the frontier'.<sup>248</sup> I would suggest that not only diaries but every other genre provided women some space to clarify their new position in colonial Australia. Emma Floyd holds the same view and argues that women used their letters and life-writings as well as their diaries to record their adjustment to colonial life.

Diaries, letters, and memoirs also reveal some of the strategies that gentlewomen adopted when faced with the migration experience and challenges to their status. The words of these women and the manner in which they were written give many clues as to how these women constructed themselves as 'gentlewomen'.<sup>249</sup>

For a period of ten years Eliza Brown wrote regular accounts of her family's life in the Swan River Settlement in the 1840s with the aim of giving 'a faithful picture'. She was a dutiful daughter to her father and she shared many of their pleasures and sorrows with him so that he 'might know all my heart'.<sup>250</sup> Delys Bird notes that Eliza Brown used her correspondence not only to inform her father of their colonial enterprise but also to write her life. The pages of her letters to 'her dearest Papa' were testimony to her heart's outpourings 'in its search for sympathy'.<sup>251</sup> After ten years of voluminous correspondence, her father's asking her to limit her correspondence to one letter per year seemed a big blow to her. Eliza even begged him to send back her annals so that she could base her reminiscences on them. She regarded those letters as 'faithful [...] documents',<sup>252</sup> and, as Bird suggests, they 'represent her colonial history'.<sup>253</sup> The

<sup>246</sup> Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania* 44.

<sup>247</sup> Delys Bird, "The self and the magic lantern: Gender and subjectivity in Australian colonial women's writing" *Australian Literary Studies* Vol. 15, No. 3, (1992): 126.

<sup>248</sup> Gayle R. Davis, "Women's frontier diaries: writing for good reason" *Women's Studies* Vol. 14, No. 1, (1987): 5.

<sup>249</sup> Emma Floyd, "Without artificial constraint: Gentility and British gentlewomen in rural Australia" in Rita S. Kranidis, ed., *Imperial Objects* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998): 95.

<sup>250</sup> Cowan, *A Faithful Picture* 140.

<sup>251</sup> Cited in Bird, "The self and the magic lantern" 127.

<sup>252</sup> Cowan, *A Faithful Picture* 156.

letters described her new life and she longed for them because they formed part of her history and documented the evolution of her colonial self.

Bob Reece argues that men's motivation for writing was extremely varied. Some of them published books as a way of making money while others wanted to advise future emigrants. But, as Reece points out, all of these male writers shared a concern 'to establish their own credibility as authorities on the Australian colonies and to dispel any notion that they had any personal interests at stake there'.<sup>254</sup> In his text, *Colonial Sketches: or, Five years in South Australia, with hints to capitalists and emigrants*, Robert Harrison pointed out that his information was authoritative and did not represent the interests of certain sections of society. He claimed that his five years' residence in South Australia from 1856 to 1861 provided him with the necessary experience and knowledge. He wrote that

The writer of the present volume is happy to say he has no class interests to support, or selfish objects to assert in publishing; and he has expressed his disinterested views on South Australia and all the facts he has brought forward are taken from the highest authorities the colony can produce.<sup>255</sup>

Reece also suggests that men targeted a dominantly male readership. He notes that 'in general, the literature was aimed at men who it was assumed would be the decision-makers and bread-winners in Australia'.<sup>256</sup> As we have seen already, women avoided being seen as authoritative writers and wrote for a mainly female audience.

Bird also claims that men were consciously writing for a large public audience as well as with financial returns in mind. They used public discourse, whereas women's writings were mainly limited to the private sphere.<sup>257</sup> Edward Wilson, for example, paid a visit to the colonies in the 1850s and wrote a very descriptive book on the colonial conditions. He even included a lengthy Appendix at the end of his narrative in which he provided valuable information and statistics concerning tariffs, public revenues, exports, etc.<sup>258</sup> Furthermore, the idea of progress

<sup>253</sup> Bird, "The self and the magic lantern" 127.

<sup>254</sup> Bob Reece, *Australia, the Beckoning Continent: Nineteenth century emigration literature* (London: University of London, 1988): 3-4.

<sup>255</sup> Robert Harrison, *Colonial Sketches: or, Five years in South Australia, with hints to capitalists and emigrants* (Hampstead Gardens, SA: Austaprint, 1978.): iv. Robert Dawson also presented himself and his colonial narrative as a reliable source of information for emigrants. He wrote that 'having resided in Australia for three years as the chief agent of the Australian Agricultural Company, and having travelled over a very considerable portion of the located as well as the unlocated parts of the colony, I have had ample opportunity of acquiring such information as I hope will be found acceptable and useful to those who are desirous of knowing what the country really is'. Robert Dawson, *The Present State of Australia* (London: Smith, Elder, 1831): xii. See also Henry Melville, *The Present State of Australia* (London: G. Willis, 1851): Preface ix.

<sup>256</sup> Reece, *Australia*, 6.

<sup>257</sup> Delys Bird, "Women in the wilderness: Gender, landscape and Eliza Brown's letters and journal" *Westerly* Vol. 36, No. 4, (December 1991): 35.

<sup>258</sup> Edward Wilson, *Rambles at the Antipodes* (London: W.H. Smith, 1859): 187-211.

did not concern women as much as men. Joy Hooton claims that 'it is the process of living that is foregrounded, rather than achievement or destiny'.<sup>259</sup> Samuel Mossman and Thomas Banister emphasise in their text the progress the Australian colonies made in the 1830s and 1840s. They travelled through Victoria and New South Wales in 1851 to note the opportunities these colonies offered for settlers, and the level of progress they showed in the previous two decades. They stated that

In order to complete our account of these colonies and the resources of the territory through which our descriptive narration purports to conduct the reader, let us consider the present commercial prosperity of the colonists, and take a retrospective view of the progress they have made during the past twenty years; and from such data speculate upon the future prospects of Australia.<sup>260</sup>

However, there was a small amount of private writing even in male narratives. Edward Curr and James Hamilton described their squatting experiences in their books, and the titles of their personal narratives reflected the dual nature of their writings, which were personal and public at the same time. Curr's *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria*<sup>261</sup> suggests that he was outlining the system of squatting through his own personal experiences. Hamilton's *Pioneering Days in Western Victoria – A narrative of early station life*<sup>262</sup> also builds on this duality of experiences and tells of the early colonial days and practices.

Joy Hooton also sees significant differences between male and female life-writings. She argues that while men's autobiographies recorded public events, women, on the other hand, were mainly interested in relationships and domestic matters. She argues that

whereas men record external events, geographical features and climactic conditions, discoveries, feats of endurance or skill, observations on native flora and fauna, women concentrate on the minutiae of daily life, the pleasures and discomforts of ordinary relationships, the personal aura of the place that is the new or familiar home, the anxieties, griefs, lonelineses and achieved enjoyments of early settlement life.<sup>263</sup>

Domestic themes were, however, not the only topics that women wrote about. Some of them wanted to show their familiarity with public matters.<sup>264</sup> In fact, there was a certain point beyond which these women felt embarrassed about having no other news to share with their family and friends. Rachel Henning lived in Springfield for a while after her marriage to Deighton Taylor.

<sup>259</sup> Joy Hooton, *Stories of Herself When Young – Autobiographies of childhood by Australian women* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1990): 89.

<sup>260</sup> Mossman, *Australia Visited and Revisited* 301.

<sup>261</sup> Curr, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria*.

<sup>262</sup> Hamilton, *Pioneering Days in Western Victoria*.

<sup>263</sup> Hooton, *Stories of Herself When Young* 89.

<sup>264</sup> This thesis will show that while colonial gentlewomen described their domestic life in great detail they touched on other topics such as the native flora and fauna as well as the indigenous people. Chapters Five and Six will argue that colonial women used their narratives not only to recount their life but also to record their scientific and ethnographic findings. Many women gained valuable information about the native flora and the indigenous people through direct contact. Some of them were pioneers in the sense that they were the first to collect new species or the first to record the customs and manners of a particular Aboriginal tribe.

In 1877 she began her letter to her sister Etta this way:

It is very difficult to write you anything that will interest you from Wollongong. Though it is a pleasant, peaceful life we lead here, there is nothing to write about. None of the adventure and newness of station life, and at the same time you know none of our acquaintances or surroundings, so that you cannot be interested in them as I am in any news about Bristol.<sup>265</sup>

Through the medium of writing, female colonists recounted their life to a home audience. They believed that their colonial self was a worthy subject matter for public attention and therefore they risked stepping out of the private sphere with the publication of their personal narratives. Women were aware of their intrusion into the world of men and apologised for their bold undertakings in their prefaces for the sake of social propriety. They sought to reflect a unique feminine viewpoint in their life-writings but at the same time they also touched on issues that were supposed to be the domain of male writers.

### Diaries and Letters

The diary was one of the most common forms of life-writings among British gentlewomen in the nineteenth century. This section will explore the uses of the diary in the colonial environment and will seek to answer how the diary helped record the novelty of Australian life.

Diaries<sup>266</sup> give an invaluable insight into people's lives and show how the diary-writer expressed and interpreted the events of her life. Katie Holmes defines the diary as a channel through which the diarist 'shaped her day, her week, her life. From the language and meaning available to her, she constructed her world.'<sup>267</sup> Diaries also empowered women in the sense that they provided a channel through which women could voice their own concerns: women wrote about the things that were important in their daily life and thus celebrated their private sphere.<sup>268</sup>

Diaries reflect the personalities of the diarists and for this reason they are considered to be highly significant in terms of their autobiographical value. Suzanne Bunkers regards them as the 'most authentic form of autobiography' because they are free from the damaging process of censoring and editing which published texts are deemed to undergo. From this point of view unpublished diaries represent the truest form of self-expression.<sup>269</sup> Joanne Cooper therefore treats

<sup>265</sup> David Adams, ed., *The Letters of Rachel Henning* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1963): 272.

<sup>266</sup> The tradition of diary-keeping in England goes back as far as the sixteenth century. Published diaries as well as several manuals on the art of diary-keeping were in circulation by the nineteenth century. Harriet Blodgett, *Centuries of Female Days: Englishwomen's private diaries* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988): 21-35.

<sup>267</sup> Holmes, *Spaces in Her Day* xii.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, xviii.

<sup>269</sup> Bunkers, "Faithful friend" 9.

diaries as sources of 'raw data'.<sup>270</sup>

Diaries were kept for a variety of reasons. Harriet Blodgett notes that until the eighteenth century diaries were a means of self-improvement, but various other motivations justified the keeping of diaries. Some wrote because it was a family tradition, while others were encouraged to keep such a record by their governesses.<sup>271</sup> Katie Holmes claims that an 'itch to record' was another common incentive. She observes that this type of diary served not only as 'a record of existence' but also as 'a desire for self-expression'. These records became a narrative of the diarist's life.<sup>272</sup> But the diary is not simply a list of events that the diarist witnessed. As Sarah Gristwood suggests 'to keep a diary is not just a way to hold on to our experiences. It is a way to validate them, to clarify them in our own minds.'<sup>273</sup> It was on the pages of their diaries that women recorded as well as analysed and interpreted the novelty of their colonial life.

The keeping of a diary was also a distinctive sign of gentility and when women continued to keep diaries in the colonies they were trying to retain their previous genteel lifestyle in rough circumstances. Keeping a diary was an 'identity-saving motivation' as Gayle R. Davis characterises it. She argues that 'by continuing the familiar diary-writing on the frontier, women could put an old habit to a new use, to help them retain some semblance of the "civilized" lifestyle they had left'.<sup>274</sup> I would suggest that diaries helped women retain a sense of their gentility not only on the frontier but also in rural Australia in general.

<sup>270</sup> Joanne E. Cooper, "Shaping meaning: Women's diaries, journals, and letters – The old and the new" *Women's Studies International Forum* Vol. 10, No. 1, (1987): 95. Unfortunately, not every diary presents as raw material because editing could often damage the original content. Editing was an issue that not only involved the actual diarists themselves but also later editors who often exercised much power when they prepared private diaries for publication long after the death of their writers. Annabella Boswell's diary underwent both processes. First it was modified by Annabella herself. She published the journal that she had kept during her youth in Australia in the 1830s and 40s. She retained many of the original diary entries but added a considerable number of paragraphs that made the journal read more like an autobiography. The title of the finished product clearly reflected this intention: *Early Recollections and Gleanings, from an Old Journal*. Then Morton Herman re-edited Annabella's journal and republished it in 1965. Joy Hooton notes that as a historian of colonial architecture, he was particularly interested in Annabella's description of Lake Innes and omitted certain sections that he thought were unnecessary. He justified his editing by arguing that his omissions were necessary because they 'impeded the flow of the narrative'. His reworked version did not contain Annabella's description of bushrangers and the note at the beginning in which she emphasised her identification with Australia and stated her reason for writing. Hooton, *Stories of Herself When Young* 3, 31, 378. Lucy Frost's scholarly edition of the *Journal of Annie Baxter Dawbin, July 1858 – May 1868* is an example of the editor's attempt to make the manuscript in its original form accessible to the public. As Paul Eggert, the general editor of the Academy Editions of Australian Literature points out in the foreword, their aim with this series was to provide 'reliable reading texts and contextual annotation based on rigorous scholarship and thorough textual collation'. This project came about as a result of general 'dissatisfaction with the unreliability of most currently available printings of Australian works dating from the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century'. Lucy Frost, ed., *The Journal of Annie Baxter Dawbin July 1858 – May 1868* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1998): vii.

<sup>271</sup> Blodgett, *Centuries of Female Days* 63-78.

<sup>272</sup> Holmes, *Spaces in Her Day* xvi.

<sup>273</sup> Sarah Gristwood, *Recording Angels – The secret world of women's diaries* (London: Harrap, 1988): 4-5.

Diaries also recorded the colonial experience and documented the life of British settlers. They were often sent home and in this sense functioned as letters. Diary entries that formed parts of the letter were probably written with a future audience in mind and therefore such diaries resembled the style of letters and were similar to other diaries only in form. Dorothy Jones draws attention to the way Lucy Jones addressed her journey diary. It indicated Lucy's original intention that her diary should be made available to a larger audience. It started as follows: 'My dear Aunts, Uncles, Grandma, Cousins, Nellie Tucker, and Birdie Price This must be passed round to you all.'<sup>275</sup> Many women took pleasure in reading other women's diaries. They were essentially 'curious' and 'inquisitive' about their family and friends' lives.<sup>276</sup> When Rachel Henning received in England the journal her sister Annie had kept during the voyage out to Australia in 1853, she told her sister in her reply letter that after tea 'we read the journal aloud. [...] It was a capital journal and most interesting to us.'<sup>277</sup> Diaries often provided the materials of colonial reminiscences, as well. In the process of writing their personal narratives, women often looked back at their diaries to get the detailed and precise information they wanted. Elizabeth Ramsay-Laye's Preface stated that her memoirs were 'selections from a diary written during my stay in Victoria'.<sup>278</sup>

In some cases, however, colonial women were unable to put down their experiences on paper. Their silence was telling. They either did not have time for their diaries and correspondents, or were simply unable to write about their life. Sarah Midgley was in such a situation. She began writing a diary when she set sail from England with her family in June 1851. She was then twenty years of age. After landing in Melbourne her father John bought land

<sup>274</sup> Davis, "Women's frontier diaries" 7.

<sup>275</sup> Cited in Dorothy Jones, " 'Letter writing and journal scribbling' " in Debra Adelaide, ed., *A Bright and Fiery Troop - Australian women writers of the nineteenth century* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1988): 17.

<sup>276</sup> Blodgett, *Centuries of Female Days* 38.

<sup>277</sup> Adams, *The Letters of Rachel Henning* 9.

<sup>278</sup> Ramsay-Laye, *Social Life and Manners in Australia* v. The experience of travelling provided another reason for writing. Given the rarity, length and inconvenient mode of long-distance travelling throughout the nineteenth century, it is not surprising that so many women recorded the experience of their journeys both on land and at sea. Journey journals and shipboard diaries were two distinct forms of diaries. They usually described the scenery, mode of transport and the way life changed under those circumstances. Eliza Brown kept a journal during a journey from York to Champion Bay in 1851. It even achieved publication in the *Inquirer*. Cowan, *A Faithful Picture* 169-184, 143. Many gentlewomen kept diaries on the long voyage to Australia. It was a widespread custom that helped to 'frame and control the meaning of the voyage out'. The shipboard diary was also a part of 'emigration culture'. It was written both as a form of amusement as well as for the benefit of future emigrants. Shipboard diaries were mostly sent home, but some of them even achieved publication. Andrew Hassam, *Sailing to Australia - Shipboard diaries by nineteenth-century British emigrants* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1995): 1-44. Edward Duyker, who edited Emily Skinner's recollections, also included her shipboard journal on the *Lady Jocelyn* in 1854. Edward Duyker, ed., *A Woman on the Goldfields - Recollections of Emily Skinner 1854-1878* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1995): 2, Shipboard journal 11-26.

near the small township of Warrnambool in 1852. This area was still covered by thick bushland and so their first task was clearing the land. The family first stayed in tents and later built a house three kilometres east of Koroit which they called Yangery Grange. Sarah resumed writing her diary in 1855 when they were comfortably settled. There is no mention whatsoever of the hardship she had to undergo at any stage of their move to Australia. Her diary records a normal life of calls, picnics, church sermons and family events. One can only guess whether or not she had any difficulties at all. If she did she managed to conceal them. But a three-year-intermezzo is certainly indicative of a period of life when things were not going in the usual way.<sup>279</sup>

Men also kept diaries and recorded their day-to-day life. Their most important subject matter was not their domestic life but their work. Richard Skelbick arrived in Melbourne in 1858 at the age of twenty and went to live with the Midgley family at Koroit in Victoria. He kept a diary until 1864 but it was only published after his death. In it he wrote about his work, the machines he brought and the house that he built for himself. He did record some family gatherings and picnic parties but in general his diary is concerned with his work and religious activities.<sup>280</sup> In contrast, Edward Snell's diary is somewhat more personal. He arrived from England in 1849 and recorded his life in South Australia, Victoria and Tasmania between 1849 and 1859 in his voluminous diary. He noted the events of his private as well as his professional life.<sup>281</sup> Both of these diaries were kept for personal use and were published only decades after the diarists' death.

Diaries provided a very personal space for the recording of women's daily life. They were not always treated as personal documents, but were often written for a larger audience of family and friends to share that personal experience with them. Diaries were written for a number of reasons, but they served the primary function of record-keeping. These records were in turn used for other purposes: they provided the basis of personal letters to family and friends and even personal memoirs and recollections. These records showed the novelty of colonial life and highlighted what events the diarist considered worthy of note.

The letter was a disciplined form of written communication and had its own rules and social conventions.<sup>282</sup> Janet Dunbar notes that 'to be a good correspondent was considered a

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<sup>279</sup> H.A. McCorkell, *The Diaries of Sarah Midgley and Richard Skilbeck: A story of Australian settlers 1851-1864* (Melbourne: Cassell, 1967): 16.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, 125-198.

<sup>281</sup> Tom Griffiths, ed., *The Life and Adventures of Edward Snell* (North Ryde: Angus & Robertson, 1988).

<sup>282</sup> Letter-writing manuals existed to give guidance on the correct form of address, style and layout. In the first half of the nineteenth century children were taught the art of letter-writing. They were educated to use proper forms of

well-bred woman's duty'.<sup>283</sup> Many women wrote letters to inform their family and friends of their colonial enterprise. The home audience therefore received the interpretation of colonial life from mainly the women's point of view.

Letters provided the only means by which colonists could keep in touch with their loved ones in the mother country. Colonial women cherished the rare occasions when the mail arrived. 'I hope you will write often and tell me all the news, for a letter from England is such a treat to us that it makes quite a commotion' – wrote Mary Thomas in Adelaide to her brother on 25 June 1839 after three years of separation.<sup>284</sup> Letters were always warmly welcomed and signalled women's yearning for home news. Sophy Cooke clearly expressed her state of mind in Adelaide in April 1852 in the following request for letters: 'Do pray write to me often' – she wrote to her sister. 'You have no idea what a treat a letter is, nor do you half know how anxious I am about you all'. This is how she felt only after five months of residence with her husband in South Australia.<sup>285</sup>

In the nineteenth century letters took a long time to reach the addressee and this often frustrated the correspondents. When Rachel Henning was residing in Bathurst in 1861 she mentioned in her letter to her sister Etta in England that 'it is very vexing to have to wait so long before getting them'.<sup>286</sup> Women like Rachel would have been blissfully happy had the telephone been invented. She noted in her letter of 4 April 1877 how she wished to 'have an hour's talk instead of letter-writing'. Interactive communication would have meant so much more to her. She added 'how much more we should know of each other's ways and habits and belongings'.<sup>287</sup> Communication in the outback remained a difficult business even until the turn of the century. Jeannie Gunn lived with her husband on an isolated property in the Northern Territory in 1902 where the mailman arrived only eight times a year. She recalled that the arrival of letters was a real 'feast' and 'like thirsty camels we drank it all in – every drop of it – in long, deep, satisfying

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address to family members, friends and strangers and, as a result, their writing style was sophisticated and polished. Cowan, *A Faithful Picture* 11.

<sup>283</sup> Janet Dunbar, *The Early Victorian Woman – Some aspects of her life (1837-57)* (London: George G. Harrap, 1953): 88.

<sup>284</sup> Evan Kyffin Thomas, ed., *The Diary and Letters of Mary Thomas 1836-1866: Being the early days of South Australia* (Adelaide: W.K. Thomas, 1915): 122.

<sup>285</sup> Irene C. Taylor, ed., *Sophy Under Sail* (Sydney: Hodder and Stoughton, 1969): 148-149. Some men were equally happy to get news from their family at home. Edward Snell greatly rejoiced when he first got letters from England in 1850. He noted in his diary entry for 18 February 1850 that 'glorious news! found my name among the list of unclaimed letters' at the post office in Adelaide. Griffiths, *The Life and Adventures of Edward Snell* 80.

<sup>286</sup> Adams, *The Letters of Rachel Henning* 79.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

draughts'.<sup>288</sup>

Letters were also expensive. Until the introduction of the penny postage in 1840 there was not a fixed price for letters.<sup>289</sup> It was very difficult to calculate the price of postage both on an overland and a sea-bound journey and different captains set different rates.<sup>290</sup> At that time it was usually the recipient who paid for the letter. In a letter dated 3 May 1851, Eliza Brown apologised for making her father pay so much for her letters. She began her letter by writing that 'I hope you will forgive me for putting you to the expense of so much postage'.<sup>291</sup> To save money, letters were often cross-written to save paper and postage. When the piece of paper was full it was turned at right angles and written across.<sup>292</sup>

Letters caused great delight because they brought news of people and events, and often various items were enclosed. Newspapers were especially appreciated but women often asked for a long list of articles that they wished to have shipped from England. As well as being a channel of communication, letters were sometimes shopping lists of items that were either not available or too expensive in the colonies.<sup>293</sup>

Arthur Ponsonby claims that letters have little in common with diaries. While they share the same 'characteristic of immediacy',<sup>294</sup> the main difference between the two forms of writing lies in the fact that letters were written with a very clear audience in mind. Letters presuppose an existing relationship between the writer and the recipient and build on materials and knowledge that people already have in common. For this reason letters are often difficult to understand for the outsider. Diaries, on the other hand, do not always have an intended readership. Ponsonby argues that diaries are free from the constraints an intended audience would expect to find in letters. Letters are more explanatory whereas the emphasis is on record-keeping in diaries. Letters also differ from diaries in that they do not give such a regular account of day-to-day life as diaries do.<sup>295</sup> As was shown earlier in this section, diaries often functioned as letters in that

<sup>288</sup> Mrs Aeneas Gunn, *We of the Never-Never* (London: Hutchinson, n.d.): 117.

<sup>289</sup> Clarke, *Life Lines* xxix.

<sup>290</sup> Cowan, *A Faithful Picture* 18.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>292</sup> Many editors included a copy of a crosswritten letter in their published work of original manuscripts. Peter Cowan, who edited the letters of Eliza and Thomas Brown, provided the photocopy of Eliza's crosswritten letter of 20 June 1845. It faced the transcribed version of that letter on p. 78. Cowan, *A Faithful Picture* 79.

<sup>293</sup> Even after ten years of residence in the Swan River Colony, Eliza Brown still asked for a few things from home. She instructed her relatives to purchase veils and a shawl for her, and compasses, a ruler, pencils, a knife and other toilet conveniences for her boys with her money. She was dissatisfied with the quality of products that were on sale in the colony. They were 'so trumpery, unfashionable, and expensive' she wrote in her letter dated 9 February 1852 to her father 'that England has always been my resource for satisfactory and cheap things'. *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>294</sup> Cooper, "Shaping meaning" 96.

<sup>295</sup> Arthur Ponsonby, *English Diaries* (London: Methuen, 1923): 2.

they informed the home audience of the daily life of the settlers. These diaries therefore had an intended audience and were written with the purpose of communication, not just record-keeping. I would argue that such diaries and letters were after all not that different. They were both sent home to inform a particular audience of the wellbeing and new life of the migrants.

Just like diaries, letters were often the products of a longer period and had several sections like entries in a diary. Patricia Clarke calls such letters 'serial letters'.<sup>296</sup> These serial letters not only contained the events of a longer period and showed how much care had been involved in the writing of them, but also served as a reminder that women were often too busy to spend much time over writing. A good example comes from Mary Thomas. At the end of her letter dated 14 October 1838 from Adelaide, she wrote to her brother in England: 'I must now think of bringing this long letter to a close, which I have been nearly a week in writing. I have so little time to spare that I could not sit to it long together.'<sup>297</sup> Another circumstance that encouraged the writing of serial letters was the long period of time that elapsed between the departure of ships that transported the Australian letters to England. Women put an end to their long epistles just before the ships were due to set sail. Fanny Macleay began her letter dated 4 December 1826 from Sydney to her brother William in Cuba by noting that 'a ship is on the eve of departure for England' and 'I cannot allow her to quit this port without taking some of my scratches dedicated to my far separated friends'.<sup>298</sup>

Serial letters sometimes contained diary entries. It is at this point where diaries and letters overlap. The Atkin family moved to a property 100 kilometres from Rockhampton, Queensland, just a few months after their arrival in Australia. When Mary sent a long letter home to her parents on 8 January 1866 from Herberts Creek she included the diary entries for one month of her life. She began the letter this way: 'I have made up my mind to keep a Diary for a month and to send it to you just to give you an exact idea of our daily life.' She told her family her daily routines, her household duties and also recorded her reading of religious books.<sup>299</sup> A group of letters could also be read as diary entries. In 1862 Rachel Henning recommended her sister Etta in England to read several of her letters together. She should start with the earliest first and 'then

<sup>296</sup> Patricia Clarke, "Life Lines: Nineteenth-century women's letters and diaries" *Australian Folklore* Vol. 11, (July 1996): 157.

<sup>297</sup> Thomas, *The Diary and Letters of Mary Thomas* 99.

<sup>298</sup> Beverley Earnshaw, et al., eds, *Fanny to William - The letters of Frances Leonora Macleay 1812-1836* (Sydney: Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, Macleay Museum, University of Sydney, 1993): 68.

<sup>299</sup> Mary Atkin, et al., *Letters written by Mary Atkin and Grace Atkin during their first two years in Australia 1865-1867* Microfilm 0648, John Oxley Library, Brisbane, 26.

they will not be so stupid, but will come in the form of a journal'.<sup>300</sup>

Just like diaries, letters were also circulated among family and friends who wanted to hear about the colonial plight of the letter-writer. It was also easier for the colonists to write only one epistle for the consumption of many people. Rachel Henning recorded such an occasion. In April 1854 she was still in England and when she received her sister Annie's letter from Australia she gave it to many people: 'I am going to send round the interesting one we got from you by the Harbinger. It is now gone to Aunt Pinchard, then the Carrs and Buxtons and Sophy Henning will have it. Also Mary Ball and Mrs Barlow; the latter has not seen an Australian letter for a long time.'<sup>301</sup>

A record of daily life and of significant events – whether in the form of a diary or a letter – was written for a variety of reasons. In the first place letters, like diaries, gave an insight into the world these women lived in. Due to the letters' highly personal nature, readers gained a very personal perspective of Australian colonial life, an aspect that colonial women often emphasised. Lucy Gray recorded her early life on Hughenden Station near the Flinders River in northern Queensland between 1868 and 1870. Her journal chapters read as separate letters and in one of them she explained that

these letters are to be chiefly about what I did, what I saw, what I thought, etc. Queensland exclusively from my point of view; consequently things that are in the foreground in my pictures are in the middle distance, or in the far horizon of other peoples.<sup>302</sup>

In some cases letter writers also wished to provide guidelines for future emigrants. Sophia Stanger came out to Sydney with her family in 1840 and travelled to Bathurst where they were to settle down. She described her family's journey through the Blue Mountains of New South Wales in July 1841 in a letter to her mother. She wanted her to know what such a journey

<sup>300</sup> Adams, *The Letters of Rachel Henning* 118.

<sup>301</sup> Cited in Paula Hamilton, et al., "Watering geraniums and feeding dogs": The letters of Rachel Henning" *Journal of Australian Studies* Vol. 19, (1986): 85.

<sup>302</sup> Lucy Gray, "Journey to Hughenden" *Queensland Heritage* Vol. 1, No. 1, (1964): 12. Unfortunately, the personal dimension was occasionally damaged during the editing process. Not only diaries but also collections of letters were edited to suit the particular purposes of the editor. A good case in point is Rachel Henning's letters. Anne Allingham points out in her article that the editor David Adams deliberately cut out certain parts and rewrote several sections in order not to hurt various people and to create an idealised version of genteel life. He also deleted materials that were in his opinion of secondary interest. In the final product, therefore, the readers are presented with only the charming side of Rachel and are denied the critical aspects of her character. Adams did not acknowledge the numerous editorial changes that he undertook and thus created the false impression that these letters were the accurate reproductions of the original ones. Anne Allingham, "Challenging the editing of the Rachel Henning letters" *Australian Literary Studies* Vol. 16, No. 3, (1994): 262-279. There is only a very vague remark in the third page of David Adams's Preface. He declared that 'the letters of Rachel Henning, as presented in this book, (the emphasis is mine) begin in 1853'. Adams, *The Letters of Rachel Henning* xiii. This reference, though, does not do enough justice to all the editorial changes that he carried out. Nevertheless, I will rely on the edited version of her letters throughout this thesis.

entailed in case she became 'tempted while reading this to follow us here'.<sup>303</sup> Some colonial letters were published by emigration agencies. They were highly propagandistic and aimed at promoting emigration.<sup>304</sup>

It was crucial for most colonists to keep in contact with their loved ones at home. Diaries and letters served a vital link with the outside world and recorded the novel experience of colonial life. This section has argued that letters were similar to certain diaries in the sense that they had the same communicative function.

### Personal Narratives

Personal narratives present a more formal and structured way of narrating colonial life. The word 'autobiography' was not in use in the first half of the nineteenth century. Colonial women preferred to entitle their life-writings as recollections, reminiscences and memoirs, or they used the structure 'life of' to describe their prose.<sup>305</sup> Autobiographies are different from letters and diaries in the sense that they are usually written at a later stage in life, whereas letters and diaries relate recent events. Time is an essential factor in autobiographies because it enables the writer to look back and interpret things from the perspective of distance. This structured form of writing is exclusive in the sense that only highly literate people turn to this genre.<sup>306</sup> Autobiographies are also usually written for possible publication.<sup>307</sup>

As discussed earlier, one of the main driving forces behind women's reasons for writing was to inform readers of life in the Australian colonies. Clara Aspinall's experience suggested that many English people were not aware of the Australian circumstances. In her view they were 'in a complete state of ignorance on the subject of Australia, and [...] believe[d] it to be only a country of gold-diggers and convicts'. She recalled that some English girls were astonished to hear about her long sojourn in Australia. They did not understand why she was in 'such high spirits and health after going through the terrible ordeal of transportation'. They kept asking her if people were really living 'very rough' there.<sup>308</sup> There was obviously some need to change popular misconceptions about Australia.

<sup>303</sup> Sophia Stanger, "A journey from Sydney over the Blue Mountains to Bathurst forty years ago" in George Mackaness, ed., *Fourteen Journeys Over the Blue Mountains of New South Wales 1813-1841* (Sydney: Horwitz-Grahame, 1965): 262.

<sup>304</sup> Eric Richards, "Voices of British and Irish migrants in nineteenth-century Australia" in Colin G. Pooley, et al., eds, *Migrants, Emigrants and Immigrants* (London: Routledge, 1991): 30.

<sup>305</sup> Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom 2*.

<sup>306</sup> Richards, "Voices of British and Irish migrants" 23.

<sup>307</sup> Ponsonby, *English Diaries 2*.

Another reason for writing was to fulfil the promise of informing acquaintances at home of the new life in Australia. Mary Thomas recalled in her early South Australian reminiscences the promise that 'I had made before I left England, to send a faithful account of our voyage to South Australia, and of our proceedings on arrival at our new settlement'.<sup>309</sup> Personal narratives, just like letters and diaries, had a communicative function in that they intended to depict colonial life to a British audience. Published narratives, however, aimed to reach a wider audience other than family and friends.

Early settlers were aware of their own significance and place in history as pioneers. Joy Hooton defines pioneering memoirs as narratives whose 'role of witness [was] to the experience of early settlement'.<sup>310</sup> Harriett Daly took up the pen in order to fill a gap. She claimed to be the very first writer in 1887 to record early pioneer life in the Northern Territory of South Australia. She wrote in her introductory chapter in *Digging, Squatting and Pioneering Life in the Northern Territory of South Australia* that

the subject to which these pages are devoted has never, to my knowledge, been brought before the world in the form of a book. This has led me to record my own experiences of a settlement hourly attaining more importance; - when it was one of the least known places in the world.<sup>311</sup>

Many other settlers were proud of their pioneering past and they even signalled this valuable experience in the titles of their recollections. Mary McConnel published *Memories of Days Long Gone By: By the wife of an Australian pioneer*<sup>312</sup> and Mary Macleod Banks, her daughter, wrote her childhood recollections under the title *Memories of Pioneer Days in Queensland*.<sup>313</sup> There were also special associations that celebrated the pioneers' achievements. The Pioneers' Association of South Australia published *Mrs David Randalls' Reminiscences*<sup>314</sup> and Mrs T. Holder Cowl's *Some of My Experiences During a Voyage to the Gulf of Carpentaria* was first read to the members of a Pioneer Club.<sup>315</sup>

Providing a true picture of the antipodean conditions - whether the experience of early pioneers or later settlers - was not the only aim. Colonial women also wished to emphasise that, rather than giving a long list of facts and figures, their main focus was on personal impressions

<sup>308</sup> Aspinall, *Three Years in Melbourne* 28-31.

<sup>309</sup> Thomas, *The Diaries and Letters of Mary Thomas* 78.

<sup>310</sup> Hooton, *Stories of Herself When Young* 21.

<sup>311</sup> Daly, *Digging, Squatting and Pioneering* 1-2.

<sup>312</sup> Mary McConnel, *Memories of Days Long Gone By: By the wife of an Australian pioneer* (Brisbane?: M. McConnel, 1905).

<sup>313</sup> Mary Macleod Banks, *Memories of Pioneer Days in Queensland* (London: Heath Cranton, 1931).

<sup>314</sup> Geo C. Morphet, ed., *Mrs David Randall's Reminiscences* (Adelaide: Pioneers' Association of South Australia, 1939).

<sup>315</sup> Mrs T. Holder Cowl, *Some of my Experiences During a Voyage to the Gulf of Carpentaria and Three Years' Residence at Normanton in the Early Seventies* (Brisbane: Besley & Pike, 1907).

and individual observations. They wanted to show Australia from the female point of view.<sup>316</sup> Janet Millett in her preface to *An Australian Parsonage* stated that 'the following pages do not pretend to the character of either a guide or a history of the colony. They are simply, as their name implies, sketches of the writer's own experiences'.<sup>317</sup> The Hill sisters' choice of title for their travel book reflected the personal nature of their narrative. They entitled it *What We Saw in Australia*.<sup>318</sup>

Most life-writings were intended for publication, unlike private diaries and letters, but there were naturally some exceptions. Katherine L. Parker intended her recollections *My Bush Book* for publication, but, as the later editor points out, it was a very difficult undertaking in the depression years of the 1930s. Her reminiscences achieved publication only after her death under the editorial work of Marcie Muir in 1982.<sup>319</sup> Some life-writings were not intended for the public, though. Mrs Stawell's *My Recollections* is such a work. She noted towards the end of her narrative that it was 'written for my children and grandchildren, not for the public'.<sup>320</sup>

As we have seen, women wrote their memoirs, recollections and reminiscences for a variety of reasons. In the first place, they wished to record the experience of their colonial life either because they promised their friends and family to do so or because they believed that their lives as early pioneers or later settlers were worth writing about. They also wanted the younger generation to know how their predecessors lived and what sort of hardships they had to endure in the past. Just like many diarists and letter writers, the authors of personal narratives also wished to emphasise the female viewpoint of the colonial enterprise.

Another form of personal narrative was the travel book. Travel writing differed from residents' recollections in the sense that they reflected the point of view of an outsider who did not have the time to mature her arguments. Fanny Rains clearly noted this perspective of the traveller in the preface to her travel book *By Land and Ocean*. Fanny departed England for

<sup>316</sup> This female point of view did not always imply, however, a common perspective. A good case in point is the way mothers and daughters depicted their family life. Mary McConnel and her daughter Mary Macleod Banks wrote about their life at Cressbrook on the Upper Brisbane River, 160 kilometres from Brisbane, in the 1860s and 70s. While Mary McConnel wrote about her Scottish heritage, the establishment of her family in the colonies and the early years, her daughter, on the other hand, focussed on her childhood years and described the station and her life at Cressbrook. She continued the story of the McConnel family where her mother stopped in her narrative. Mary McConnel did not want to write about the later years because her aim was to inform the children of her earlier life. She noted that 'my children are acquainted with the subsequent years of my life, and my pen is not needed to recall them here'. The scope of these two books are different because their authors sought to recount different stories. McConnel, *Memories of Days Long Gone* By 52; Banks, *Memories of Pioneer Days in Queensland*.

<sup>317</sup> Millett, *An Australian Parsonage* vi.

<sup>318</sup> Hill, *What We Saw in Australia*.

<sup>319</sup> Marcie Muir, *My Bush Book - K. Langloh Parker's 1890s story of outback station life* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1982): 152.

Adelaide in 1873 with a friend. They stayed together in South Australia for three months but this friend did not accompany Fanny on the rest of her journey around the world. She reminded her audience that her thoughts and opinions were formed '*en passant*' and as a consequence they 'lack the authority to be gained from a more lengthy sojourn and greater experience'.<sup>321</sup> Kathleen Lambert called New South Wales her home from 1843 to 1888. In the introduction to her memoir she contrasted the account of Australia given by residents with those of travellers. She argued that

travellers [...] are merely birds of passage for a few months or weeks, staying amongst us, [...] seeing what is to be seen under the most favourable conditions, and listening to interested or interesting description of places and people they have not had time to investigate. They leave without having the slightest idea of the real homes, lives, intellects, and capabilities of either country or people.<sup>322</sup>

Thus her memoir, *The Golden South – Memories of Australian life from 1843 to 1888* emphasised the perspective of the insider.

Changing conditions in nineteenth-century Britain made overseas travel more affordable among the middle class.<sup>323</sup> While many opportunities for travel existed for men, the possibilities for women, on the other hand, were restricted. Men could take up overseas positions in the navy or army, serve as administrators, or explore unknown regions of the world. The eighteenth-century institution of the Grand Tour also provided women with the possibility of travel and they often accompanied their husbands on these occasions. Single women, on the other hand, could see the world only when they were chaperoned or when employed as governesses or lady's companions.<sup>324</sup>

Dorothy Middleton claims that travel liberated women from the constraints of life in England. She argues that travel was 'an individual gesture of the house-bound, man-dominated Victorian woman'. It also offered 'a freedom of action unthinkable at home'. In her view the exodus of lady travellers was in line with other fundamental movements such as women's emancipation and fight for suffrage. Behind all these demands was women's burning desire for independence and opportunity.<sup>325</sup> That spirit of independence was exemplified by some courageous women who embarked on the long journey to Australia, or - most ambitiously -

<sup>320</sup> Mary Stawell, *My Recollections* (London: Richard Clay, 1911): 157.

<sup>321</sup> Fanny L. Rains, *By Land and Ocean* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1878): vi.

<sup>322</sup> Kathleen Lambert, *The Golden South – Memories of Australian home life from 1843 to 1888 by 'Lyth'* (London: Ward and Downey, 1890): 2.

<sup>323</sup> Maria H. Frawley, *A Wider Range – Travel writing by women in Victorian England* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994): 20.

<sup>324</sup> Mary Russell, *The Blessings of a Good Thick Skirt: Women travelers and their world* (London: Collins, 1986): 39-42.

<sup>325</sup> Dorothy Middleton, *Victorian Lady Travellers* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965): 4, 7.

around the world, on their own. Eliza Theobald travelled by herself in the mid-1870s and proudly noted in the preface of her travel booklet that she met agreeable fellow passengers wherever she went. She wrote that

I am also glad to testify to the fact that a lady may, without fear, travel alone, either by land or by sea. My experience gives me the pleasure of stating I have uniformly found fellow-passengers kind and genial, and ready to render assistance required. The contrary is the exception. The proverb is true in travelling as elsewhere, 'he who wants friends must show himself friendly'. I say my experience has been a very happy one, the retrospect of which will always afford me pleasure.<sup>326</sup>

Shirley Foster suggests that the form of travel writing was already established by the beginning of the nineteenth century. This mode of writing was characteristic of colonial and imperial discourse and was written in an objective style. It often included documentary materials. Foster points out that these features fitted well into the contemporary male literary tradition. When women wrote their travel accounts they had to settle their work into this background. It was a difficult undertaking because of the contemporary views on genteel femininity: women were allowed to venture into literature mainly in the field of poetry and novel writing. They were expected to cover such topics as home, family life and sentimental events only. The male discourse of travel writing was, on the other hand, entirely devoid of such themes. In order to give an authentic and accurate account, women were required to feminise the genre of travel writing. Foster attributes the use of disclaimers and women's reliance on earlier male sources to women's efforts to safeguard their femininity.<sup>327</sup>

Travel writing was nevertheless a worthwhile undertaking. Shirley Foster claims that 'recreation of the foreign reminded of an "alternative" existence; it was a mode of self-definition, confirming the sense of new identity; it allowed both self-exploration and challenge to convention within the context of "objective" literature'. She also adds that a characteristically female version of this genre was established. Women treated certain topics in their work that received little or no attention in contemporary male writings. Their emphasis on domestic life, household management, child care and related female issues such as marriage customs, female

<sup>326</sup> Eliza Theobald, *A Sketch of My Visits to America and Australia* (London: Pardon, 1876): 2. Several other women declared that they encountered no problems while they were travelling on their own. The Hill sisters left for Australia in January 1873. They were both unmarried and unattended but travelling together must have given them some kind of comfort. Rosamond and Florence stated in their book *What We Saw in Australia* that their undertaking was seen as 'absolutely crazy' and 'eccentric' but noted that public opinion changed a little when it became known that they were going to visit their aunt. They accomplished their journey in sixteen months and arrived home with the conviction that it was safe for ladies to travel unchaperoned. They wrote that such a journey 'may, we feel sure, be accomplished with ease and comfort by ladies unprovided with servant or escort, we constantly met with kindness and attention; everybody was ready to afford us assistance and information'. Hill, *What We Saw in Australia* 1-3.

<sup>327</sup> Shirley Foster, *Across New Worlds - Nineteenth-century women travellers and their writings* (New York: Harvester, 1990): 18-20.

status and costume were also discussed in their accounts.<sup>328</sup> Harriet E. Clark visited Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Port Darwin with her husband. While it was Francis E. Clark who recorded the major events of this journey, his wife contributed several chapters in which she emphasised the female point of view. Her work included topics such as housekeeping on board and meeting other women and children in foreign countries. In her Introduction she stated her understanding of the difference between the male and female experience of travel.

When a man and a woman are journeying 'Around the World' together they are likely to see all things through different glasses. The man may, perhaps, have a clearer vision and a wider outlook; but the woman, with more leisure, and with more opportunities in some directions because she is a woman, will notice little things which have escaped the larger vision, and yet are none the less interesting.<sup>329</sup>

Personal narratives as well as travel books were sometimes based on diaries and letters. Casey Blanton claims that 'the genesis of women's authorship was typically found in the private sphere: in diaries, letters'. It is no wonder therefore that women sought to enter the genre of travel literature through these channels.<sup>330</sup> The title of Fanny L. Rains's travel book immediately suggests the genre of her account: *By Land and Ocean or The journal and letters of a young girl*.<sup>331</sup> Mary McConnel relied on her diary, too, when she was writing her memoir. At one point she wrote that 'I think that here I will quote from an old diary'.<sup>332</sup>

The earliest woman traveller to Australia was Mary Ann Parker who landed in Sydney Cove just three years after the arrival of the First Fleet. She arrived with her husband Captain John Parker who was appointed to the command of the *Gorgon*. She was an experienced traveller having visited France, Italy and Spain in her youth with her mother. Her husband died in 1794 and she published her narrative *A Voyage Round the World* a year later to support her family financially.<sup>333</sup> Another rather early traveller was Jane Roberts. As the title of her book, *Two Years at Sea* suggests, she spent two years travelling between 1829 and 1831. Her first destination in Australia was the Swan River Settlement. From there she moved on to Van Diemen's Land before returning to England.<sup>334</sup>

One reason for travel was to visit family members. Eliza Theobald travelled around the world in two and a half years. She left England in September 1873, visiting her brother in New

<sup>328</sup> Ibid., 23-24.

<sup>329</sup> Clark, "Glimpses of life" 593.

<sup>330</sup> Casey Blanton, *Travel Writing - The self and the world* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997): 57.

<sup>331</sup> Rains, *By Land and Ocean*. Catherine Bond's *Goldfields and Chrysanthemums* which recorded her visit to Coolgardie and Melbourne, retained the original form of the diary, and the events of that journey were given on a day-to-day basis under separate entry headings. Catherine Bond, *Goldfields and Chrysanthemums: Notes of travel in Australia and India* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, 1898).

<sup>332</sup> McConnel, *Memories of Days Long Gone* By 50.

<sup>333</sup> Mary Ann Parker, *A Voyage Round the World* (Sydney: Hordern House, 1991): Introduction.

York and then crossing the American continent and the Pacific Ocean to be reunited with her sister in Sydney. She arrived back home in February 1876 and published her experiences under the title *A Sketch of My Visits to America and Australia*.<sup>335</sup> Some travellers set off with a professional purpose. Marianne North and Elizabeth Gould left England to paint the flowers and birds of Australia. Elizabeth arrived with her zoologist husband in 1838 and visited New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land. She made an impressive number of drawings of the native birds to illustrate John's studies.<sup>336</sup> Marianne was born in England in 1830 and travelled extensively in Europe with her family. After the death of her father in 1869 she began travelling in search of beautiful plants and flowers to paint.<sup>337</sup> But not only botanical interest fuelled women to travel to Australia. The Hill sisters came to South Australia in 1873 as travellers, but in addition to visiting some places of interest they were also curious about social institutions such as orphanages and asylums.<sup>338</sup>

Australia was often included in round-the-world itineraries. Alice Anne Montgomery, the Duchess of Buckingham and Chandos, left London in autumn 1892 with a lady friend. Together they spent a couple of months in Australia before journeying on to New Zealand and North America. They spent most of their time in Melbourne and Sydney where they enjoyed the hospitality of Government House.<sup>339</sup> Alice Mary Frere left an account of her trip around the world in 1865 in her book *The Antipodes and Round the World*. She spent her youth in India, where her father Sir Bartle Frere worked as an administrator in the Indian Civil Service for thirty-five years and was later Governor of Bombay. When he was recalled to London he made the homeward journey via Australia in 1865 with his daughter.<sup>340</sup> They visited Melbourne and

<sup>334</sup> Jane Roberts, *Two Years at Sea* (London: John W. Parker, 1837).

<sup>335</sup> Theobald, *A Sketch of My Visits to America and Australia*.

<sup>336</sup> A.H. Chisholm, *ADB* Vol. 1: 465.

<sup>337</sup> Helen Vellacott, ed., *Some Recollections of a Happy Life: Marianne North in Australia and New Zealand* (Caulfield: Edward Arnold, 1986): 1-3.

<sup>338</sup> Hill, *What We Saw in Australia*. Other similar works include Charlotte Anley's *The Prisoners of Australia* and Flora Shaw's *Letters from Queensland*. Charlotte Anley undertook the long voyage to Sydney in order to inspect and report on the situation of the female prisoners at Parramatta in the year 1836. In the company of Samuel Marsden she paid a visit to the Parramatta Female Factory on behalf of the London Committee of the British Ladies' Prison Visiting Association. Her humble observations and suggestions were recorded in her book. Charlotte Anley, *The Prisoners of Australia* (London: J. Hatchard, 1841). Flora Shaw was a paid professional. She was a journalist and worked as the colonial writer for *The Times* from 1890 to 1900. She travelled extensively in the British Empire and reported on the colonial conditions in her articles. She even visited Queensland and compiled reports on the economy of Queensland in the early 1890s. A selection of her articles was published in 1893. Flora L. Shaw, *Letters from Queensland* (London: Macmillan, 1893).

<sup>339</sup> Alice Anne Montgomery, *Glimpses of Four Continents: Letters written during a tour in Australia, New Zealand, and North America, in 1893* (London: John Murray, 1894).

<sup>340</sup> Douglas R.G. Sellick, ed., *Venus in Transit - Australia's women travelers 1788-1930* (North Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2003): 67.

some of the Victorian goldfields before travelling to Sydney, the Blue Mountains, and then Brisbane and a number of nearby stations. After a short visit to New Zealand they returned to Australia to see Tasmania and finally Adelaide. Alice published her account of their travels in 1870 under the title *The Antipodes and Round the World* in 1870.<sup>341</sup>

A unique class of travellers included the wives of ship captains who often accompanied their husbands on long voyages. Rosalie Hare was married in 1827 in Ipswich, England, and shortly afterwards her husband was appointed commander of an emigrant ship. They reached Tasmania in January 1828, where they spent two months before they sailed back to England via Java. Rosalie kept a diary during the journey and recorded her impressions of the young Tasmanian settlement of Circular Head.<sup>342</sup> Even settlers and temporary residents were interested in exploring Australia. Louisa Anne Meredith settled down in Van Diemen's Land in 1840. She made a visit to Victoria with her husband in the late 1850s, recording her impressions in a book entitled *Over the Straits: A visit to Victoria*. They spent only a few weeks there and paid a short visit to Melbourne and the diggings at Ballarat.<sup>343</sup>

This section has argued that personal narratives and travel books communicated and analysed the experience of colonial life. The publication of these personal narratives often ensured not only a wider audience but also the transfer of previously private letters and diaries to the public realm. The female perspective of colonial life and travel was therefore not only confined to private readings within the circle of family and friends but could reach a wider audience of mostly female readers. Furthermore, published texts empowered female colonists and travellers. The insertion of originally private documents, such as letters and diaries, in the main body of more formal life-writings legitimised the place of womanly issues that were considered to be part of the private sphere into the supposedly more prestigious realm of the public sphere.

### Conclusion

The depiction of colonial life by female British settlers on the pages of their personal narratives, such as their letters, diaries, reminiscences, memoirs, recollections and travel books, resulted in the construction of a carefully crafted colonial identity. This section argued that colonial women had different purposes with their narratives. While some women wrote only to maintain

<sup>341</sup> Alice Mary Frere, *The Antipodes and Round the World* (London: Hatchards, 1870).

<sup>342</sup> Rosalie Hare, *The Voyage of the Caroline from England to Van Diemen's Land and Batavia in 1827-28* (London: Longmans, Green, 1927): ix.

relationships, others put pen to paper to secure themselves a place in colonial history. Many of them also considered writing as a means of entering the public realm of men.

Many women's accounts constructed their writers' identity in celebratory terms. They depicted female colonists as heroines who succeeded in coping with and overcoming the hardships and challenges of colonial life. Behind women's recounting of their stories lay not just a promise to keep their home audience well-informed of their new life but also a sense of pride that they could succeed in establishing themselves in the colonies. Delys Bird claims that 'these women used their writing to place themselves in the centre of their personal histories. In this way, they were able to construct a position within writing from which they could transform drudgery and deprivation of all kinds, into narratives in which they were the heroines.'<sup>344</sup>

While one might explain this celebratory attitude as a defensive strategy – they did not want to disappoint their loved ones at home, scare future settlers or admit their failure – it could also be seen as a testimonial of what the Australian colonies could offer to women who felt imprisoned and restricted in their sphere of action in Britain. As was shown in this chapter, colonial life provided women with a wider subject matter and as a result many women settlers became familiar with economic and pastoral topics in Australia despite the fact that they were mostly kept ignorant about them in Britain. Colonial narratives suggest that female authors approached these issues modestly, but women tended to be proud of their ability to discuss them.

This heroic representation of the colonial self came to surface in other areas, as well. Unlike male writers, who considered the political and economic progress of colonial Australia as their main themes, women, on the other hand, mostly wrote about themselves. The female perspective of colonial life came to be in the foreground of their narratives. Women wrote about their own life and their relationships in their autobiographical accounts, and about their sometimes unchaperoned journeys in their travel books. These topics were considered novel in the nineteenth century; a period that was still dominated by the ideology of the separate spheres. Colonial life resulted in the relaxing of genteel ideals, and the publication of colonial women's life-writings was a good indicator of these changes.

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<sup>343</sup> Louisa Anne Meredith, *Over the Straits: A visit to Victoria* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1861)

<sup>344</sup> Bird, "The self and the magic lantern" 126.

# Chapter Three

## Domestic Life in the Bush

## Introduction

When British gentlewomen started a new life in the Australian bush, their life changed in many ways. Those who settled down on the frontier or in sparsely populated rural areas had to cope with extreme hardship. Back in Britain these middle-class ladies were used to living in civilised conditions. Relocating to the 'middle of nowhere' in the bush caused considerable change in their lifestyle. Adjustment to the new circumstances went hand-in-hand with the redefinition of their roles and a shift in their self-image.

This chapter looks at the way emigrant women's life changed in colonial Australia. I will outline some of the major aspects of their new mode of living that they found rather hard to accept. Issues to be dealt with include housing, the servant problem, housework and the lack of female company and religious services in the bush. The aim of this part of the thesis is twofold: firstly, to find out what was unique about gentlewomen's experiences of their colonial life and secondly, to discover how the new circumstances challenged gentlewomen's notions of gentility and their self-perception.

Katharine Kirkland clearly stated the particular consequences of settling down in the colonies. She began her memoir *Life in the Bush* - recording the period between 1838 and 1841 that she spent in the Port Phillip District - by declaring that 'the wilds of Australia present at this time some strange scenes'. In her view colonists and settlers underwent transformation of a kind that 'we have no experience of in civilised times'.<sup>345</sup> In her childhood memoir, Ellen Campbell noted that her pioneer mother had to do things that 'I don't suppose she ever dreamt of doing when she was a girl in England'.<sup>346</sup> Many challenges were awaiting the British migrants in rural Australia.<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> Katharine Kirkland, "Life in the bush" in Hugh Anderson, ed., *The Flowers of the Field - A history of Ripon Shire together with Mrs Kirkland's Life in the bush from Chambers's Miscellany, 1845* (Melbourne: Hill of Content, 1969): 173.

<sup>346</sup> Ellen Campbell, *An Australian Childhood* (London: Blackie, 1892): 12.

<sup>347</sup> 'Silverleaf' gave a brief description of the difficulties of bush life from a woman's point of view in her article "Town and Country Housekeepers" in the *Illustrated Sydney News* in 1881. She compared town and bush housework and came to the conclusion that 'some of our best town housekeepers would find themselves sadly at fault if they should find themselves transplanted into the far bush, miles from shop, store, or the daily tradesman [...]. The household on a station must be a miniature town in itself; it must have its store, and those who make up a list must be far-seeing not to find that something has been forgotten, or the consumption of some article miscalculated. Then the lady on a station is supposed to possess medical and surgical knowledge, from pulling a tooth to mending a broken leg. She must be Lady Bountiful, too, and have the discernment to know when to give and when to withhold. [...] Weeks may pass without a single friendly caller to relieve the monotony of bush life, and then, without warning or pre-arrangement, eight or nine will - like an American surprise-party - make their appearance.' 'Silverleaf', "Town and country housekeepers" *Illustrated Sydney News* Vol. XVIII, No. 7, (9 July 1881): 14.

## Housing

Home was the centre of British genteel life. Emma Curtin claims that 'in nineteenth-century Britain, the idea of the home was highly significant in defining ideals of gentility. It was as much a social construct and state of mind as a reality of bricks and mortar.'<sup>348</sup> Jenni Calder argues that 'the home and the structure of life within it was at the centre of the middle-class view of life' in Victorian England. 'Objects became symbols of standard and lifestyle: the two were inseparable'.<sup>349</sup> Early settlers faced extreme difficulties at the very beginning of their colonial enterprise. On arrival in Australia many women had to put up with tents or simple huts for their abodes. It was a very unusual and hard form of existence for these middle-class people who usually came from cities. Surprisingly enough, they accepted their strange and often uncomfortable dwellings and often felt happy under seemingly primitive circumstances.

Early pioneer settlers often had to stay in tents during the first few weeks and months of their colonial life. Louisa Clifton and her family spent some time in a tent during the early stages of their life in Australind, Western Australia in 1841. She referred to this period of their life as a 'strange scene in our history'. For her the greatest challenge of this experience was that she was constantly occupied with the everyday duties and had no time whatsoever for leisure. On the occasion of moving to a house after staying approximately three months in a tent she wrote: 'During that period the necessities of life occupied so much time, thought and fatigue, rendering unavailable any leisure hours'.<sup>350</sup> As mentioned in Chapter One, Victorian women's lives were characterised by idleness and they were not expected to work. Louisa seemed to miss her former life that was free of domestic duties and longed for the time she used to have all for herself at home. Her sense of identity as a gentlewoman suffered from her loss of idleness.

Early colonists were aware that their tent life was abnormal in many ways. To the outsider it may have looked like an uncivilised mode of existence, but colonial women nevertheless did their best to keep up a certain standard. Mary Thomas and her family were on the ship *Africaine* that brought the first shipload of settlers to the new colony of South Australia. Mary witnessed the proclamation of this colony in 1836. When the men put up the tents shortly after landing at Holdfast Bay in November 1836 she recalled that 'everything was in the roughest fashion imaginable'. The family stayed in tents until the middle of September 1837 when they moved to a house in Hindley Street, Adelaide. Mary later remarked in her reminiscences that

<sup>348</sup> Emma Jane Curtin, "In Awe of Mrs Grundy: British gentility and emigrant gentlewomen in Australia, 1830-1880" (PhD thesis, La Trobe University, 1995): 645.

<sup>349</sup> Jenni Calder, *The Victorian Home* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1977): 32.

many newcomers 'when they arrived among the tents they would look about with seeming astonishment at finding some of their own race living bush fashion, and yet not quite savage'. She was also surprised that such conditions did not turn them completely wild. After a while, however, Mary could only laugh at herself and her way of life. This attitude helped her come to grips with the situation that would have been impossible even to think about under normal circumstances.

We thought but little of inconveniences which could not be avoided, especially as some of them were rather amusing than otherwise, and we laughed at the idea as to what our friends in England would say if they could see us in the ridiculous situations in which we were sometimes placed.<sup>351</sup>

Surprisingly enough, many early settlers declared themselves content and happy during their tent lives. Anne Leake, a fourteen-year-old English girl, arrived in Fremantle in 1829 with her grandmother. Before settling down in Fremantle, where everybody lived in tents and huts, Anne spent two weeks in Perth with the wife of the Colonial Secretary. In a letter dated 3 January 1830 she reassured her governess in England that despite the harsh circumstances she felt content:

I think you would laugh to see how we live here in a square place made of rushes which we have dignified with the name of house, but inside we are very comfortable. [...] You will hardly believe me when I say that I am quite happy here. [...] You must not suppose that we are living here like savages.<sup>352</sup>

Tent life and the primitive state of houses must have shocked these ladies but words of complaint were hardly ever recorded in their letters or reminiscences. The above examples suggest that women tried to look at the bright side of things. Rather than collapsing in despair at the primitive conditions of life they tried to make the best out of their situation. Moreover, they appeared to look at their rough life as an adventure. Both Mary Thomas and Anne Leake believed that people at home would 'laugh' at their colonial residences. Knowing that they could not easily change things they opted for enjoying the little they had. They may even have felt a sense of liberation in their new mode of existence, identifying themselves with romantic fictional characters who had to overcome tough conditions and challenges on their way to happiness.

Dale Spender argues that women tended to keep silent about or made light of the troubles in their narratives simply because they did not want their loved ones at home to learn about the many obstacles they had to overcome. Spender suggests that this approach may have been advantageous to the women themselves. She writes that 'in the process of trying to present the bright and funny side of their harrowing experiences to their family audiences, women may have

<sup>350</sup> Lucy Frost, ed., *No Place for a Nervous Lady* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1984): 74.

<sup>351</sup> Evan Kyffin Thomas, ed., *The Diary and Letters of Mary Thomas 1836-1866: Being the early days of South Australia* (Adelaide: W.K. Thomas, 1915): 50, 64, 67, 68.

<sup>352</sup> Mrs J. Cowan, "Some pioneer women" *Western Australian Historical Society* Vol. 1, Part X, (1931): 46.

found a means to deal with some of the hardships of their lives'.<sup>353</sup> Besides, their letters and writings followed certain conventions that did not permit women to give way to their sorrows. Penny Russell notes that their emotional life was carefully hidden away from public view and was silenced even in their diaries.<sup>354</sup>

Huts were definitely an improvement on tents, but they, too, lacked the kind of comfort these middle-class British women had been used to at home. The change must have been especially striking for Henrietta Foot. She lived in very good circumstances at home but because her husband squandered away his inheritance they had to migrate to Australia. Henrietta described their abode near the Darling River in New South Wales where they settled down in the early 1860s. She was aware that her bark hut seemed primitive but she assured her readers that she felt happy.

Our tarpaulin was soon erected on strong posts, and sheets of bark for the walls, forming quite a comfortable hut; the wagon was placed at one end of the building, and served as a most excellent bedstead, while at the other side we had a bark fireplace, so large and roomy that it formed a little kitchen, warm and cosy in the winter, and many a pleasant hour have we spent round that social fireside. Our sons pitched their tent at a short distance from our abode, and in less than a week we felt ourselves quite settled. This must seem strange to many whose wants are numerous; but we really felt at home in the lonely bush, and it was surprising how quickly our little comforts seemed to grow around us.<sup>355</sup>

Jennifer Isaacs notes that Aborigines sometimes built bark huts for themselves; and the colonists therefore employed the Aboriginal people's skill in building their own huts. Henrietta also mentioned that their bark house was built with the assistance of a 'black'.<sup>356</sup>

Only later when looking back on their past did early female settlers occasionally allude to the hardship they had to put up with. Reflecting on life, Mary Thomas wrote after two years of colonial life in a letter to her brother George in England in 1839 that 'what I have endured since I have been here is so far beyond all I had anticipated (and you know it is not a little that will make me complain)'.<sup>357</sup> Religion often gave strength to overcome difficulties. Mary acknowledged the part her faith played in enduring the harsh living conditions in the early years of South Australia. Writing in 1864 she looked back on those twelve months that she spent in a

<sup>353</sup> Dale Spender, *Writing a New World: Two centuries of Australian women writers* (London: Pandora, 1988): 50.

<sup>354</sup> Penny Russell, *A Wish of Distinction* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994): 128.

<sup>355</sup> Mrs James Foott, *Sketches of Life in the Bush, or, Life in the interior* (Sydney: Gibbs, Shallard, 1872): 22. When Katharine Kirkland arrived at their property in the Port Phillip District in 1839 the hut was not finished. It was built of slabs and had only three rooms but no windows or doors. What annoyed Katharine the most was that the rain often came down the chimney and put out the fire. It took them some time before they could fix these problems. She wrote in her memoir, however, that she 'did not mind' having to live in such conditions. She was 'getting inured to these little inconveniences'. Notwithstanding these simplicities she felt happy: 'It may seem strange, but I now felt happy and contented' even though 'we had not many luxuries'. Kirkland, "Life in the bush" 183-184.

<sup>356</sup> Jennifer Isaacs, *Pioneer Women of the Bush and Outback* (Willoughby, NSW: Lansdowne Press, 1990): 14.

<sup>357</sup> Thomas, *The Diary and Letters of Mary Thomas* 117.

tent:

we lived nearly twelve months in tents, and during that time and long after endured many trials, fatigues, and privations, of which those who now come to these shores little dream, and which all the gold of Victorian mines would not induce me to undergo again even if I were as well able to do so now after the lapse of so many years. Often have I wondered since how we ever got through them, but Providence sustained and protected us.<sup>358</sup>

Life in a tent or a hut was a demanding form of existence for most people in the first half of the nineteenth century. Female settlers were amazingly tolerant and did their utmost to conceal any discontent. They also tried to make their life as comfortable and convenient as they could. To the outside world they appeared happy and satisfied, and assured their family at home that everything was alright. Their descriptions of their primitive tents reveal the importance of living conditions in women's lives. Early male settlers also mentioned their tent life but did not give such a detailed description about this experience as women did. After all, the tent belonged to the domestic sphere and men were supposed to write about public affairs as well as their work 'developing' the land.

Nathaniel Hailes arrived at Holdfast Bay, South Australia in March 1839 and noted in his recollections that most of the new arrivals constructed in the Park Lands a 'Robinson Crusoe sort of hut with twigs and branches from the adjoining forest. In this fine and dry climate these huts answer well enough as temporary residences.' He did not state whether he liked living in these huts because this did not seem to be an aspect of early Adelaide that was worth writing about in much detail. Nathaniel only explained that these abodes were endurable thanks to the pleasant climate. In his memoir he then went on to describing the layout of the city of Adelaide.<sup>359</sup> Jonathan Binns Were disliked the tent in which he lived with his wife and children in Melbourne for a few weeks at the end of 1839. For six weeks they had 'boisterous' weather with a lot of rain and Jonathan recalled in his diary that they had to endure many 'trials' at the beginning of their colonial life. The weather made life uncomfortable and delayed the building of their cottage. For him the inconveniences of these early days were, however, negligible in comparison to the expenses he encountered in Melbourne. He noted that 'I was quite broken down, and disappointed, everything being so very dear'.<sup>360</sup>

These two examples suggest that men did not seem to be as much concerned about their domestic arrangements as women were. Men usually were preoccupied with other concerns. For

<sup>358</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>359</sup> Allan L. Peters, ed., *Recollections – Nathaniel Hailes' adventurous life in colonial South Australia* (Kent Town: Wakefield Press, 1998): 10.

<sup>360</sup> Jonathan Binns Were, *A Voyage from Plymouth to Melbourne in 1839 – The shipboard and early Melbourne diary of Jonathan Binns Were* (Melbourne: J.B. Were, 1964.): 275, 281.

women, on the other hand, the home - even a rough and temporary one - was an important subject to write about. Jenni Calder suggests that 'home and the female were inevitably intimately associated'.<sup>361</sup> Home-making was an essentially female duty. Calder argues that

The making of a home was not only woman's work but work that should be hard and dedicated. It was full of rewards, or was represented as such, and no middle-class woman of the period could have been unaware of the satisfaction she was meant to derive from knowing that she herself had created that special atmosphere, those special comforts, that neatness and orderliness, that responsible expression of good taste. She knew not only that she was useful, but that she was essential to the comfort and well-being of all who dwelt in her home, and that this home reflected, was the *only* reflection of, her achievement and her importance. Home-making was not only a duty, it was a right.<sup>362</sup>

Even though women were not directly involved in the building of tents, huts and houses, it was their job to create homes within the building. The early examples of colonial housing show that despite the primitive structure of early colonial abodes, women sought to transform them into cosy homes. It was the idea of the home that mattered to them the most because it defined who they were.

Anne Gollan notes that after the hut was built the settlers usually erected a lean-to that later became the kitchen. With the passing of time more and more additions were made such as bedrooms, sitting room and a verandah. The number of outhouses reflected the size and prosperity of the station. There was usually a dairy, a slaughter house, a laundry and huts for the station hands and servants as well as the travellers. A store-room was an essential building because this was where bulk supplies of basic items such as flour, sugar, tea and soap were kept.<sup>363</sup>

Women had to put up with life in a tent only for a short time, though. Soon a slab hut was built that was followed by either a pisé, wattle and daub, or a thatched cottage, and finally a proper house.<sup>364</sup> The wattle and daub was a 'simple' and 'quick' method of building. It was a well-known building technique in Europe and the reason why it was so popular among the

<sup>361</sup> Calder, *The Victorian Home* 9.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>363</sup> Anne Gollan, *The Tradition of Australian Cooking* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1978): 46. Several early settlers described their accommodation in their narratives. Eliza Mahony's memoir shows not only the gradual improvement of their living quarters but also the establishment of additional buildings. She recalled in her memoir that when they arrived at the newly-established township of Gawler in South Australia in 1839 they first pitched their tent under a peppermint tree. Soon a hut was erected to which they jokingly referred to as the 'house'. It was thirty feet long and had three rooms for her family. They engaged two ticket-of-leave men from New South Wales who built a proper house for them at Clonlea. This was a 'wattle-and-daub hut, with a calico ceiling, whitewashed walls, and a sawn-pine floor, and a door made out of the case the piano was brought out in. It was most comfortable' and they lived there until about 1880. As the years passed they also built a kitchen, a schoolroom and a building for 'casual travellers' which they called the 'Old Spot'. Eliza Sarah Mahony, "The first settlers at Gawler" *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australia - South Australian Branch* Vol. XXVIII, (1926-27): 65-72.

<sup>364</sup> John Archer, *Building a Nation - A history of the Australian house* (Sydney: William Collins, 1987): 25-58.

settlers was that such a house could be erected in a day.<sup>365</sup> Thatched and pisé houses were also common in colonial Australia.<sup>366</sup> A weatherboard house with shingled roof was another favoured building method. Kitchens were usually detached from the main building in the colonies.<sup>367</sup> When the settlers had more money and time at their disposal they made comfortable homes for themselves. These houses were known as homesteads.<sup>368</sup> G.A. Wilkes defined the Australian meaning of this word and noted that the homestead was 'used in a special sense like "house" for the residence of the owner or manager on a station, significantly set apart from the barracks and the men's hut'.<sup>369</sup>

The verandah became an essential addition and a characteristic feature of the typical Australian house. There were different kinds of verandahs such as the attached front verandah, the integral loggia, the surrounding verandah and the two-storied verandah. They all originated in different countries and were introduced at different periods in Australia.<sup>370</sup> From the 1820s and 1830s onwards the verandah became a standard component of the Australian house.<sup>371</sup> Verandahs were significant places in the lives of colonial women. Tanya Dalziel describes the

<sup>365</sup> Ibid., 42, 28-29.

<sup>366</sup> Rosina Ferguson told her parents in Scotland in her letter from South Australia that they were building their thatched house. She arrived with her husband on the *Buffalo* in December 1836 and on 15 February she wrote that 'We are in a tent at present, and has [sic] a hut erected for our luggage. [...] They have been getting the reeds to thatch the house. They are now going to fell the trees for daubing, we expect to have it done for to live in this approaching winter.' Colin Kerr, ed., 'A Excellent Coliney' - *The practical idealists of 1836-1846* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1978): 75. For a description of a pisé cottage see Archer, *Building a Nation* 63.

<sup>367</sup> See for example Patricia Clarke, et al., eds, *Life Lines: Australian women's letters and diaries 1788 to 1840* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1992): 97-98.

<sup>368</sup> Mary Macleod Banks described her Queensland childhood in her narrative *Memories of Pioneer Days in Queensland*. She grew up on a station called Cressbrook situated on the banks of the Brisbane River not far from its head in the 1860s and 70s. Mary described the homestead in the first chapter of her book. Her description shows that Cressbrook was the centre of a very busy station life. She also points out that their homestead had a central passageway. A gravel walk led to a porch that adjoined the hall. It was narrow and covered by a loft to protect against the fierce summer sun. Three rooms opened on each side of the hall and there were some smaller rooms and a bathroom beyond. There was a verandah at the front of the house that was joined at right angles by a lower verandah of the earliest part of the house. This section of the house was made of weatherboards and a shingled roof. The dining room was found in the old house. The kitchen was in a separate building and so was the laundry. In addition to the 'house' there was also a 'cottage' where 'three gentlemen gaining experience of bush life' lived. There were a lot of out-buildings behind the house such as stables, barns, sheds, a school house, a store, a blacksmith's forge and a row of wooden houses or 'huts' where the station hands lived. There was also a fruit orchard and a fowl yard nearby. The garden was adorned by magnificent plants such as yellow jasmine, lilac *Duranta* and pink baby roses. Mary Macleod Banks, *Memories of Pioneer Days in Queensland* (London: Heath Cranton, 1931): 11-16.

<sup>369</sup> G.A. Wilkes, *A Dictionary of Australian Colloquialisms* (Parramatta: Sydney University Press, 1978): 175.

<sup>370</sup> Miles Lewis, "The Australian verandah" *Tirra Lirra* Vol. 7, (1997): 16. The verandah was a common part of Spanish and Portuguese houses since the Middle Ages and they used it widely in their South American and West Indies settlements. The British recognised its advantages in hot and humid climates and they, too, added a verandah to their houses in India and North America. Lieutenant-Governor Robert Ross built the first verandah in Australia in 1792. It encircled the frontage of his stone house and not only moderated the sun's heat on the walls of the building but also provided an external access to rooms and made hallways unnecessary. Archer, *Building a Nation* 29-31.

<sup>371</sup> Miles, "The Australian verandah" 21-22.

verandah as an 'extension of the private sphere'. It was considered a feminine site because many activities that traditionally took place inside the house could also be carried out here.<sup>372</sup> Harriett Daly described the significance of the verandah that was attached to their log hut in Palmerston in the early 1870s: 'Here we spent the greater part of our time; a table and all the most comfortable chairs were put here; it quite answered the purpose of an extra sitting-room, and was by far the most favoured resort of our small quarters.'<sup>373</sup>

Early settlers had to put up with very simple forms of accommodation in the colonies but many women confessed to being happy and content with their lot. Their level of tolerance for the primitive outlook and lack of comfort seemed amazingly high and they bravely put up with their initial hardships. It is debatable whether or not they were truly happy, or whether they were endeavouring not to disappoint their loved ones at home. After all, early settlers' gentility suffered badly when they found themselves in such primitive conditions after the lifestyles they had left behind in Britain. The early forms of dwellings were often transitory until the settlers had enough money and time for the erection of proper houses, and later homesteads.

### The Servant Problem

In Britain, middle-class women were accustomed to domestic help. As managers of the household one of their functions was the supervision of servants' work.<sup>374</sup> Mary Macleod Banks recalled that her mother, Mary McConnell, 'controlled the household activities' in Cressbrook.<sup>375</sup> Davidoff and Hall claim that the management of servants was considered to be the female equivalent of men's business duties.<sup>376</sup> Penny Russell points out that servants were indicators of the genteel family's social status. She notes that servants 'maintained by their labour the house and furnishings which represented the gentry's wealth and taste, and in their own presence they constituted a statement of their employers' means and good management'.<sup>377</sup> Dorothy Jones suggests that it was the servants' work that made possible the idleness of gentlewomen's lives. She argues that the 'non-productiveness of respectable women's lives was an essential means of determining social status and in England this was made possible by a cheap and plentiful supply

<sup>372</sup> Tanya Dalziel, "Beyond the verandah" *Antipodes* Vol. 11, No. 1, (1997): 38.

<sup>373</sup> Mrs Dominic D. Daly, *Digging, Squatting and Pioneering in the Northern Territory of South Australia* (Victoria Park, WA: Hesperian Press, 1984): 52.

<sup>374</sup> Barbara Rees, *The Victorian Lady* (London: Gordon & Cremonesi, 1977): 65.

<sup>375</sup> Banks, *Memories of Pioneer Days in Queensland* 30.

<sup>376</sup> Leonore Davidoff, et al., *Family Fortunes - Men and women of the English middle class 1780-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991): 392.

<sup>377</sup> Russell, *A Wish of Distinction* 167.

of servants'.<sup>378</sup>

Some colonists brought their own servants out to the colonies.<sup>379</sup> When Katharine Kirkland landed in Hobart Town in 1838, her family had a female servant, as well as a shepherd and his wife with them.<sup>380</sup> Often the colonists secured the labour force through the system of indenture - a form of agreement employed since the beginning of American colonisation. Settlers tried to assure the labour force by entering into contract with the labourers. In the Swan River and South Australian settlements contracts usually bound servants to their masters for seven years. Their passage money was provided for and they were also promised some kind of board and lodging as well as a yearly salary.<sup>381</sup> Mrs David Randall recalled in her reminiscences that when the decision was made to emigrate to South Australia in the early 1840s, her husband and his brother looked for servants who were willing to come out with them. She wrote that 'through advertising they had already succeeded in obtaining promises from nearly forty persons, that they would go with us to South Australia under written agreement to work for us in any way required, at current wages'. When the Randalls finally settled in a house in Adelaide it was a comfort for them to have their own servants. She noted that 'compared with other Colonists we did not know what deprivation was, for we had our own servants, when good servants were very scarce'.<sup>382</sup>

But indentured servants did not always guarantee a secure labour force, as Mary Thomas's case suggests. Her family brought out several servants to South Australia in 1836. In a letter to her brother in England in 1838 Mary explained that by the money they paid for their land they were entitled to take ten labourers with them free of charge who were bound to work for them for one year. One of the female domestics got married to a printer, while a lack of work (due to delays in the Thomas family taking possession of their land) meant that the Thomases

<sup>378</sup> Dorothy Jones, "Ladies in the bush: Catherine Traill, Mary Barker and Rachel Henning" *SPAN* No. 21, (1985): 112.

<sup>379</sup> Ruth Teale's research into the lives of nineteenth-century colonial gentlewomen shows that the average middle-class household had at least two live-in servants. There was usually a cook and a nurse to look after the baby and the infant children. Casual labour was employed for the purposes of washing and cleaning and they were referred to as 'lady help'. The more well-off families, however, had additional domestic employees. A governess was paid to instruct the elder daughters and the school-age children, while a nurse maid was responsible for the infants. The job of a lady's maid involved attending to her mistress's personal needs, the scullery maid waited at the table and the parlour maid answered the door. Ruth Teale, *Colonial Eve - Sources on women in Australia 1788-1914* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1978): 83. For example, Mary Macleod Banks was surrounded by a large domestic staff. She grew up on a pastoral property called Cressbrook on the Brisbane River in the 1860s and 70s and she recalled in her memoir, that her family employed a nurse, a governess, a few maids, a laundress, a laundry maid as well as a gardener, stockmen, a blacksmith and a carpenter. Banks, *Memories of Pioneer Days in Queensland* 11-31.

<sup>380</sup> Kirkland, "Life in the bush" 174.

<sup>381</sup> Alan Atkinson, et al., eds, *Australians 1838* (Broadway: Fairfax, Syme & Weldon Associates, 1987): 73.

<sup>382</sup> Geo C. Morphett, ed., *Mrs David Randall's Reminiscences* (Adelaide: Pioneers' Association of South Australia, 1939): 2, 5.

had to release their two agriculturalists from their contract.<sup>383</sup>

In Western Australia the settlers often had to release their indentured servants before their time of service was up because their businesses were not profitable enough to pay them.<sup>384</sup> Eliza and Thomas Brown arrived in the Swan River Settlement in 1841, bringing with them quite a few servants. In a letter dated 8 September 1843 Eliza wrote about the death of a former servant the previous month. Eliza informed her father that this servant had been freed from his indenture a few weeks before his sudden death.<sup>385</sup> There is no mention why the Browns released him but Eliza and Thomas's letters reveal a financially insecure period throughout the first few years.<sup>386</sup>

In the eastern colonies, convicts provided the bulk of the work force until transportation ceased in 1853 in Tasmania and in 1839 in Queensland. It ended in 1840 in New South Wales but resumed for a while in 1848. Western Australia also employed convicts between 1850 and 1868.<sup>387</sup> Many colonial women recorded their dislike of convict labour for moral reasons, but there were several female settlers who cherished good memories of their convict servants.

Eliza Brown felt uneasy about the convict servants and feared that her father would disapprove of them employing convicts in the Swan River Settlement. She admitted in her letter dated 2 April 1851 that she was embarrassed about the matter, writing 'I am afraid you look down upon us with contempt since we have harboured convicts. I must own that my pride is taken down a few patches, perhaps it will prove a wholesome castigation.'<sup>388</sup> There seemed to be more colonial women, however, who got on well with the convict servants and even grew fond of them. Annabella Boswell recalled in her narrative that when she was eight years old she lived in Glen Alice near Bathurst for six years and her family had many convict servants. Annabella remembered that 'we were always well and kindly served, and I can even now recall to mind the names and appearance of some' of them. She wrote fondly of the groom who treated her like a

<sup>383</sup> Thomas, *The Diary and Letters of Mary Thomas* 95.

<sup>384</sup> Atkinson, *Australians 1838-73*.

<sup>385</sup> Peter Cowan, ed., *A Faithful Picture: The letters of Eliza and Thomas Brown at York in the Swan River Colony 1841-1852* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1931): 54-55.

<sup>386</sup> Anne Whatley's diary reveals that their servants did not wish to be released from their indenture in the Swan River Colony just a few months after landing in 1830. Anne recorded in her diary that they were beginning to have problems with their indentured servants. She wrote 'we wish we had not brought out indentured servants. Those who are tied are sure to be discontented, and think they should be better off anywhere else. Many people have given their indentured servants their liberty - but ours will not accept it, though it has been offered. The woman says, "No, I know you want to get rid of us and so I won't go!" Oh, it is a miserable system!' Canon Burton, "The diary of Anne Whatley" *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society* Vol. 1, No. 7, (1930): 26.

<sup>387</sup> Itiel Bereson, et al., *Inquiry Australia* (Richmond: Heinemann Educational Australia, 1985): 85, 92, 86; and Graeme Davison, et al., eds, *The Oxford Companion to Australian History* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1998): 649.

princess and the gardener who never forgot to take a posy to them on Sundays.<sup>389</sup> After transportation ended, more and more free settlers arrived, but for a long time many settlers preferred to employ the former convicts.<sup>390</sup>

Chinese servants also constituted a substantial percentage of the labour force and they most often took jobs as cooks and gardeners. Their presence, however, was not always appreciated and racist remarks were prevalent. Emma Macpherson admitted in her recollections that 'I own to a great dislike of them myself, and never would have them about me if I could possibly help it. They are generally considered very quarrelsome, are easily offended, and so terribly revengeful and treacherous.' Emma also found it difficult to remember the face of a Chinese person because they appeared all the same to her eyes. She also pointed out that the reason why Chinese people were generally held in such bad esteem was because they put aside all their savings and never spent much in Australia. For that reason a heavy tax was levied on the 'Chinamen' in Victoria - a measure that even Emma Macpherson found 'somewhat despotic' for a colony that prided itself as a land of 'free and liberal principles'.<sup>391</sup>

The great majority of female colonists were satisfied with the Chinese employees, though. Clara Aspinall gave a truly friendly view of the 'Celestial fellow-creatures'. While she was at the diggings near Avoca in Victoria in 1850 she noted that the Chinese

are a very-much abused race. They appeared to me quite a distinct class from, and much more harmless than, the cruel mandarins of whom we read. I must confess to having taken rather a fancy to the poor Chinamen. They seemed to be just as good-tempered as Englishmen are in general; indeed, if I may declare the truth, I thought that they betrayed more equanimity and meekness of disposition than do many of my own countrymen. They are patient and industrious, though not energetic.<sup>392</sup>

While Clara was staying in Maryborough she often watched the Chinese men at work. In this way she learnt a great deal about alluvial digging. She was on such friendly terms with them that

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<sup>388</sup> Cowan, *A Faithful Picture* 136.

<sup>389</sup> Morton Herman, ed., *Annabella Boswell's Journal* (Melbourne: Angus & Robertson, 1965): 39-40. See also Mrs Charles Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania, During a Residence of Nine Years* (London: John Murray, 1852) Vol. 1: 45.

<sup>390</sup> Christiana Blomfield described this transitory stage. She was in New South Wales in 1839 and by that time no more convicts were assigned to the settlers. The available non-convict labour was unsatisfactory, though. She complained about the free emigrants in a letter dated 10 November 1839 from Denham Court, a property near Liverpool. She described them as 'a lazy and useless set' who demanded high wages as well as large rations of meat, flour and tea. They therefore employed former convicts or ticket-of-leave men who were already used to the ways of the colony. Christiana considered them 'rogues' but experience taught her that they were still better than the recent free migrants. Eve Buscombe, ed., *The Blomfield Letters Covering the Period 1799 to 1845* (Sydney: Eureka Research, 1982): 77.

<sup>391</sup> Emma Macpherson, *My Experiences in Australia - Being recollections of a visit to the Australian colonies in 1856-7. By a Lady* (London: J.F. Hope, 1860): 181-183.

<sup>392</sup> Clara Aspinall, *Three Years in Melbourne* (London: L. Booth, 1862): 175-177.

they greeted each other 'with nods and smiles' each morning.<sup>393</sup>

Just like the Chinese, Irish servants were also discussed as a separate category of people.<sup>394</sup> British settlers brought with them their Irish prejudices to the colonies. Irish employees constituted a large group throughout the nineteenth century: Irish women made up more than fifty per cent of the immigrant domestic servants.<sup>395</sup> My research suggests that of those women who recorded their impressions of Irish servants, there were a greater number of favourable opinions than unfavourable. Or maybe those who disliked the Irish did not even bother about writing of them and emphasised only those (few?) cases when they were satisfied with their Irish employee's work. While Elizabeth Ramsay-Laye was staying in Melbourne in the 1850s she employed an Irish girl as housemaid. She held her in high regard and even recommended that the other settlers employ Irish servants in the colonies. She noted that 'if properly managed and well treated they become different beings when away from Ireland, attaching themselves strongly to the family and making light of many a little inconvenience which would scare an English servant'.<sup>396</sup>

As we have seen, the colonial servant class was made up of a great variety of people<sup>397</sup> who had mixed reputations among the respectable British employers for a number of reasons. Some colonial gentlewomen were reluctant to employ convicts on moral grounds, while at the same time holding certain racist notions about the Chinese and the Irish. I have argued in this section that female employers nevertheless seemed rather tolerant. Their narratives reveal that they were mostly satisfied with people of convict, Chinese and Irish background.

In addition to racial fears, there seemed to be other problems with the servants. They

<sup>393</sup> Ibid., 178-179. See also Edward Duyker, ed., *A Woman on the Goldfields - Recollections of Emily Skinner 1854-1878* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1995): 56. Men like John Hunter Kerr were also satisfied with their Chinese servants in the early 1850s. He recalled in his narrative that when he employed two Chinese men in Melbourne some 'urchins' on the street made 'choice remarks on their long pig-tails and loose dress'. But John was happy with their service as waiter and cook and he 'had never cause to regret engaging these men, who served me faithfully for some eighteen months'. John Hunter Kerr, *Glimpses of Life in Victoria by 'A Resident'* (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 1996): 125.

<sup>394</sup> Paula Hamilton shows that the Irish servants in general were ridiculed, looked down and made fun of in contemporary cartoons. Paula Hamilton, *"No Irish Need Apply": Aspects of the employer-employee relationship Australian domestic service 1860-1900* (London: Australian Studies Centre, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, 1985).

<sup>395</sup> B.W. Higman, *Domestic Service in Australia* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2002): 63.

<sup>396</sup> Elizabeth P. Ramsay-Laye, *Social Life and Manners in Australia - Being the notes of eight years' experience by a resident* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1861): 92-93. See also Aspinall, *Three Years in Melbourne* 108-109.

<sup>397</sup> Many rural colonial households employed Aborigines as domestic servants. Their employment was a risky undertaking because the indigenous Australians were not familiar with European housekeeping practices and standards. Furthermore, they were not motivated to earn their living by work. Female attitudes to Aboriginal labour and Aboriginal understanding of the principles of work will be discussed in Chapter Six.

demanded high wages and this was much to the dislike of many colonists. Katherine McKell recalled in her Victorian childhood memoir of the 1850s and 1860s that while living on Bolwarrah Station her family employed a Scottish girl and her wage was £1 a week. She added that this amount must have seemed a lot in comparison with the few shillings British servants received each month for their services in the old country.<sup>398</sup> Another difficulty that arose with female employees was that they often received a proposal of marriage shortly after their arrival in the colonies. Men outnumbered women for a long time in the colonies<sup>399</sup> and for this reason it was considerably easy for single women to enter into matrimony in Australia. Louisa Meredith remarked in Tasmania in the 1840s that both prisoner and free female servants were 'certain of marrying, if they please; proposals are plentiful, inconveniently so, indeed, sometimes, to master and mistresses, when tidy handmaidens are wooed, won, and married in such quick succession that new servants have constantly to be sought, and their passage paid'.<sup>400</sup> I argued in Chapter One that many servants came out with the prospect of betterment, aspiring to move up the social ladder and in many cases wishing to become landowners themselves. This fact also accounted for their unwillingness to stay for long at one house.

The experience of bad servants was an everyday reality for most colonists. Ruth Teale notes that the 'mistress's chief concern and her unfailing topic of conversation was the difficulty in finding reliable domestic help'. The servant question was 'the bane of every household'.<sup>401</sup> Rachel Henning was one of the many colonists who noted that servants were a common topic for discussion among women. She wrote in a letter to her sister Etta on 12 September 1861 while she was staying with her other sister Amy at Bathurst that 'if a few married ladies meet, it is quite ridiculous to hear the chorus of lamentation that they strike up'. She called the servants 'a plague'.<sup>402</sup> Not everybody had problems with the servants, though. Anne Drysdale was satisfied with her employees at Borongcop Station near Geelong in the early 1840s. She wrote in her diary on 6 September 1841 three months after taking up her residence there that 'the servants are

<sup>398</sup> Katherine McKell, *Old Days and Gold Days in Victoria (1852-1873). Being the memories of a pioneer family* (Melbourne: Edward A. Vidler, 1924): 14.

<sup>399</sup> The ratio of women to men in the early 1850s was 100 to 145, while it was 100 to 113 by the turn of the century. Bereson, *Inquiry Australia* 49.

<sup>400</sup> Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania* Vol. 2: 209.

<sup>401</sup> Teale, *Colonial Eve* 84. Susan Martin notes in her thesis that Australian women writers also tackled this question in their fiction. Susan Martin, "She'll Rewrite Mate: Ideas of the self and the landscape in nineteenth century Australian women's novels" (PhD thesis, Monash University, 1989): 28.

<sup>402</sup> David Adams, ed., *The Letters of Rachel Henning* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1963): 78. See also Mrs Charles Meredith, *Notes and Sketches of New South Wales During a Residence in that Colony from 1839 to 1844* (Sydney: John Murray, 1844): 161.

excellent, and we have nothing to annoy us'.<sup>403</sup>

Due to the lack of servants in rural areas, colonial women often had to do without them for considerable periods of time, an event significant enough to be written about in their narratives. Helen Pfeil points out that 'being without a servant, even for the period of a day, was considered extremely disruptive and worth noting in diaries and letters'.<sup>404</sup> Despite the fact that these women could manage without servants for short periods of time, the idea that they could live without servants for the rest of their lives never occurred to them. Servants were a part and parcel of their life.<sup>405</sup> Rachel Henning acknowledged in a letter to her sister in England in 1866 that 'to be without a servant for a short time is a very common episode in the bush' but added that 'though tiresome enough for the time, is soon over and forgotten'.<sup>406</sup>

Throughout the nineteenth century domestic service provided the greatest source of employment for women.<sup>407</sup> Yet domestic servants constituted a very small percentage of the population in 1800. Their number began to increase rapidly only after 1820. The introduction of assisted female migration schemes to Australia in 1831 secured a large supply of potential domestic servants. The number of domestic servants reached its peak in 1860. According to the census figures there were about 40 domestic servants per 1000 population in 1861. After 1860 their number fell slowly, especially during the great depression of the 1890s. These figures suggest that the decreasing number of domestic servants justified colonial employers' complaints only after 1860. B. Higman notes that 'before 1850, complaints about a short supply of domestic servants were relatively uncommon and poorly founded. [...] After 1860 the complaints became frantic, from Victoria to Queensland, and many who wanted to employ domestics were unable to do so'.<sup>408</sup> Work in factories and shops became alternative forms of employment at this time and seemed more preferable to servant work.

My readings suggest, however, that complaints about the lack of servants abounded also in the first half of the nineteenth century. Ann Gore lived on an isolated property near Lake Bathurst in the 1830s. In a letter to her cousin in 1837 she confessed the burden of housework that fell upon their shoulders. She wrote that 'since we have been here we have been left for two months together without servants and obliged to do all the work ourselves not very pleasant I can

<sup>403</sup> Anne Drysdale, "Miss Anne Drysdale's diary" in P.L. Brown, ed., *Clyde Company Papers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952) Vol. 3: 96.

<sup>404</sup> H. Pfeil, "'The last piece of furniture procured' – Some mistresses' perspectives on the mistress-servant relationship, 1870-1900" *Lilith*, No. 10, (2001): 97.

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>406</sup> Adams, *The Letters of Rachel Henning* 227.

<sup>407</sup> Hamilton, "No Irish Need Apply" 3.

assure you'.<sup>409</sup> These women were aware that their situation would have aroused pity back in England. Annie Baxter wondered at Yesabba in 1843 'how shocked they would be in England to think of my having been days [...] on a Station in the bush, without a woman servant!'<sup>410</sup>

While many men do mention the servant problem<sup>411</sup> the discussion of this inconvenience does not occupy a central place in their narratives. The management of household activities and servants was after all considered to be a woman's job and therefore men did not seem to care too much about it. Overall, women's accounts appear to be more informative about the domestic aspect of colonial life. Men, on the other hand, were much more concerned about the employment of station hands<sup>412</sup> – a topic that hardly ever surfaced in women's texts.

Female settlers found themselves in a sensitive situation in rural Australia in the nineteenth century. The very essence of their gentility was questioned when they found they could not always rely on domestic labour for the running of their household. The occasional shortage of domestic labour required a shift in gentlewomen's self-image, as the following section will argue.

### Work

Britain's growing wealth and the increasing complexity of the mercantile economy offered jobs that aimed at attracting male labour only and women were expected to 'aspire to a state of gentility devoid of responsibility'. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, notions of refinement prohibited women from taking up any kind of employment except in events of necessity.<sup>413</sup>

Life on pastoral estates in Australia provided one such necessity. Apart from domestic duties and family nurturing, women sometimes had to lend a hand on the station. One of their most common tasks involved the weighing out of rations. Louisa Meredith felt a little uneasy about managing the store-room at their temporary house 'Riversdale' in Tasmania in 1841. She recalled that

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<sup>408</sup> Higman, *Domestic Service in Australia* 20-26.

<sup>409</sup> Clarke, *Life Lines* 166-168.

<sup>410</sup> Frost, *No Place for a Nervous Lady* 120.

<sup>411</sup> Robert Harrison resided in South Australia for five years in the second half of the 1850s and he also noted that 'the difficulty of hiring a good servant is almost insurmountable'. Robert Harrison, *Colonial Sketches: or, Five years in South Australia, with hints to capitalists and emigrants* (Hampstead Gardens, SA: Austaprint, 1978): 47. See also Kerr, *Glimpses of Life in Victoria* 291.

<sup>412</sup> See for example Edward M. Curr, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria Then Called the Port Phillip District (from 1841 to 1851)* (Echuca: Rich River Printers, 2001): 423-429.

<sup>413</sup> Richard D. Altick, *Victorian People and Ideas* (London: J.M. Dent, 1974): 50-51.

At first I found the business of the store-room the most novel of my household duties, and the weekly or semi-weekly distribution of rations the least pleasant of them, as, besides our own hired farm-servants – who of course received their supplies from us – there were the sawyers, stonemasons, carpenters, drainers, and fencers, all of whom we had to supply with flour, meat, tea, sugar, salt, soap, tobacco [...] so that accurate accounts must be kept, and I confess I did not much admire this indispensable huckster's shop affair, the business of which also included the giving out materials for the building and articles for farm use [...]; but all this is (or rather was at the time in question) a matter of course, in a settler's establishment.<sup>414</sup>

Louisa enjoyed a comfortable life in Birmingham during her girlhood<sup>415</sup> and station work must have been a great contrast to her former lifestyle.

Rachel Henning kept her brother's books and accounts at Exmoor in the mid-1860s. She wrote that 'I keep all his books and accounts, copy his letters and invoices and am generally his clerk, and it is a department I much prefer to making puddings'. It was her sister Annie who cooked and kept the house. The fact that she could be 'of some use' to her beloved brother Biddulph made Rachel feel good in an occupation usually the province of men.<sup>416</sup>

In colonial Australia many women had the opportunity to prove their business talents. The sheer number of single women who managed pastoral properties without male assistance is a testimony to women's capability for work. Miss Anne Drysdale was a Scottish woman who arrived in Port Phillip in March 1840 at the age of forty-seven. She already had considerable experience in farming back in Scotland. She took up Boronggoop, a run of 10,000 acres near Geelong, that she managed with another woman called Caroline Newcomb from 1841 until her death in 1853.<sup>417</sup> Her surviving diary shows her enjoyment of bush life and her success with farming.<sup>418</sup> Harriet King managed Dunheved on her own in the late 1820s while her husband Captain Phillip Parker King was surveying parts of South America. Dunheved was a farm eight kilometres from Penrith in New South Wales. Harriet's surviving letters, covering the period between 1826 and 1829, reveal that she was a trustworthy manager of the estate. She sent detailed and appropriate farm accounts as well as a summary of the main social events that took place in her society at that time.<sup>419</sup> Martha Vicinus points out that these women did not conform to the Victorian ideal in the sense that they worked for their own living and did not rely

<sup>414</sup> Cited in Teale, *Colonial Eve* 66.

<sup>415</sup> Patricia Clarke, *Pen Portraits: Women writers and journalists in nineteenth-century Australia* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1988): 34.

<sup>416</sup> Adams, *The Letters of Rachel Henning* 179.

<sup>417</sup> Clarke, *Life Lines* 35, 38.

<sup>418</sup> Drysdale, "Miss Anne Drysdale's diary".

<sup>419</sup> Dorothy Walsh, ed., *The Admiral's Wife: Mrs Phillip Parker King – A selection of letters 1817-56* (Melbourne: Hawthorn Press, 1967). Pamela Sharp lists a number of other pastoral pioneers and leaseholders. Pamela Sharp, "A Study of Relationships Between Colonial Women and Black Australians" (MA thesis, Deakin University, 1991): 65.

financially on their fathers or husbands as the majority of the female population did.<sup>420</sup>

Farm management was not the only work that colonial women tried their hands at. Their biggest challenge was housework. It was not easy to live up to the ideal expectations of the Victorian woman in colonial Australia but as the next section will show the great majority of colonial women managed to cope with the new demands.

### Housework

Colonial women had to adjust themselves to the new circumstances and when there were no servants around they had to take on many tasks themselves. They were aware that by doing physical work they violated the rules of gentility. The great majority of the female settlers and visitors, however, looked at their fate as a personally enriching experience and tried to turn their newly acquired skills to their advantage.

As shown in the previous section, middle-class women were expected to be in charge of the household and the supervision of servants. But women's knowledge of housework was more of a theoretical rather than of a practical nature.<sup>421</sup> Gentlewomen were not trained in the rudiments of household duties in an age when servants were expected to do everything for them. Many colonial women therefore found it shocking to do housework when servants were not available. The lack of these skills turned out to be their greatest handicap in their bush homes. This is what Mrs A. Campbell came to realise on the goldfields. She left her Canadian home with her family in the early 1850s and settled down in the Ovens River Valley, Victoria, where her husband worked as police magistrate.<sup>422</sup> She recalled that 'True, it was never dreamed [sic] I would be placed in a position where I would have myself alone to depend upon, and, therefore, many things that would have been of use to me were neglected, as not being necessary where servants could be had'.<sup>423</sup>

With the passing of time, however, women were forced to learn to look after their own household.<sup>424</sup> Annie Baxter was not exempted from this fate. In 1844 she left Yesabba and moved to Yambuck, a station 25 kilometres from Port Fairy (then called Belfast) in Victoria. She recorded in her memoir that even after three weeks she did not have a woman servant. She

<sup>420</sup> Martha Vicinus, "Introduction: The perfect Victorian lady" in: Martha Vicinus, ed., *Suffer and Be Still - Women in the Victorian age* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973): ix.

<sup>421</sup> Rees, *The Victorian Lady* 63-65.

<sup>422</sup> Sheila Wigmore, *Australian Pioneer Women* (Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1933): 29-30.

<sup>423</sup> Mrs A. Campbell, *Rough and Smooth: Ho! For an Australian gold field* (Quebec: Hunter, Rose, 1865): 89.

explained that 'as I could have no female servant, I had to act in that capacity myself'.<sup>425</sup> By necessity these women acquired various skills. Katharine Kirkland had to improve her cooking and also became proficient at the management of the dairy. She observed that 'necessity makes one learn many things'.<sup>426</sup> Georgiana Molloy excelled in the role of nursery-maid at Augusta in 1833,<sup>427</sup> while Eliza Brown's needlework catered for the clothing of her entire family.<sup>428</sup> Henrietta Foott noted that needlework was both a typically feminine pastime as well as an activity that had to be done as a 'necessity' in her isolated bush home on the Darling in north-western New South Wales in the 1860s.<sup>429</sup> Plain sewing was a necessary accomplishment for women and they often made their morning gowns and underclothing with the help of a seamstress in Britain. It must have been daunting not to have the aid and expertise of a seamstress in the colonies.<sup>430</sup>

These women were amazed how quickly they could adapt to their new circumstances. Mary McMaugh was quick to learn her lesson of station life on the Upper Macleay in the early 1850s. When she found herself in charge of the housework on her husband's station she was at first confused, not knowing what to do or how to do it, but as time passed by she made headway in the kitchen. On looking back at those early years she wrote that 'it took me some time to settle down. Everything was so new and strange. [...] I knew so little about household management, cooking, etc., but I quite surprised myself how quickly I got into the way of doing things.'<sup>431</sup> Sarah Musgrave's mother was also ignorant about the mysteries of cooking when as a young wife she arrived from London to outback New South Wales in the late 1820s. Sarah recalled that 'the knowledge of this art had to be imparted to her by the men employed by my uncle'.<sup>432</sup> It must have been embarrassing for a well-bred English woman to learn the basic points of housekeeping from those rough pioneer men of the station.

<sup>424</sup> In her article Dorothy Jones also points out that women in other colonies such as New Zealand and Canada faced similar problems in rural areas and they, too, had to acquire certain domestic skills. Jones, "Ladies in the bush: Catherine Traill, Mary Barker and Rachel Henning" 112-118.

<sup>425</sup> Annie Baxter Dawbin, *Memories of the Past: By a Lady in Australia* (Melbourne: W.H. Williams, 1873): 76.

<sup>426</sup> Kirkland, "Life in the bush" 184, 193.

<sup>427</sup> Alexandra Hasluck, *Portrait with Background - A life of Georgiana Molloy* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1960): 103. Ladies in Britain usually employed wet nurses. Breastfeeding was uncommon among ladies of Georgiana's social class. William J. Lines, *An All Consuming Passion: Origins, modernity, and the Australian life of Georgiana Molloy* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1994): 135.

<sup>428</sup> Cowan, *A Faithful Picture* 94.

<sup>429</sup> Foott, *Sketches of Life in the Bush* 39. See also 'Silverleaf', "More about town and country housekeepers" *Illustrated Sydney News* Vol. XVIII, No. 8, (6 August 1881): 14.

<sup>430</sup> Janet Dunbar, *The Early Victorian Woman - Some aspects of her life (1837-57)* (London: George G. Harrap, 1953): 86.

<sup>431</sup> Mary McMaugh, *Pioneering on the Upper Macleay* (Sydney: Mitchell Library, 1922): 5.

Georgiana Molloy was one of the few women whose writings indicate that she could not cope with the workload. Georgiana opened her heart in a letter to her friend Margaret Dunlop in Scotland after three years of pioneering life at Augusta in 1833: 'I must unbosom myself to you, my dear girl, which I have never done – but this life is too much both for dear Molloy and myself.'<sup>433</sup> In a later letter to another friend Helen Story at the end of 1834 she explained that they had to 'work as hard and harder than servants will'.<sup>434</sup>

In order to survive many women had to change their attitudes and expectations. It was by all means a struggle<sup>435</sup> but by adopting different strategies they were able to turn this sudden misfortune to their advantage. It was on the pages of their diaries and letters home that they tried to explain and negotiate their new circumstances. Their writings reveal the extent to which they modified their notions of the genteel lifestyle.

Harriett Daly explained in her memoir that their new circumstances were facts they had to reckon with. She arrived with her family in Port Darwin in 1870. The new settlement of Palmerston had a population of about sixty people who all lived in log huts. Pioneering life was a drastic change for the Daly girls after the thriving social life they had left behind in South Australia. On looking back on the early days she noted

True, we had plenty to occupy us in our household and every-day duties, many of which could only be accomplished by our own hands. Difficulties had to be overcome, and many things to get used to which were new to us, and at first one had many trials of patience and forbearance. However we were young, and determined to make the best of things, and to grumble as little as possible at what could not be helped.<sup>436</sup>

Harriett suggested that it was their youthful energy that helped them respond to the challenges of their life.

Religious faith often gave strength to overcome difficulties. For Annie Baxter it took a little longer to adjust at Yesabba near Port Macquarie in 1840. She did indeed find her country life tough but with the passing of time she, too, reconciled with her fate. Her faith in the

<sup>432</sup> Sarah Musgrave, *The Wayback* (West Wyalong: Bland District Historical Society and Young Historical Society, 1984): 7.

<sup>433</sup> Hasluck, *Portrait with Background* 103.

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>435</sup> An anonymous English woman's letter from the Swan River Settlement in 1829 revealed her determination to respond to the challenges her new life gave her. Soon after landing the Governor received her husband. This fact indicates that this family may have been of a high social standing. Yet in her letter she told her correspondent that her daily routine started at five o'clock in the morning with the feeding of the poultry, sheep, goat, pigs and dogs. She then prepared breakfast and cooked dinner and never got to bed earlier than 8 o'clock. She admitted in her letter that 'To be sure the life I lead here is far different from that I ever before experienced; but you know I am not of a very discontented temper; yet at times I think I have now some trials'. This must have been a significant understatement on her part. "Extracts of letters from Swan River, Western Australia" *Western Australian Pamphlets* Vol. 4, No. 3, (1830): 7.

<sup>436</sup> Daly, *Digging, Squatting and Pioneering in the Northern Territory of South Australia* 62.

Almighty's scheme of things helped her a great deal. She wrote to her English friend Henrietta in April that 'I've almost sufficient good sense to see that whatever be our Station in this world, it has pleased our Wise creator to place us there – and although I do occasionally feel inclined to grumble, I always conclude that "All is for the best", as it is'.<sup>437</sup>

Elizabeth Townbridge was slightly ashamed of doing manual work in her bush residence in the 1860s. She proudly declared in her published diary that her work was greatly appreciated by her family. She admitted in some embarrassment, however, that her work was totally unladylike.

My husband and the boys are reaping the benefit of my industry, as, like a true bush-wife and mother, I am at work for them, most unsentimentally too, not working slippers, or embroidering braces, as delicate ladies are apt to do in the old country, but – I only write it in a whisper – making their cloth caps and trousers.<sup>438</sup>

Elizabeth stated the phenomenon of a working bush wife and mother as the norm rather than the exception. This diary entry reveals that, on the one hand, Elizabeth boasted of her contribution to her family's clothing but on the other hand, she was aware that doing productive and practical work was contrary to the genteel lifestyle. The public nature of her published diary entry in *Sharpe's London Magazine* seems to suggest that she was aware of a genteel English audience that might read her narrative and for this reason she explained the fate of colonial gentlewomen to a home readership ignorant of the implications of bush life. She pointed out her usefulness to her family but at the same time appeared to be apologetic in order to conform to home notions of genteel femininity.<sup>439</sup> Interestingly, this passage also reveals a sense of pity for the true English ladies who undertook only unproductive needlework and could not feel the same sense of usefulness. Elizabeth's diary entry has a humorous tone because she made fun of the worthlessness of some genteel accomplishments. She was proud because she could do something significant in the interest of her family.

Mary Atkin looked at her domestic work as an experience that would help her better understand the value of servants' work once she returned to England. Mary arrived with her husband and sister-in-law in Rockhampton in 1864 where they lived for some time while Robert Atkin was looking for land. In a letter to her mother in Wales dated 12 May 1865 she described her daily routine of washing and preparing dinner by herself. She concluded at the end that 'I think work agrees with me and I am very well. I don't dislike Household work an atom. At all events when I return to England, I shall know how much to expect servants to do, and how they

<sup>437</sup> Frost, *No Place for a Nervous Lady* 94.

<sup>438</sup> Elizabeth Townbridge, "A year of bush life in Australia" *Sharpe's London Magazine* (1869): 264.

<sup>439</sup> Curtin, "In Awe of Mrs Grundy" 118.

ought to do it.<sup>440</sup> Mary did not mind doing the housework because she was of the opinion that it would make her a better head of a genteel household. Just like many other women of her background she, too, believed that she would have servants under her charge in the future. Mary looked at her active days as useful but only temporary.

But however unusual such domestic work was for these gentlewomen, many learnt to enjoy and appreciate their lot. Ada Cambridge acknowledged that she found her 'lesson' in the 'rudiments of Bush housekeeping' 'ever more interesting' in her second Victorian home 'Como' in Yackandandah between 1871 and 1872.<sup>441</sup> Several women noted in their narratives their satisfaction after the completion of their work. Elizabeth Fenton was proud of her ability to churn butter in Van Diemen's Land in 1830. She wrote to her friend in her journal that 'at this piece of information I see you open your eyes, but I wish I could give you a just idea of the self-satisfaction I felt when I first achieved this exploit'.<sup>442</sup>

Adjusting the realities of housework to the expectations of a genteel mode of life was indeed challenging as the above examples demonstrate. Emma Macpherson declared in her reminiscences that those colonial gentlewomen who succeeded in preserving their gentility during their residence in the bush were an asset to their husbands who should therefore be proud of them. She wrote that 'life in the bush is really a trial for any lady, and certainly the wife who fulfils all the domestic requirements of her station, and still retains her intellectual tastes and refinement, may fairly be termed a crown to her husband'.<sup>443</sup> Colonial men also noticed the enormous effort gentlewomen made in their colonial household. Samuel Mossman and Thomas Banister recounted in their narrative the story of a Mrs Wentworth who lived in the early 1850s with her husband three kilometres from Bathurst in Victoria and did all the housework herself because she did not have any servants. The two men noted that 'no doubt this necessity entailed great inconvenience upon our friends; but Mrs Wentworth, like many English ladies under similar circumstances, made the best out of it'.<sup>444</sup>

Not only the early settlers faced such challenges. Housework remained a difficulty throughout the nineteenth century in newly opened and scarcely-populated areas. Even though Diana Ramsden was a visitor who spent only a few months in northern Queensland in 1899-

<sup>440</sup> Mary Atkin, et al., *Letters written by Mary Atkin and Grace Atkin during their first two years in Australia 1865-1867*. Microfilm 0648, John Oxley Library, Brisbane, 20.

<sup>441</sup> Ada Cambridge, *Thirty Years in Australia* (London: Methuen, 1903): 73.

<sup>442</sup> Mrs Fenton, *Mrs Fenton's Tasmanian Journal* (Adelaide: Sullivan's Cove, 1986): 72.

<sup>443</sup> Macpherson, *My Experiences in Australia* 200.

<sup>444</sup> Samuel Mossman, et al., *Australia Visited and Revisited - A narrative of recent travels and old experiences in Victoria and New South Wales* (London: Addey, 1853): 237.

1900, her experience of station life taught her a great deal about life in the bush. She stayed on her friends' station Mount Pleasant near Bowen that was across the Bo River and was completely surrounded by bush. She described the peculiarity of bush housekeeping in her diary:

The contrast between the Queensland lady's life and her sisters at home is very great: the uncertainty of her domestics and the varied trials, if such they can be called, of the cooking ménage – sometimes no butter; too hot for the hens to lay, then no eggs to use; perhaps no milk, yet through it all the hostesses are bright and pleased to show hospitality. The Housemaid becomes laid by from a tarantula bite or some such reason. The lady then has to turn her hands to housemaid's work: but far worse if the Cook is laid by for any reason and perhaps the new housemaid not arrived; then there is all the washing of clothes to be done, and it is done too in addition to the cooking by the brave mistress of the house, in fact when necessity arises, they are capable of doing anything, even to helping to put out a bushfire, or go out riding at a muster of Cattle. I think the bush housekeeper is a very excellent woman and bears her worries most bravely.

Diana noted many aspects of rural life where the bush housewife had to show her talents. She also concluded that despite these difficulties these women appeared to be happy: 'There is much for them to put up with, yet they are happy and contented.'<sup>445</sup>

Respectable women and girls in Australia continued to do housework themselves even in settled areas. The concept of female housework seemed to become part of colonial life. The Woolcot family lived in Sydney in the early 1890s. Even though they were a fictional family in Ethel Turner's *Seven Little Australians* they were depicted as a typical Australian family of the time. Their household consisted of seven children and their parents. The children were naughty and noisy all the time and did not behave themselves as well as their father would have liked. They had a daily governess who instructed the children, except for Pip who went to grammar school. The family also employed a man who looked after the horses, the stable and the garden in their suburban home 'Misrule' on the Parramatta River. They did not have a nurse, though. Meg, the eldest girl, who was only sixteen, 'combine[d] the duties of nursery-maid and housemaid'. It was her responsibility to set the table in the nursery before each meal if the younger girls were not available and it was also she who dressed the two youngest ones in the morning. Everything else was done by the children themselves: 'beyond that the seven had to manage for themselves' wrote Ethel Turner. Judy sewed the buttons on her own frock and was once mowing the lawn when the man was busy doing other things.<sup>446</sup> Their arrangements reflected a hybrid situation where they still employed some domestics but were quite comfortable about doing housework themselves.

Many men also had to learn something about the household, especially cooking. When the pioneer squatter Edward Curr was left alone at his hut in Wolfscrag in Victoria in the early

<sup>445</sup> Diana Ramsden, "Beautiful Queensland and Leaves from My Diary (1899-1900)" Microfilm 0649, John Oxley Library, Brisbane, 4, 15-16.

1840s he had to cook for himself. He admitted that it was 'a novel industry to me at the time'. A few days later help arrived in the form of a married couple as domestic servants and the woman relieved him from any further domestic activities when she took over the cooking and cleaning of his hut.<sup>447</sup> This example suggests that men's isolation also resulted in their having to do some housework for a short time but they did not look at this misfortune as a threat to their gentility. It was just one aspect of bush life that they had to contend with in order to succeed with their business.

Life with occasional shortages of servants proved to be a challenging task for British women in Australia. Instead of the idle genteel life they were prepared for in their girlhood, women had to face an active life in the colonies. Women's narratives show that they did not let the difficulties grieve them but instead rejoiced in their achievements.

### The Governess

Another kind of work that gentlewomen could undertake in the colonies was teaching. In Britain upper-class families employed governesses since Tudor times. By the nineteenth century more and more middle-class families could afford to pay for the services of the governess. Just like servants, governesses came to indicate the wealth and position of the genteel family. They also enabled a gentlewoman to become 'truly a lady of leisure' by taking over the responsibility of educating the children. In this way the mother had more time at her disposal and could spend her days in idleness as befitted a quintessentially genteel lady.<sup>448</sup>

Young children received their basic education from their mothers. Later on boys were either sent to school or a tutor was hired for them. The mother of young daughters had two options: she either continued to instruct her daughter in the genteel accomplishments and housewifely duties or employed a governess to do the same. A governess was called 'daily governess' if she lived at home and travelled to her employer's house every day. 'Private governesses' lived under the same roof as their employers.<sup>449</sup> Many colonial women were instructed by governesses in their childhood.<sup>450</sup>

<sup>446</sup> Ethel Turner, *Seven Little Australians* (London: Ward Lock, 1978): 7-26.

<sup>447</sup> Curr, *Recollections of Squatting* 54, 61-62.

<sup>448</sup> M. Jeanne Peterson, "The Victorian governess: Status incongruence in family and society" *Victorian Studies* Vol. XIV, No. 1, (1970): 9.

<sup>449</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

<sup>450</sup> Dorothy Gilbert was born in 1885 and spent her early days in Pewsey Vale house in South Australia. This property was in the possession of the Gilbert family from 1839 when Dorothy's grandfather Joseph Gilbert bought it after arriving from England. Dorothy wrote her reminiscences in 1973 in the form of a letter to her nephew. In this letter she gave a detailed description of the household and the busy social life her family led at the end of the

Teaching was seen as one of the very few respectable ways for gentlewomen to earn money. Under normal circumstances it was their fathers' and later their husbands' responsibility to obtain the necessary financial means to provide for them. The plight of single women was especially difficult after their fathers or husbands died and there was no one to support them. Such women were exempted from the 'ban' on paid employment and could look for work as governesses. Even though they received wages, their work ensured them a place in the private sphere. In a way they were safe and secure.<sup>451</sup>

The very nature of the position of the Victorian governess implied certain contradictions, as M. Jeanne Peterson points out. She argues that 'status incongruence' characterised the role of the governess. A governess's employers required her to prepare their children for the genteel way of life, and the idea of the lady of leisure was put forward as the main ideal. Even though the governess was herself representing as well as teaching the characteristics of the genteel lady, she was at the same time seen as a failure and an outsider who no longer conformed to this ideal. As a woman who earned her own living, the governess was contrary to the image of the lady who knew nothing about money matters and did no work whatsoever. While she was regarded as a lady capable of initiating young girls in the genteel performance, as a paid employee, however, she was a servant working for money.<sup>452</sup> Barbara Rees argues that the governess was therefore a 'lady suspended' because she did not have a gentleman to rely on.<sup>453</sup>

Peterson suggests that emigration to Australia often helped women overcome this conflicting situation. Australia was believed to be a society less obsessed with class relations and many governesses therefore believed that their position would be less ambiguous in the colonies. They also hoped that their chances of marriage would greatly increase in a society where men

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nineteenth century. She also listed her governesses. She first wrote about a Miss Molero who was followed by a Miss Parker. She stayed with them for three years and taught them 'the three Rs' as well as basic Music and French. Then came Miss Dijou who was of French origin, and in 1898 Miss Cohn was Dorothy's last governess. Dorothy Gilbert, "Country life in the later nineteenth century: Reminiscences by Dorothy Gilbert" *South Australiana* Vol. XII, (1973): 58-59.

<sup>451</sup> Peterson, "The Victorian governess" 10. Several colonial gentlewomen explained in their narratives why they had to earn money as governesses. Margaret Emily Brown worked as a governess in her youth. She arrived in Australia with her family in 1849 as a four-year-old girl and settled down in Port Fairy, Victoria. She recalled in her childhood memoir that she was obliged to contribute to the family income. Her father ran the local newspaper but times were hard. The opposition journal was more powerful and profitable and he suffered huge financial losses. Her mother opened a school while Margaret took the position of morning governess to the daughters of a Mr Young. But she was not well-paid and later went to work as a resident governess to a Mr Calder's family near Horsham. She had to take care of the education of six children and was also required to supervise their table manners and look after them after school hours. Margaret Emily Brown, *A Port Fairy Childhood 1849/60* (Warrnambool, VIC: Port Fairy Historical Society, 1990): 37-42.

<sup>452</sup> Peterson, "The Victorian governess" 8-15.

<sup>453</sup> Rees, *The Victorian Lady* 99.

outnumbered women.<sup>454</sup> This was the belief that Penelope Selby expressed in a letter to her family at the end of 1849 at Port Fairy, Victoria. She was herself married with two children but had six unmarried sisters in England. She suggested that her sisters should migrate to Australia where they 'would get good situation as governesses until married'.<sup>455</sup>

Between 1849 and 1862 several organisations were established to aid single women in their search for work. The Society for the Employment of Women was one such initiative. Agencies such as the National Benevolent Emigration Society and the Female Middle Class Emigration Society were set up to help women find work as governesses in the colonies.<sup>456</sup> In her book *The Governesses – Letters from the colonies 1862-1882* Patricia Clarke describes the fate of about 150 single women who came out to Australia with the assistance of the Female Middle Class Emigration Society. She notes that most governesses found it difficult to obtain situations. There were more governesses looking for work than there were jobs on offer. The intermittent economic depressions of the 1860s and 1870s made the prospect of finding work even slimmer. In 1862 Maria Atherton wrote from Brisbane to Maria Rye, the main founder of the Female Middle Class Emigration Society:

I am sorry to say that there appears no opening for educated women in Brisbane. Schools abound and Governesses are not wanted. [...] [W]e see no prospect of employment and are consequently anxious and harassed with doubts and fearing that our means may be exhausted before we can meet with any supply.<sup>457</sup>

Clara Aspinall warned of the unforeseeable risks many governesses were undertaking in the colonies and advised them in 1862 to stay at home. She also emphasised the rough circumstances many well-bred governesses would have to tolerate in the goldfields:

It appears to me a great risk for governesses to go out to Melbourne on speculation (which I fancy many have done, with little success); and in my opinion they had much better stay at home (where it is now the rule rather than the exception for families to have private tuition), unless, indeed, they go under an engagement, or have influential friends in the colony, through whose recommendation they could procure a desirable situation. It is not always in the wealthiest families in this gold community, that a highly-educated lady would feel the most happy and comfortable; and families who are not rich cannot afford to indulge in the luxury of a first-class governess.<sup>458</sup>

As for the possibility of marriage, some were luckier than others. An early arrival called Miss Mounsdon married one of her fellow passengers in 1862 soon after landing in Sydney. Louisa

<sup>454</sup> Peterson, "The Victorian governess" 20-21.

<sup>455</sup> Frost, *No Place for a Nervous Lady* 181. Marion Amies also notes that emigration could solve the problems that arose from status incongruence. Her research on the representation of governesses in nineteenth-century women's fiction shows that governesses often got married and were accepted into the family to a greater extent than in Britain. Marion Amies, "Home Education and Colonial Ideals of Womanhood" (PhD thesis, Monash University, 1986): xiii.

<sup>456</sup> Peterson, "The Victorian governess" 19-20.

<sup>457</sup> Patricia Clarke, *The Governesses – Letters from the colonies 1862-1882* (Melbourne: Hutchinson, 1985): 21-22, 129-130.

<sup>458</sup> Aspinall, *Three Years in Melbourne* 68-69.

Geoghegan was not so fortunate, though, and she worked as a governess for five years in Victoria before she married in 1871.<sup>459</sup>

Most emigrant governesses thought highly of themselves in terms of their standards of social behaviour. They were shocked to confront those Australian employers who mixed refinement with some degree of roughness. Louisa Geoghegan believed that the ideal governess was a respectable woman who refrained from physical work. She expressed her dislike of some of the expectations wealthy colonists placed on governesses. In her reply to Miss Lewin at the Female Middle Class Emigration Society on 17 May 1868, she noted that in the Wimmera district of western Victoria there were a lot of 'mushrooms', i.e. *nouveau riche* who demanded 'rather queer things' from their governesses. Louisa did not understand why it was the governess's duty to light the schoolroom fire. She suspected that because these people were used to manual labour themselves they expected their employees to do such work, too. She recounted the story of two 'lady' governesses whom she knew personally. They could not keep up with such expectations and soon left their employers.<sup>460</sup>

Governesses, just like many female settlers in the bush, had to redefine their sense of identity. Miss Barlow was sent by the Female Middle Class Emigration Society to Melbourne in 1862 where she started a school at Janefield, a small village then about 20 kilometres from Melbourne which was already seen as the bush. The following year she sent a happy account to the Society informing them that the running of the school was hard work but at the same time a profitable business venture. She could not afford keeping a servant and so did everything by herself. She was proud of her achievement and described her new life: 'I am getting quite a Colonial woman, and fear I should not easily fit into English ideas again – can scrub a floor with anyone, and bake my own bread and many other things an English Governess and Schoolmistress would be horrified at.'<sup>461</sup> Miss Barlow was able to reconcile her ideals of genteel womanhood with the pressing circumstances that demanded her to do physical work. Marion Amies argues that 'the ideal of leisured womanhood was modified to encompass the imperative of work so that the governess was no longer outside the ideal'.<sup>462</sup>

The governess played an important role in the education of genteel girls. She instructed her pupils in the accomplishments young women were expected to acquire and prepared her for

<sup>459</sup> Clarke, *The Governesses* 51, 103-108.

<sup>460</sup> *Ibid.*, 106-107.

<sup>461</sup> *Ibid.*, 68-69.

<sup>462</sup> Marion Amies, "The Victorian governess and colonial ideals of womanhood" *Victorian Studies* Vol. 31, No. 4, (1988): 537-538.

the genteel life that was assumed to be awaiting her. She was employed to set a good example to the young generation of gentlewomen but by doing so she herself lost the values she symbolised and taught. Just like colonial housewives, Australian governesses were sometimes required to do some housework and thus had to redefine their sense of gentility as colonial ladies.

### The Lack of Female Company

Life in the bush not only affected women's attitude to and relationship with housework, but it also influenced their social activities. When female colonists settled down in sparsely populated areas they were denied the presence of other women. Isolation and loneliness in the Australian bush were therefore great challenges to them. This section discusses the way women's lives were affected by the lack of female company in the bush.

Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, in her ground-breaking essay on the relations between women in nineteenth-century America, argues that women lived in 'a specifically female world'. Their daily life as well as their upbringing and years of motherhood were characterised by their reliance on other women. Geographical separation was a painful experience, as Smith-Rosenberg's examples from nineteenth-century American women's letters and diaries show.<sup>463</sup> For Eliza Brown in Western Australia this lack of a reliable familiar and social network seemed to be the greatest drawback of colonial life. She explained in a letter to her father on 2 October 1843, just two years after arriving in the Swan River, that

the greatest loss in coming to Swan River [is] the deprivation of social intercourse with our relatives and friends which I cannot at times but feel most keenly. My dear little ones have no indulgent grandpapa and kind aunts to promote their pleasures and expand their affections. The benefit of such helps to the parent and aids to their mental and moral development are lost to them by the step we have taken. This is the dark side of our enterprise.<sup>464</sup>

Delys Bird claims that 'the lack of a supportive social milieu'<sup>465</sup> made a great impact on women in rural areas who therefore cherished every opportunity to talk to other women. In 1902 Jeannie Gunn lived on an isolated station in the Northern Territory with her husband Aeneas, and for five months she did not see another settler woman. While they were camping out one day they met a group of settlers including a woman who told her that she had not seen another woman for two years. They made the most of each other's company: 'At our fireside we women did most of the talking'. The men left them but the women continued. 'Late into the night we

<sup>463</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, 'The female world of love and ritual: Relations between women in nineteenth-century America' in Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct - Visions of gender in Victorian America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985): 53-76.

<sup>464</sup> Cowan, *A Faithful Picture* 56.

talked: late into the night, and all the next day and evening and following morning' when both of them went on their way.<sup>466</sup>

Gentlewomen wished to have the company of other women of their own social background. The first three years in Augusta, Western Australia, were demanding for Georgiana Molloy. Her husband, Captain Molloy, spent a great deal of time away from home and the young settlement of Augusta did not provide much in the way of social life, let alone many women of similar standing. Georgiana confessed to a friend in Scotland, in a letter dated 12 January 1833, how challenging it was not to have any female person to talk to for days and months on end. She exclaimed: 'How would you 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?' She missed the company of her friend with whom she had cherished so many dreams in her youth.<sup>467</sup>

Although colonial women usually employed female servants in their house, they were not considered proper companions. Anne Chapman felt lonely but could not look to her servants for company. She noted that on the station

I would have been contented if I had had a pleasant and happy home, but living away so many miles from the township and only one neighbour about a mile away, certainly there were the farm servants, but that is not all the companionship one requires.<sup>468</sup>

Gentlewomen distanced themselves from the servant class even in the isolation of their bush life. Their loneliness was unbearable but their genteel upbringing required them to seek the company of other gentlewomen. They could not regard domestic servants as their equals and their notions of gentility held strongly over their longing for female company. Patricia Grimshaw and Graham Willet note the 'definite social limits of sisterhood' that ensured that female servants were kept at a 'proper' distance.<sup>469</sup>

Lonely colonial women sometimes turned to Aboriginal women for companionship. Jeannie Gunn admitted that she did not feel lonely at Elsey Station in the Northern Territory in 1902 because the indigenous people kept her company. Jeannie took great delight in them and found their presence entertaining. She noted that 'my friends used to wonder why I was not lonely, a hundred miles from any white neighbours, and I used to wonder if anyone could be

<sup>465</sup> Delys Bird, "'Born for the Bush': An Australian women's frontier" *Australian and New Zealand Studies in Canada* Vol. 2, (1989): 7.

<sup>466</sup> Mrs Aeneas Gunn, *We of the Never-Never* (London: Hutchinson, n.d.): 144-145.

<sup>467</sup> Hasluck, *Portrait with Background* 104. See also Mrs T. Holder Cowl, *Some of my Experiences During a Voyage to the Gulf of Carpentaria and Three Years' Residence at Normanton in the Early Seventies* (Brisbane: Besley & Pike, 1907): 35.

<sup>468</sup> Anne Hale Chapman, "Reminiscences" ML MSS 2837, Mitchell Library, Sydney, 61.

<sup>469</sup> Cited in Emma Floyd, "Without artificial constraint: Gentility and British gentlewomen in rural Australia" in Rita S. Kranidis, ed., *Imperial Objects* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998): 98.

lonely with a perpetual circus and variety show on the premises'.<sup>470</sup>

Books and natural history also provided entertainment for lonely bushwomen serving as a genteel pastime in addition. Ethel Hassell settled down at Jarramungup Station north-east of Albany, Western Australia, with her husband in 1878. She recalled in her narrative that even though she did not see a 'white woman' in the first nine months, her life was never dull. She read a lot of books, pursued her interest in natural history and botany,<sup>471</sup> and she, too, made friends with the local Aborigines. These activities kept her constantly occupied. She pointed out that 'I found plenty to keep me busy and interested, and I cannot honestly say on looking back, that my days were dull'.<sup>472</sup>

Isolation continued to be a burning problem even in the latter decades of the nineteenth century in areas where settlements were recent. Diana Ramsden enjoyed her station life on Mount Pleasant near Bowen in the north of Queensland at the turn of the century. She was only a visitor there but commented on how often the ladies felt lonely in the bush. She wondered 'how many of the lonely women in the bush would be delighted to have a lady to talk to and be companionable and help her while she has to be at home by herself when the husband has to be out riding on the run'.<sup>473</sup>

Several women wrote about the great number of visitors in their rural homes but noted that few of them were women. Judith Godden points out that men did not feel lonely because they had men around them on the station.<sup>474</sup> Mary McConnel recalled in her reminiscences that 'I often sat down with fourteen men, most of them travellers arriving at sundown, which there is never later than 7 o'clock. [...] We often had very pleasant people, but all men'.<sup>475</sup> Women found it difficult to completely immerse themselves in male conversation. They missed the womanly subjects that characterised their social contact in normal circumstances.

Katharine Kirkland presented a different example. After a while she got used to male society to such an extent that when she found herself among women again she did not know how to talk to them. Katharine and her husband settled down in the Port Phillip District in 1839. Later

<sup>470</sup> Mrs Aeneas Gunn, *The Little Black Princess of the Never-Never* (Melbourne: Robertson & Mullens, 1957): 36. Colonial gentlewomen's relationships with Aboriginal women will be further discussed in Chapter Six.

<sup>471</sup> Colonial gentlewomen's pursuit of botany will be further discussed in Chapter Five.

<sup>472</sup> Ethel Hassell, *My Dusky Friends - Aboriginal life and legends and glimpses of station life at Jarramungup in the 1880's* (East Fremantle: W.E. Hassell, 1975): 8.

<sup>473</sup> Ramsden, "Beautiful Queensland" 16.

<sup>474</sup> Judith Godden, "A new look at pioneer women" *Hecate - A Women's Interdisciplinary Journal* Vol. V, No. 2, (1979): 13.

<sup>475</sup> Mary McConnel, *Memories of Days Long Gone By: By the wife of an Australian pioneer* (Brisbane?: M. McConnel, 1905): 19.

that year she travelled to Melbourne to give birth to her second child. When she had the opportunity to see other ladies she realised that she was not the same woman as before and learnt the effect her isolated bush life had had on her. She admitted that 'I really felt at a loss upon what subjects to converse with ladies, as I had been so long accustomed only to gentlemen's society and in the bush, had heard little spoken of but sheep or cattle, horses, or of building huts'.<sup>476</sup>

True friendships in the colonies were therefore greatly appreciated. Penelope Selby considered herself very lucky to have found a friend in the person of Mrs Dawson. They first met on the voyage out in 1840 and both settled down in the Port Phillip district. In a letter to her sisters in England, Penelope wrote about the significance of her friendship with Mrs Dawson: 'How often I think of the comfort I have experienced in having found such a friend.'<sup>477</sup>

As society developed, the intricate system of calling was re-established. It enabled women to make and keep contacts with other women. Paying 'calls' on others was a part of everyday life and was seen as a duty that had to be undertaken by women.<sup>478</sup> The system of calling was also a crucial element 'in the bonding of society'. Penny Russell points out that such visits were the first steps in establishing social contact. They were ceremonial occasions and very formal in nature. Men also made calls but theirs were more informal and not as frequent as the calls women undertook.<sup>479</sup>

There were different types of calls and often women called on several people during a short period of time. Calls were not always appreciated but were nevertheless regarded as significant parts of women's everyday life.<sup>480</sup> Women often noted the calls they made and the names of the people who called on them.<sup>481</sup> Georgiana McCrae's Melbourne diary entry for 6 January 1843 recorded that she 'rode to town [and] [c]alled on Mrs Myer and Mrs J.F. Palmer', whereas her diary entry for 26 July 1843 mentioned Miss Gavan and the Montgomerys.<sup>482</sup> Calling cards were an important part of the calling protocol.<sup>483</sup>

<sup>476</sup> Kirkland, "Life in the bush" 189-190.

<sup>477</sup> Frost, *No Place for a Nervous Lady* 162.

<sup>478</sup> Rees, *The Victorian Lady* 120.

<sup>479</sup> Russell, *A Wish of Distinction* 50-53.

<sup>480</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>481</sup> Marian Aveling and Alan Atkinson note that in some instances women kept diaries for the sole purpose of recording the callers and reminding themselves of the calls they would have to make in return. Atkinson, *Australians* 1838 239.

<sup>482</sup> Hugh McCrae, ed., *Georgiana's Journal - Melbourne 1841-65* (Melbourne, Angus & Robertson, 1966): 85, 105.

<sup>483</sup> Daniel Pool points out that calling was a typically female undertaking in England because men were not at home during the day. They were either out at work, hunting in the country, or in clubs in the cities. Women never called on men because it was considered to be improper. When calling on a household, the footman took a calling card to the lady of the house, whose butler placed the calling card on a salver in the front hall. The collection of calling cards showed the visitors who were considered to be included in the family's social circle. Daniel Pool, *What Jane*

Julie Roy Jeffrey in her study of migrant and native-born American women's mid-nineteenth century diaries points out that women yearned for the friends they had left behind more than men did. She analyses women's early experiences on the western frontier and observes that husbands could not make up for the loss of female company. Jeffrey notes that men's accounts are less preoccupied with absent friends than women's records.<sup>484</sup> Edward Snell was one of a very few colonial men who expressed loneliness in his writings. He arrived in Adelaide in 1849 and a year later he noted in his diary that he did not feel as happy there as at home. He thought 'very often of the friends I have left behind me in England. I should like very much to see Mother and sisters, Allibon, Routledge and his wife, [...] and a host of others.'<sup>485</sup> He was evidently homesick. But my readings of male narratives suggest that such expressions of isolation and loneliness were as a rule not very typical in men's personal texts.

When Edward Curr first found himself alone in the bush at Wolfscrag sheep station in Victoria in the early 1840s, - although the result of having to release a deceitful overseer - he was regretful. At first it was difficult for him to bear his loneliness mainly because he had to take responsibility for everything by himself. He, too, had to learn cooking and was also afraid of possible Aboriginal attacks. He came to realise the necessity of 'a certain amount of conversation and friendship' and so when a policeman arrived a few days later he was happy. He noted that 'the prospect of having some one to talk to for the evening pleased me not a little'. With the passing of time, however, he learnt to overcome his loneliness. He stated that 'afterwards I got used to be alone, and very indifferent on the subject'.<sup>486</sup> Edward only missed the act of conversation and was content to talk even to policemen or ordinary bush workers. Edward may have considered it inappropriate for a man to admit difficulties, a better course of action to

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*Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew - From fox hunting to whist - the facts of daily life in nineteenth-century England* (New York: Touchstone, 1993): 66-69. Georgiana McCrae's diary entry for 8 March 1842 shows that calling was a female ritual and that calling cards were in use even in colonial Australia. She wrote 'Mrs Eyre Williams came in Kirk's phaeton, and I took her to call on Mrs La Trobe, Mrs Lonsdale, Mrs Myer, and left cards for Mrs Kemmis'. McCrae, *Georgiana's Journal* 62. The lady of the house was then expected to return a card or to visit the person who had left a calling card at her house. Callers were not always received, though. There was a difference between being 'physically' and 'socially' 'at home'. If the caller was admitted to the house she could expect a light conversation on matters such as the weather. Pool, *What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew* 67-68. Calls were not to last longer than fifteen minutes. Rees, *The Victorian lady* 121. Georgiana noted in her diary on 3 October 1843 that 'while we were at table Mrs Cobham, Mamie, and James Grahame were announced, and after a quarter of an hour's ceremonious conversation, they all left'. McCrae, *Georgiana's Journal* 110.

<sup>484</sup> This feature is especially notable in American diaries that record the experience of months in wagons on the road. Once they settled down, however, this sense of loneliness and isolation was only a short phenomenon. The situation in the American West improved as the new cities began to grow and expand. Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women - The Trans-Mississippi West 1840-1880* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1979): 38, 56.

<sup>485</sup> Tom Griffiths, ed., *The Life and Adventures of Edward Snell* (North Ryde: Angus & Robertson, 1988): 79.

<sup>486</sup> Edward M. Curr, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria Then Called the Port Phillip District (from 1841 to 1851)* (Echuca: Rich River Printers, 2001): 52-55.

instead be making light of his loneliness.

Colonial women learnt to cope with housework when servants were not available but the challenge of loneliness was far more difficult to tackle. This section has shown that many gentlewomen felt isolated in the bush. They were homesick partly because they missed their female friends and relatives. In sparsely populated areas it was not easy to meet other gentlewomen. Female domestics were frequently part of the household but they were not considered equal and appropriate companions for gentlewomen. The lack of proper female company was painful for most gentlewomen because they were denied an essential component of their genteel mode of life in colonial Australia.

### Childbearing

Female narratives are distinctive from men's narratives in their portrayal of children. Colonial gentlewomen reflected on the difficulties and peculiarities of giving birth to their children and educating them in the colonies. Their texts help social historians reconstruct the way Victorian women related to children.

Childbirth was an important aspect of women's lives but it did not receive considerable attention in their letters, diaries and autobiographical narratives.<sup>487</sup> Women informed the readers of their narratives only about the successful births. Miscarriages and stillbirths were not usually recorded. Lucy Frost, the editor of Annie Baxter's voluminous journals, tells us that Annie had four miscarriages but Annie described none of them explicitly. She made only indirect references to those tragic moments. While she lived at Yesabba in 1843 she was analysing her relationship with children one day and it was painful for her to recall that she would have had a nine-year-old child if she had not danced too much at a Rochester Ball.<sup>488</sup>

<sup>487</sup> Women did not give a detailed description of the way their life changed during those nine months. Julie Roy Jeffrey notes this attitude to pregnancy in her study of mid-nineteenth century American diaries. She explains that pregnancy was a subject that formed part of everyday talk among women but it was not recorded on paper. Only indirect references were made to the arrival of new family members. Jeffrey, *Frontier Women* 39. Cynthia Huff, on the other hand, points out that British women did share their fears surrounding pregnancy and their experiences of childbirth in their diaries. She argues that the diary was used as a forum for preparing themselves for this big event and to record their condition. She cites various examples but she does not mention whether or not writing about this aspect of female life was a widespread practice in British society. Cynthia A. Huff, "Chronicles of confinement: Reactions to childbirth in British women's diaries" *Women's Studies International Forum* Vol. 10, No. 1, (1987): 63-68.

<sup>488</sup> Frost, *No Place for a Nervous Lady* 98, 130. The editor of Katherine L. Parker's personal narrative of her bush life at Bangate Station in northern New South Wales in the 1880s and 1890s points out that a riding accident Katherine described in a joking manner had in fact life-long implications. A fall prevented Katherine from bearing children and making any other rides for the rest of her life. In her reminiscences she related this accident as 'one of the minor tragedies of life'. She wrote that 'like Humpty Dumpty, I had a great fall, and all the King's horses and all

The birth of a child was a very special moment and had its own rituals. Penny Russell notes that women stayed in their bedroom for some time after their confinement was over because childbirth was regarded as an illness and they needed time to recover.<sup>489</sup> Eliza Shaw was a pioneer settler of the Swan River colony who arrived with her husband in 1830 and settled down at their property Belvoir, Upper Swan, two years later. In a letter to a Mrs Waghorn in Britain on 3 February 1832 she described the latest addition to her family and referred to delivery as a time of illness. She wrote that 'I was taken ill in the night and Ellen was born between three and four o'clock the next morning the 27<sup>th</sup> January'.<sup>490</sup> Russell also points out that the hardship of labour was not mentioned because it could have posed a threat to the image of genteel femininity.<sup>491</sup>

Penny Russell characterises childbirth as a 'female-dominated ritual'. She notes that women often turned to their mothers on such occasions but in cases they were not available they sought the assistance of other women.<sup>492</sup> Midwives were often employed throughout the nineteenth century to assist at delivery. Doctors were only called in emergency.<sup>493</sup> In sparsely-populated areas it was often difficult to find other women, let alone doctors. When the time arrived to give birth, Eliza Brown arranged for a woman to be present at her confinement. She first called the doctor and the nurse but they were both unavailable. A Mr Bland then offered his housekeeper Mrs Hefferton to whom Eliza was afterwards very grateful. She complimented her by writing that 'I had such comfort from the kind attentions of this good creature, Mrs Hefferton'.<sup>494</sup> Women not only expected to get female assistance during their labour but they themselves also helped others during childbirth. Eliza Brown felt it her duty to help two women who were without midwives and doctors. She informed her father in her letter that

It is with a view of giving some insight into the social characteristics of this place that I mention the circumstances of having administered myself the necessary attention to two women of the labouring class who were without Nurse, Doctor, or neighbour or any female but myself within

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the King's men could not put me together again'. She hid her real feelings behind the words of a well-known nursery rhyme. Marcie Muir, ed., *My Bush Book - K. Langloh Parker's 1890s story of outback station life* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1982): 144, 66.

<sup>489</sup> Russell, *A Wish of Distinction* 104.

<sup>490</sup> Cited in Stephen Martin, *A New Land* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1993): 73.

<sup>491</sup> Russell, *A Wish of Distinction* 104.

<sup>492</sup> *Ibid.*, 103. Mrs Casely was an Australian-born woman. She married a Methodist minister at the age of twenty-four in 1863. Their first home was in Deloraine. Her mother was both doctor and nurse because the local doctor, Dr Valentine, was working at another township on that day. In her memoir she expressed her gratitude to her mother after the birth of her son. Mrs R.S. Casely, *Memoirs of Mrs R.S. Casely 1839-1916*. MS 9762, La Trobe Library, Melbourne, 6.

<sup>493</sup> Atkinson, *Australians 1838* 74; and Graeme Davison, et al., eds, *Australians 1888* (Broadway, NSW: Fairfax, Syme & Weldon Associates, 1987): 264.

<sup>494</sup> Cowan, *A Faithful Picture* 96.

several miles at the time of their illness.<sup>495</sup>

Cynthia Huff notes that in Britain women expressed their concern and anxiety over other women's ordeals in their diaries.<sup>496</sup> This same attitude can be seen in the Australian personal narratives, as well. Penelope Selby wrote about her friend Mrs Dawson's first confinement in the year 1842. She assured her sisters in England that 'I had been rather nervous some time previously, it being her first child and she so delicate'. Penelope was present at her friend's delivery and remarked that 'we managed [it] admirably'. She also informed her family that the Dawsons frequently turned to her for advice whenever the child showed symptoms of not being well.<sup>497</sup>

Penny Russell draws attention to fathers' small role in the experience of childbirth.<sup>498</sup> Georgiana McCrae recounted in her diary her husband's utter ignorance about the wellbeing of his expectant wife and the birth of his first child in Australia in 1841. On the eve of 28 December Georgiana was entertaining two guests at dinner in her Melbourne home when her contractions began. The symptoms were evident but her guests seemed to pay no attention to her troubles. She noted that 'I could hardly conceal the effects of a twinge of pain, but the captain and Thomas Anne [sic] did not make a move till 10 pm'. As soon as they were gone she called for the doctor and in the early hours of the morning gave birth to a daughter. It was the doctor on his way home who let Andrew McCrae know of the new arrival in his family.<sup>499</sup>

Colonial women often gave birth in unusual circumstances. The case of Constance Jane Ellis was indeed extraordinary. She arrived with her family in Charleville, Queensland, in April 1894 but found that the cottage was not yet available for them to occupy. They therefore pitched their tent and made camp. Almost immediately it started raining. Her husband intended to ask a woman called Mrs Jones to take a look at his wife but Constance persuaded him not to set off in pouring rain. She nevertheless left the tent in order to get something but then realised that 'something had happened to me'. She called her husband and told him: 'Here's the baby!' Unable to move anymore she gave birth to Sissy on that very spot 'by the light of a fat lamp, in the rain'.<sup>500</sup> Aboriginal women occasionally helped colonial women give birth to their children

<sup>495</sup> Quoted in Margaret Grellier, "The family" in C.T. Stannage, ed., *A New History of Western Australia* (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1981): 507.

<sup>496</sup> Huff, "Chronicles of confinement" 67.

<sup>497</sup> Frost, *No Place for a Nervous Lady* 162.

<sup>498</sup> Russell, *A Wish of Distinction* 105.

<sup>499</sup> McCrae, *Georgiana's Journal* 54-55.

<sup>500</sup> Constance Jane Ellis, *I Seek Adventure - An autobiographical account of pioneering experiences in outback Queensland from 1889 to 1904* (Sydney: Alternative Publishing Co-operative, 1981): 64-65.

but not many settlers left records of such incidents.<sup>501</sup>

Many women died of childbirth or its aftereffects. Marian Aveling notes that in the early half of the nineteenth century this cause claimed more women's lives than any other illness.<sup>502</sup> In the second half of the nineteenth century it was still the 'third greatest cause of death for women' in the fifteen to forty-four age group.<sup>503</sup> Georgiana Molloy passed away at the Vasse in Western Australia in 1843 just four months after giving birth to her fifth living daughter. She fell ill after the third and fourth births but managed to recover. She was unable, however, to regain health after her final pregnancy and eventually died.<sup>504</sup>

Settler women were far away from their families in Britain and for this reason they often had to rely on the services of strange women. But women's ordeals did not end with childbirth. Infant mortality was very common.<sup>505</sup> Women were deeply affected by the loss of their children. Constance Ellis lost one of her daughters four days after she came into the world in the mid-1890s. She wrote her memoirs in the early 1940s when she was eighty years old, but even from such a distance she admitted that 'I cannot bear to think of what we suffered. [...] Oh, I have gone through much and more than I would ever suffer anyone to do again.'<sup>506</sup> Faith in God's will comforted women in times of difficulty. When Mary Ann Casely's children were infected by typhoid fever in Port Adelaide she was terribly worried about them. She recalled that 'I felt both would be taken from us and I could not bear the thought of parting with my treasures. But after much prayer and supplication I became willing that God should have them if He thought best.' To her great joy they soon recovered.<sup>507</sup>

Colonial birth rates exceeded British rates throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>508</sup> Women's reproductive life spanned about twenty years: they could expect their first child around the age of

<sup>501</sup> Mary Gilmore tells in her reminiscences of a Mrs MacEacharn who was assisted by some native women during her labour. Cited in Sharp, "A Study of Relationships" 83-85.

<sup>502</sup> Atkinson, *Australians 1838* 107.

<sup>503</sup> Renate Howe and Shurlee Swain, "Fertile grounds for divorce" in Kay Saunders et al., eds, *Gender Relations in Australia* (Sydney: Harcourt Brace Johanovich, 1992): 163.

<sup>504</sup> Hasluck, *Portrait with Background* 242-244.

<sup>505</sup> Often the cause of death was the doctor's negligence. Mary McConnel's seven-month-old baby died at Ipswich in the early 1850s. Looking back from the distance of fifty years, Mary suggested in her memoir that the doctor was to blame for the death of her baby. She wrote that 'I do not think my good doctor understood the treatment of infants'. Her faith in God's will was strong, though. She 'sought to be resigned to the Father's Will, who had given us the precious loan and then took him to Himself'. McConnel, *Memories of Days Long Gone By* 32.

<sup>506</sup> Ellis, *I Seek Adventure* 85. The death of Georgiana Molloy's baby silenced her for three years. She lost her first child on the voyage out and gave birth to the second one in a tent at Augusta. To her great sorrow this little one also passed away. It was only in October 1833 that she could write about this tragedy to her friend Helen Story in Scotland who herself lost a child. She wrote that 'language refuses to utter what I experienced when mine died in this dreary land'. Hasluck, *Portrait with Background* 73.

<sup>507</sup> Casely, *Memoirs* 8.

<sup>508</sup> Atkinson, *Australians 1838* 82; and Davison, *Australians 1888* 304.

twenty and the last in their early 40s.<sup>509</sup> Christiana Blomfield was married at the age of eighteen in 1820 and gave birth to her first child a year later. Her twelfth and last child was born in 1842 when she was forty years of age.<sup>510</sup> Christiana feared that her correspondent's Aunt Matilda would think that the Blomfields 'stock' their 'house too fast'. She included this comment in her 5 January 1828 letter to her niece Louisa Edwards in which she reported the arrival of a baby girl and informed her that she was expecting the fifth one at the time of writing. She observed that despite the frequent additions to her family she could regard themselves as 'very moderate folks'. She pointed out that couples in the colony usually had one childbirth every year because there were few fatal disorders affecting children. She predicted that this part of the world could therefore expect to have larger families in the near future than any other.<sup>511</sup> But not every woman was as productive as Christiana. Emmeline Macarthur gave birth to her first son only in 1866 when she was already thirty-eight years old. She previously had several miscarriages, though.<sup>512</sup>

Cynthia Huff notes that motherhood was the 'ultimate achievement for most nineteenth-century women' who considered the bearing and rearing of their offspring a 'duty' and accepted the necessary troubles without question.<sup>513</sup> Most people in the nineteenth century took large families for granted and they were the norm rather than the exception.<sup>514</sup> Constant childbearing, however, left its mark on some women. Constant increase to the family prevented Eliza Brown from devoting as much time to her elder sons as she felt she should. She told her father in a letter in 1844 that 'the increase of family diminished my opportunities and energies for keeping up sufficient discipline to be enabled to do much if any good with the elder ones'.<sup>515</sup> In some cases, women were glad to take a break from constant childbearing. Emily Welch left England for South Australia in 1853 with her husband and their two children. She gave birth to her third child soon after landing in Adelaide. They settled down near Port Elliot. In a letter to her mother dated 20 February 1856 Emily told her that she was expecting her fourth child and was glad that it did not come earlier. She noted that 'I am very thankful I have been so long without a babe, for now

<sup>509</sup> Atkinson, *Australians 1838* 107.

<sup>510</sup> Clarke, *Life Lines* 97, 105.

<sup>511</sup> *Ibid.*, 99-100.

<sup>512</sup> de Falbe, *My Dear Miss Macarthur* 9.

<sup>513</sup> Huff, "Chronicles of confinement" 66.

<sup>514</sup> In her South Australian childhood reminiscences of the 1850s and 1860s Sarah Conigrave compared women's attitudes to childbearing in different times. She noted the large size of families in the past and emphasised that it was never a problem to raise a big family. Parents did their utmost and worked as best as they could to provide for them. Mrs J. Fairfax Conigrave, *My Reminiscences of the Early Days - Personal incidents on a sheep and cattle run in South Australia* (Perth: Brokensha & Shaw, 1938): 69.

<sup>515</sup> Cowan, *A Faithful Picture* 68.

we have so many more comforts about us'.<sup>516</sup> The first few years of pioneering life must have been too demanding for Emily to want to care for a larger family.

Only a very few women expressed publicly their unwillingness to undergo more pregnancies. Jane Bardsley was a woman who did not want a large family. She got married at the age of eighteen and settled down with her husband on Midlothian Station. The realisation of her second pregnancy came at a time of financial difficulty. She broke the news to her friend Althea in a letter in the late 1890s. She first wrote about the cuts in expenditure and then added that 'on top of all our poverty' she was expecting another child. Two years later in 1900 she gave birth to her third son. She was again 'upset' because neither her husband nor herself wanted another baby so soon. She eventually gave birth to seven children.<sup>517</sup>

Childless women's reactions to the productiveness of other women is very interesting. Annie Baxter never became a mother even though she wanted to have children of her own. Her four miscarriages and marital problems were great obstacles. She did not understand why women had so many children, especially when they did not have enough money to feed them. In a conversation with a Mrs C.F. at Yesabba in 1843 she advised her not to have any more offspring. The married woman, however, did not know 'how it is possible for married persons to avoid it?' Annie sarcastically noted 'just as if the bare ceremony of matrimony was to be the cause of myriads starving!'<sup>518</sup> This woman was evidently ignorant about abstinence and lactation as a means of birth control or did not even want to limit the number of her offspring.<sup>519</sup> Contraception may not have been considered compatible with gentility at that time.

Children were very important in the lives of nineteenth-century women who were brought up to regard the happiness of their family as the main ambition of their life. The colonial circumstances, however, demanded sacrifices on the part of women at childbearing age. Migration deprived them from the valuable assistance of their mothers, female friends and relatives and not even the doctors were as accessible in rural areas as they were in Britain.

<sup>516</sup> Pat Roberts, ed., *Emily's Journal - The Welch letters* (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1986): 39.

<sup>517</sup> John Atherton Young, ed., *Across the Years 1896-1936 - Jane Bardsley's outback letterbook* (North Ryde, NSW: Angus & Robertson, 1987): 113, 121, xi.

<sup>518</sup> Frost, *No Place for a Nervous Lady* 109. See also Adams, *The Letters of Rachel Henning* 240.

<sup>519</sup> Contraception was a topic that was written about as early as 1797 when the philosopher Jeremy Bentham advocated the sponge method. A later book that came out in 1825 and was entitled *Every Woman's Book: or, What is Love* by Richard Carlile offered other methods of contraception such as the use of condom and the practice of partial withdrawal. The vulcanization of rubber in 1843 made vaginal caps even more popular. By the late 1880s contraceptives were accepted to such an extent that they were on display at chemists' shops in central London. At the end of the century the three most preferred methods of contraception were the use of sponge, the douche and the vaginal cap because they gave women control of their own bodies. Joan Perkin, *Victorian Women* (London: John Murray, 1993): 68-70; and Rees, *The Victorian Lady* 51-53.

Despite the harsh conditions of life, women in Australia tended to rear more children than in the old country. Large families were the norm rather than the exception in an age when the use of contraceptive methods was not yet widespread.

### Religion

An unquestioning faith in God was a typical characteristic of British gentlewomen in the nineteenth century. The church and its activities were part and parcel of women's everyday life. When many gentlewomen settled down in the Australian colonies they often felt the want of proper religious instructions and services.

Piety was an important characteristic of the Victorian woman. In addition to maternal feeling it was a significant quality that defined the respectable and well-bred women of the time.<sup>520</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall point out that religion had a very special place in the life of the gentry. Not only did it provide a sense of identity and community but it also gave guidelines to proper behaviour and helped people make moral choices. Various activities related to religious life such as church attendance, family worship, the observance of Sabbath and familiarity with religious literature, came to be defined as integral parts of gentility and respectability. Faith also gave strength in times of trouble.<sup>521</sup>

Early settlers had to face many obstacles in practising their religion in rural Australia. To begin with, there were few churches. It was difficult for women not to find churches and ministers in the Australian bush. Georgiana Molloy sincerely felt their absence at Augusta in Western Australia in 1833 and 'long[ed] and pray[ed] for some faithful minister'.<sup>522</sup> Rachel Henning also missed the church at Exmoor in Queensland in 1862. She revealed in her letter that 'Sunday seems so quiet in the bush. I should like to hear some church bells, but there is no bell near, except that on the blackboy's pony, which I hear tinkling somewhere in the bush.'<sup>523</sup>

Where there were no churches in the neighbourhood, the head or any other member of the family read a sermon. Family worship was also popular. Hugh Jackson argues that family worship was common among middle- and upper-class Protestants in mid-Victorian Britain. Servants and children were also expected to be present on these occasions.<sup>524</sup> Jane Henty arrived with her husband in Portland Bay, Victoria, in 1836. She noted that they had daily prayers and a

<sup>520</sup> Rees, *The Victorian Lady* 110.

<sup>521</sup> Davidoff, *Family Fortunes* 76-77.

<sup>522</sup> Hasluck, *Portrait with Background* 76.

<sup>523</sup> Adams, *The Letters of Rachel Henning* 109.

<sup>524</sup> H.R. Jackson, *Churches and People in Australia and New Zealand* (North Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987): 147.

morning and an evening service on Sundays when one of the Henty brothers read the sermon. They also encouraged the station hands to attend the service. When they tempted them with a piece of plum cake and a small glass of rum almost every man turned up. Mrs Henty felt bad about motivating the men in this way but she strongly believed that she was doing all this for their own good.<sup>525</sup>

The figures show a gradual increase in the number of clergymen throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>526</sup> Towns were of course better provided for, but there was always a shortage of ministers on the frontier. Hugh Jackson argues that several factors accounted for the insufficient number of clergymen on the frontier:

The clergy [...] were in short supply in frontier districts. People absorbed in pioneering were often unable or unwilling to support a regular ministry, and city congregations were uninterested or miserly about funding the work. It was also an inherently difficult task ministering to a thinly spread population and nowhere was this more so than on the great inland plains of eastern Australia.<sup>527</sup>

This section will show that settlers, especially women, would have greatly appreciated the services of clergymen. Ministers were welcome in many homes and some families even contributed to the foundation of churches.

Henrietta Foott lived at Jandra on the Darling River in the 1860s and she recalled in her narrative that only four clergymen visited them in eight years: three Church of England and one Presbyterian minister. The family did not neglect to worship God, though. They knew that God was with them and that he did not mind their praying under gum trees rather than in proper churches. She noted that

many a family meet together in their log hut to worship God, and although there is no church bell heard, no clergyman seen for years among them, they cannot forget the gracious assurance, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." Prayer can be uttered as well under the shade of a gum tree, with no other eye but our Heavenly Father's

<sup>525</sup> Jane Henty, *Old Memories* (Hamilton, VIC: Whitcombe & Tombs, 1902): 9.

<sup>526</sup> The first Anglican minister arrived with the First Fleet in 1788. By 1836 there were seventeen clergymen in New South Wales. There was one chaplain to 433 people in Van Diemen's Land in 1804 but the ratio got worse by 1836 when each of the nine Church of England ministers had 5,000 worshippers under their pastoral care. The two colonies were included in the Diocese of Calcutta until 1836 when the first Anglican Bishop of Australia arrived in Sydney. As for the followers of Catholicism, they had no official chaplain until 1820 even though around 25-30 per cent of the population was made up of Catholics, particularly Irish. They had a bishop sent to them in 1835. By the mid-1830s ministers of other denominations also took up residence in colonial Australia. By 1836 there were four Wesleyan Methodist ministers and five Presbyterian ones in each colony. In 1836, when the census was taken, thirty-five ordained ministers were working in New South Wales and there were 2,200 people to each pastor. The situation was slightly better in Van Diemen's Land where twenty-three pastors were in service and the ratio was one to 1,900. By 1850 the number of religious ministers increased to 150 in New South Wales. Among them there were seventy-two Anglican, twenty-nine Catholic, twenty-eight Presbyterian, fourteen Wesleyan, four Independent and three Baptist ministers. The ratio of clergymen to people was at this time 1 to 1,250. In the Port Phillip District the ratio was 1 to 1,453 and in Van Diemen's Land 1 to 800. The Port Phillip District had a total of 54 clergymen while Van Diemen's Land had 87. John Barrett, *That Better Country - The religious aspect of life in Eastern Australia, 1835-1850* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1966): 11-14, 75-80.

<sup>527</sup> Jackson, *Churches and People* 25.

looking down upon us, as in the crowded cathedral.<sup>528</sup>

Several colonial women recalled the long journeys they had to take to reach the nearest church. Sarah Conigrave lived with her family in Hindmarsh Island in South Australia from 1853. As her father felt 'great concern about our spiritual welfare' the family regularly went to Goolwa on the mainland for church on the Sabbath. They had to walk 16 kilometres to and from church no matter what the weather was like. Her parents were rather strict about it and therefore 'no excuses for not going were allowed in those days'. Their presence was important also because Sarah and her sister played the harmonium.<sup>529</sup> More churches were needed and wealthier families contributed towards their foundation and building. To commemorate their silver wedding anniversary, Mary McConnel's husband donated money to the building of the nearby church at Esk in the early 1870s.<sup>530</sup>

On the frontier and in isolated areas there were few clergymen, and settlers appreciated their presence and services regardless of their religious denomination. Even though Mrs T. Holder Cowl was not a Roman Catholic she cherished the visit of a Catholic priest. She spent three and a half years in Normanton in the Gulf of Carpentaria from September 1871 to March 1875. One day a Roman Catholic priest came to their town - it was the first visit made by a minister of any religion to that area. 'There were young people there who had never received any of the sacraments of any church. They scarcely knew what religion meant.' The Rev. Father McGuinness enjoyed the hospitality of Mrs Cowl's house very frequently. She looked back at him as 'a genial, cheerful, kindly man and good company'.<sup>531</sup>

Clergymen's wives also had to be energetic in looking after the spiritual wellbeing of their parishioners. Ada Cambridge married a clergyman, George Frederick Cross, in 1870 and she recalled that while they were living in Ballan in Victoria in the mid-1870s, she was actively involved in parish life. She did the Sunday School, 'trained the choir, visited every parishioner within reach, did all that hard work unfairly demanded of the parson's wife'.<sup>532</sup>

<sup>528</sup> Foott, *Sketches of Life in the Bush* 40-41.

<sup>529</sup> Conigrave, *My Reminiscences of the Early Days* 75. See also Morphett, *Mrs David Randall's Reminiscences* 9.

<sup>530</sup> McConnel, *Memories of Days Long Gone By* 48. See also Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania* Vol. 2: 90-91, 185-187.

<sup>531</sup> Cowl, *Some of My Experiences* 31. Mary Banks Macleod recalled in her early Queensland memoir that during her childhood at Cressbrook, on the Brisbane River, 'clergy representing the various Christian churches visited us'. Her mother even 'attempted to establish a United Christian Church on a small scale in a little chapel built about a mile away from the head station'. As the surrounding area was opened up for selectors more and more families drove to that church to attend service. A Church of England, Presbyterian, Wesleyan and Methodist clergyman held service there alternately. Unfortunately, the preachers attacked one another's viewpoint and thus caused some kind of tension. Banks, *Memories of Pioneer Days in Queensland* 36.

<sup>532</sup> Cambridge, *Thirty Years in Australia* 86-87.

The parents of Mary Macleod Banks were devout Presbyterians.<sup>533</sup> Mary noted the significance of Sunday in her family. Her description reveals a very strict observance of this day but also shows that it provided a regular break from the day-to-day schedule of work and brought peace and tranquillity to their life at Cressbrook:

Our bush Sundays were happy in spite of the restrictions which hedged them round; we might not run, nor gather fruit, nor sing songs, nor read anything but books on religion or the magazines laid out on the verandah table for Sunday reading. [...] All work had ceased, and the observance of things above the common routine brought about a sense of dignity and restfulness into our lives. We enjoyed helping to arrange the chairs in rows in the hall for the morning service and to lay out the books. The short sermon, read from a book and probably more delectable than many another preached throughout the world on that day, was no burden to us; we often heard one by Charles Kingsley. We sat, looking out on the wide, quiet bush, and listened – the earth and its promise were fair in our eyes.<sup>534</sup>

A dutiful interest in religious literature characterised Georgiana Molloy, who was also a devout Presbyterian. She wrote in a letter to Helen Story in 1833 about the books she read at Augusta. She confessed that she read mostly religious books. Her conscience was troubled every time she took up another book.<sup>535</sup>

Attending a proper religious service not only satisfied women's hunger for spiritual guidance, but it also brought back memories of home. Emily Skinner greatly rejoiced when a minister came around and held service for her community at the Victorian diggings in the middle of the nineteenth century. She noted that services were not frequent and a long time elapsed between them. One day a Wesleyan minister came around and a big congregation gathered to hear the sermon. She felt comforted by the sacred words that also brought back the memory of old days gone by when she listened to those same words in her church at home. She wrote in her recollections:

How good it seemed to once more see an assembled congregation and to listen to the sacred words. [...] As he spoke the old familiar words, long unheard by many there assembled, recollections of bygone times when those same words had been listened to in the dear old church or chapel at home, brought tears to many eyes. It was an evening to remember.<sup>536</sup>

The church stood as a symbol of order in the lives of these women. Emma Curtin claims that 'religious observance also helped to reaffirm their gentility'.<sup>537</sup> Since religion was part of their life in Britain, it was understandable that they wanted to attend church even in the colonies.

<sup>533</sup> Kay Walsh, et al., *Australian Autobiographical Narratives* (Canberra: Australian Scholarly Editions Centre, University College of New South Wales, 1998) Vol. 1: 101-102.

<sup>534</sup> Banks, *Memories of Pioneer Days in Queensland* 40.

<sup>535</sup> Hasluck, *Portrait with Background* 243, 76.

<sup>536</sup> Duyker, *A Woman on the Goldfields* 95. Elizabeth Ramsay-Laye lived in a tent at the diggings in Castlemaine in the early 1850s. She noted the same: 'Sunday in a far-off land always brings to me thoughts of home and loved ones there, the dear old church and chiming bells. It is a sweet reflection that we are all using the same form in prayer, and that our noble liturgy does not forget those "that travel by land or by water"'. Ramsay-Laye, *Social Life and Manners in Australia* 16.

While their churchgoing could be seen as just another paraphernalia of their genteel mode of life and as such a mere formality, it would seem that religion and the church meant much more to these women. The sincerity of their writing style and the amount of paper they devoted to the recording of their religious activities suggest that women did indeed take religion seriously and that they did care about the observance of Sunday. The absence of pious reflections in their texts, however, suggests that religion, after all, was more important in a formal sense. One could argue that they simply did not have much time for reflection in their busy colonial life.

Gentlewomen were believed to be more religious than their menfolk. McLeod explains that religion provided a way out from the restrictions and limitations of the domestic sphere:

within the church or chapel they could find one public arena from which they were not excluded. The personal morality which was at the heart of Christian concerns in the nineteenth century accorded well with the situation of most middle-class women, locked as they were into a world of family and friends, while groups such as prayer societies offered a woman's subculture of validation and support.

McLeod argues that men, on the other hand, had other places where they could meet in public. While they did not neglect religious services, religion occupied a slightly different place in their life.<sup>538</sup>

My own research also suggests that the absence of religious services did not have such a great emotional effect on men. James C. Hawker came out to South Australia with his father in 1838 and became a land surveyor. He noted in his narrative that when the Reverend Newland arrived, Colonel Gawler requested him to hold the Sunday service at the surveyors' camp. Unfortunately, only a small congregation gathered at James's tent because of denominational objections and soon the Reverend ceased to hold services for them.<sup>539</sup> James Hawker related all this information very objectively and did not even mention whether or not he was disappointed when the Reverend Newland decided not to visit their camp anymore. James devoted only one paragraph to the description of the pastor's short presence, which suggests that while he considered religious observance a part of his life, it did not rate highly enough to dwell on it for long or even to express his feelings about it.<sup>540</sup>

Religion often gave women support to cope with all kinds of difficulties, as I have argued

<sup>537</sup> Emma Curtin, "Gentility afloat: Gentlewomen's diaries and the voyage to Australia, 1830-80" *Australian Historical Studies* Vol. 26, No. 105, (1995): 643.

<sup>538</sup> Cited in Davidoff, *Family Fortunes* 108.

<sup>539</sup> James C. Hawker, *Early Experiences in South Australia* (Adelaide: E.S. Wigg, 1899): 45.

<sup>540</sup> There were naturally some exceptions. For Richard Skilbeck, religion was significant in his life. In the diary that he kept at Koroit in Victoria from 1858 to 1864 he devoted a considerable space to the description of the sermons he heard, the services he attended and other important church-related matters. He was a Methodist and was personally interested in the establishment and running of the local Methodist church opposite his own house. H.A. McCorkell,

earlier in this thesis. Faith strengthened Eliza Brown to overcome the death of her son who drowned in the River Avon on 15 December 1844. Eliza wrote in a letter to her father three weeks after the incident that people tried to solace her but it was religion that gave her the most comfort.

Though the sympathy of friends is very pleasing it is religious consolation that is most available in the present instance and from which all our comfort is derived. 'The tender mercy of God' no doubt wills that our treasure should no longer be on Earth the more to fix our hopes on Heaven where only we can be reunited, and whither through His gracious assistance we may the more vividly raise the regards of our remaining little ones to be fixed by mention of him who is gone before, for may we not indulge the Christian's hope that the youthful member of Christ's Church upon Earth rendered so by baptism dying before the time of committing actual sin is a blessed dweller with God and Angels.<sup>541</sup>

Religious festivals were properly observed in colonial Australia. Christmas was a special occasion in the religious and social calendar. Despite the unusual climatic conditions, colonists sought to celebrate Christmas in the usual way. Mary Macleod Banks recalled that 'in this hot season of midsummer we observed Christmas with the customs of northern hemisphere' at Cressbrook. They had their customary turkey followed by plum pudding and mince pie. There was also a service in the hall that they decorated with 'dark green sprays of chestnut' and white linen on which they painted greetings and good wishes. They set up a Christmas tree, exchanged gifts and welcomed Father Christmas. Boxing Day was different, however, and on this day they did not really follow British customs. They took advantage of the warm weather and organised an outdoor picnic where they invited all the station hands and also people from the nearby stations. They served them ripe figs, watermelons, peaches and also ginger ale. They organised horse races and the day ended in the schoolhouse with dancing.<sup>542</sup>

Women were the managers of the household and their insistence on the preservation of English traditions showed that they wished to maintain their cultural practices even on the other side of the world. Christmas, just like any other religious festivals, served to remind the colonists of their Old World background. It is interesting to point out that Mary's family took advantage of the warm weather and spent Boxing Day with activities on the open air. This pioneering family sought to maintain old ways but at the same time were beginning to adapt themselves and their celebration to the new country.

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*The Diaries of Sarah Midgley and Richard Skilbeck: A story of Australian settlers 1851-1864* (Melbourne: Cassell, 1967): 125-198.

<sup>541</sup> Cowan, *A Faithful Picture* 74-75.

<sup>542</sup> Banks, *Memories of Pioneer Days in Queensland* 56-58. Colonial men also mentioned the preservation of English Christmas traditions. Henry Melville noted in his narrative after a residence of twenty years that 'Christmas Day is generally extremely warm, and yet few dinner tables will be found without hot roast beef and steaming plum-pudding, decorated with the blooming mimosa, in lieu of the English holly berry'. Henry Melville, *The Present State of Australia* (London: G. Willis, 1851): 317.

In summary, colonial women's religious life suffered badly in the colonies: churches were far away, ministers were few and they were deprived of the comfort and guidance religious services used to give them at home. The colonists nevertheless observed Sunday as a day of rest and the household regularly gathered together for the reading of the scriptures. Religious holidays were also observed even though the climatic differences did not quite allow the settlers to celebrate them in the usual way.

### Thoughts of Home

Migration to the colonies was an emotionally difficult step for many settlers. Their accounts reveal a constant longing for the country and the people they left behind. Women gave voice to their homesickness not only in their anxious waiting for letters, as was shown in Chapter Two, but also on the pages of their personal narratives.

For the great majority of colonists the word 'home' always referred to the mother country. Annie Baxter noted at the end of her reminiscences in 1873 that 'everybody speaks of England as "home"; so with all the enjoyments of a new country, and there are many here which the common run of people do not enjoy in Europe, still the old country cannot be forgotten; and this is as it should be'.<sup>543</sup> Even colonial-born women were educated to call England their home. Constance Gordon Cumming noted during her short residence in New South Wales in 1875 that 'every one speaks of England as "home," though neither they nor their parents or grandparents ever saw the old country; and certainly our Queen has no more devoted subjects'.<sup>544</sup>

It was impossible to erase the sweet memory of the native country from one's heart. Annie Baxter's journal recorded on 1 January 1839, just five years after her arrival in the colonies, that 'I think we can never forget to love our country - other loves may die - but that never!'<sup>545</sup> Sarah Perry came out to Australia as a young adult at the age of twenty-six with her family. She met her future husband Charles Perry on the voyage out and they got married two months after their arrival in Melbourne in January 1854. She died, probably at childbirth, in May 1856. Her poem entitled "England" revealed her homesick heart and showed her admiration for her country of birth that she could not forget:

<sup>543</sup> Dawbin, *Memories of the Past* 112.

<sup>544</sup> Constance F. Gordon Cumming, *At Home in Fiji* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1881): 29. Even men looked at the old country this way. John Hunter Kerr arrived in Melbourne in 1839 but returned to his native Scotland in 1847 for a short visit. He recalled that 'I landed on the green shores of the dear old country [...] which the emigrant never ceases to think of as "Home"'. Kerr, *Glimpses of Life in Victoria* 67.

<sup>545</sup> Lucy Frost, *A Face in the Glass - The journal and life of Annie Baxter Dawbin* (Melbourne: William Heinemann, 1992): 15.

Land of all lands still dearest!  
 Unto my bosom nearest!  
 Accept this simple lay;  
 Though cruel distance sever,  
 I love thee now as ever,  
 I love thee night and day.  
 [...]  
 Oh! wherefore did I leave thee?  
 Spot, dearest still! believe me,  
 Many fair lands I've seen,  
 But none unto me bringeth  
 The joy that round thee clingeth,  
 Though occasions intervene.<sup>546</sup>

Colonial women often felt the need to explain why their love for their native land was still intact. Penelope Selby arrived as an adult and a mother of two children. It seemed impossible for her to give up her English heritage and exchange it for an Australian identity. She argued that 'if I were here twenty years I should still look upon the place I left as my home and look forward to the time of visiting again'. This was how she felt in 1841 just after a few months' residence in the colonies.<sup>547</sup> Mary Thomas was of the opinion that one had to be born into a country to be able to love it with one's heart. When one migrated to another country as an adult, complete identification with the new place was impossible. Even after twenty-eight years in Australia Mary felt that she still belonged to England. Her diary recorded the following entry for 1 November 1864:

I cannot say that my long residence in the Southern Hemisphere has induced me to prefer it to my own dear country in any one point. I suppose this is generally the case with those who emigrate at an advanced time of life. My children, who were all young when they came here, are naturally more attached to it.<sup>548</sup>

Mary was right. Those women who arrived in the colonies as young children tended to regard Australia their true home because they found it much easier to identify with their new country. Eliza Chomley landed in Melbourne with her family in 1851 when she was only eight years old. In her memoir she declared that she was proud of her English heritage. As someone who left England at such an early age and spent the greatest part of her life in the colonies, however, she was more inclined to call Australia her home. She wrote that 'I am to all intents and purposes Australian more than English in my feelings and affections. It has been a happy home to me all my life, and is the birthplace of my children and grandchildren.' In 1908 an

<sup>546</sup> Alfred J. Perry, ed., *"Durable Riches;" Or, A voice from the golden land. Being memorials of the late Sarah Susannah Perry, of Melbourne, Australia* (London: Partridge, 1857): 16-19, 54. Colonial men also expressed their homesickness in poetic ways. Henry Parkes' verse "My native Land" and Roderick Flanagan's "To Ireland" revealed their authors' nostalgia for their home country. Parkes wrote that however bountiful Australia was it could never replace his native England. He noted that 'the counter-charm for home / Is found not yet where'er I roam, / O'er sea or land'. Flanagan looked at his native Ireland as the 'dear land of my heart'. Brian Elliott, et al., eds, *Bards in the Wilderness - Australian colonial poetry to 1920* (Melbourne: Nelson, 1970): 34-35, 58.

<sup>547</sup> Frost, *No Place for a Nervous Lady* 156-157.

opportunity arose for her to revisit her country of birth. It was a life-long dream come true for her. She spent about nine months there and enjoyed herself tremendously visiting old cities and other sights of interest. 'I loved England' – she wrote in her memoir. But the first sight of the Southern Cross and the gumtrees made her realise which part of the world her heart truly belonged to.<sup>549</sup>

Going home was a rather common desire among middle-class emigrants but the sheer thought of months of ship life was enough to deter most people from ever undertaking the long journey back home. It was also very expensive and not many could afford it. Better work opportunities in Australia often discouraged the migrants from returning home.<sup>550</sup> Some had no illusions about seeing their home again. Julie Jeffrey's study of American migrant women shows that it was comforting and emotionally supportive for many to believe in heavenly reunion rather than to rely on an earthly one.<sup>551</sup> Sophy Taylor was confident that she would get to see her family in person one day. The fact that they would surely meet again in heaven comforted her anxious heart. She concluded her letter in April 1852 that I 'hope we shall all meet again in a few years, and meet again not only on earth but in heaven where we shall part no more, for my chief anxiety now is to know that we are all seeking salvation through the same Saviour and thus all are travelling one road that leads to the same happy end'. Their earthly reunion was never to take place, though. Sophy died shortly after giving birth to her first child in 1853.<sup>552</sup> The prospect of forthcoming family reunion gave strength to overcome the difficulty which migration and the breaking up of the extended family caused to the colonists.

Some women had the opportunity to return back to their native land. Rachel Henning sailed back to England after a year's residence in Australia because she was so homesick. She returned, however, five years later in 1861 to look after her bachelor brother's household.<sup>553</sup> In 1865 Rachel was again desirous of returning home but at the same time she recognised the difficulty of that move: 'I can only hope that something may turn up in the far future to enable me to see you again, for I never even venture to look the thought in the face that it may never be

<sup>548</sup> Thomas, *The Diary and Letters of Mary Thomas* 84.

<sup>549</sup> Eliza Chomley, "My Memoirs" MS 9034 Box 912/5, La Trobe Library, Melbourne, (1920): 1, 76-80.

<sup>550</sup> Gertrude Gooch arrived in Sydney in 1861 as a governess sent to Australia by the Female Middle Class Emigration Society. She was in her thirties and quickly obtained a good situation at Ashfield. In her letter a year later she admitted that the higher wages tempted her to stay in the colonies for a while. She was not sure if she would ever see her own country again. She wrote that 'I am certain it will be a long while before I see the Old Country again, perhaps never. I love it as ever, but I can earn more money here and I expect always [will] find something to do.' Clarke, *The Governesses* 54-57.

<sup>551</sup> Jeffrey, *Frontier Women* 75.

<sup>552</sup> Irene C. Taylor, ed., *Sophy Under Sail* (Sydney: Hodder and Stoughton, 1969): 139, 25.

<sup>553</sup> Adams, *The Letters of Rachel Henning* 42, 86.

in this world.<sup>554</sup> But she was never to see her native country again.<sup>555</sup>

Some women developed a sense of dual loyalties. In a celebrated passage, W.K. Hancock notes that

Our fathers were homesick Englishmen, or Irishmen, or Scots; and their sons, who have made themselves at home in a continent, have not yet forgotten those tiny islands in the North Sea. A country is a jealous mistress and patriotism is commonly an exclusive passion; but it is not impossible for Australians, nourished by a glorious literature and haunted by old memories, to be in love with two soils.<sup>556</sup>

Some colonial women and their daughters felt this way, as well. Henrietta Foott believed that after a long residence in Australia settlers ought to feel fondness for their new home. She admitted that after some initial nostalgic longings for her mother country she learnt to love Australia. She wrote in her memoir that 'although the land of my fathers must ever hold the first place in my heart, Australia is very dear to me, and ought to be to every one who has made it their adopted country'.<sup>557</sup>

Homesickness was a state of mind that troubled almost every migrant. It was very difficult to forget one's roots and only some migrant women succeeded in identifying themselves as Australian. It was easier for the younger generation, but many of them were brought up to regard England as their real home. Going back to England was not only an expensive but also an exhausting and dreadful experience in the age of long ship voyages that few people could afford. The 'tyranny of distance' and better job opportunities persuaded many colonists to remain in Australia. Colonists developed a dual understanding of home: Australia was the actual home where they lived but Britain was the country they admired and longed for deep in their heart.<sup>558</sup> It was easier to identify with the colonies for second-generation settlers or for those who spent the greater part of their childhood in Australia.

### Gentility in the Bush

This chapter has shown that life in the Australian bush was a challenging task for most colonial women, but despite the difficulties these women tended to enjoy their new country. Most people frowned on women for choosing to live in isolated areas on the frontier because it was believed

<sup>554</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>555</sup> Ibid., 287.

<sup>556</sup> W.K. Hancock, *Australia* (Brisbane: Jacaranda Press, 1966): 51.

<sup>557</sup> Foott, *Sketches of Life in the Bush* 26.

<sup>558</sup> Chapter Four will show that their nostalgic longings were often eased by the development of associations that tied them emotionally to their new country. With the passing of time many colonists learnt to like their Australian home.

to be a hostile place for women.<sup>559</sup> Several women recollected facing society's resistance against their movement to the bush. In 1902 when Jeannie Gunn decided to accompany her husband to Elsey Station south of the Katherine in the Northern Territory she also encountered this attitude. Her husband Aeneas sent several telegraphs to his men on the station asking them to prepare for the arrival of his wife but they chose to disobey his orders and advised him not to bring his wife with him. They even refused to provide a buggy for her. When Aeneas asked them to get one they did not even take the trouble to find one but replied instead that 'no buggy [is] obtainable'. Jeannie also recalled that the women in Darwin regarded the act of women who went to the bush as 'sheer madness'.<sup>560</sup>

Female city-dwellers were prejudiced against bush life and were unable to comprehend that one could lead a happy life so far away from the hustle and bustle of the city. Katharine Kirkland's account of bush life expressed her fellow women's surprise at her happy residence in the bush. In 1839 she went to Melbourne to give birth to her child and while she was staying there she met several other women. She recalled that 'the ladies in Melbourne seemed to consider me a kind of curiosity, from living so far up the country, and all seemed to have a great dread of leading such a life, and were surprised when I said I liked it'.<sup>561</sup> There were a few women who disliked their life in the bush,<sup>562</sup> but on the whole women tended to enjoy their new

<sup>559</sup> Henry Lawson's short story 'No place for a woman' wonderfully illustrates this nineteenth-century attitude. Ratty Howlett tells the narrator of the story that he married a girl called Mary a long time ago. He did not want her to accompany him to the bush immediately. He first wished to get 'the place a little more shipshape'. But Mary did not want to be left alone. She wanted to be with her husband so that she could look after, work with and help him. When the time came for Mary to give birth to their first child, Ratty did everything to arrange female assistance but both the doctor and her mother arrived too late to save her and the baby. Everybody blamed him for his inability to save the life of his wife and child but he maintained that he had always been against Mary's coming to the bush. He believed that it was 'no place for a woman'. Henry Lawson, "No place for a woman" in Cecil Mann, ed., *The Stories of Henry Lawson* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1964): 303-310.

<sup>560</sup> Gunn, *We of the Never-Never* 13-16.

<sup>561</sup> Kirkland, "Life in the bush" 189.

<sup>562</sup> Rosa Phayne fared badly in the colonies. The three years that she spent there was a period of intense struggle and loneliness for her. She arrived in Melbourne in 1849 as an assisted migrant by the Female Middle Class Emigration Society. She came out to work as a governess but her expectations were sadly disappointed. She disliked Melbourne from the moment she stepped ashore. After a short stay there she obtained a situation in the Wimmera district. Her employer was Thomas King Scott who owned a station called Rich Avon West on the west bank of the Avon River. Rosa tried to accept her new life but her efforts were in vain. She was not satisfied with anything and did not get on well with Mrs Scott. She complained about the 'intense loneliness and unprotectedness, utter friendliness' that governesses in Australia had to endure. She described her life in the bush in a letter dated 18 May 1871 to the Society: 'into the details of Bush life I shall not enter much. Its advantages and disadvantages - of the former, the principal one is one does not spend too much money, which is desirable as things are very dear in this Country; of the latter, the place feels like a prison to me, only without the ignominy, no books, no Society, nothing improving, everything retrograde, conversation, scandal and gossip, things I hate and have never been accustomed to. You may say perhaps I am overdrawing the picture because I am prejudiced against; not so, I would not wilfully or willingly do it [sic], it is the case.' She missed the company of other cultured people and not even the higher wages could compensate her for the loss of refined society. In the end Rosa managed to earn enough money to pay her voyage home and she left Australia for good in June 1872. Clarke, *The Governesses* 110-117.

life.<sup>563</sup>

Rachel Henning disliked the bush initially. She first set foot in Australia in 1854 and settled down at her brother's farm in Appin, 16 kilometres south of Campbelltown in New South Wales. She was bored and suffered from homesickness. In her letter dated 29 March 1855 she wrote to her brother-in-law in England and admitted that 'I dislike this bush life extremely and find it sometimes difficult to amuse myself, though at home the days used to seem too short for what I had to do'. Her second attempt at life in the colonies, however, was much more successful. She learnt to love her adopted country. She eventually longed to have another reunion with her family in England but the enjoyment of 'the lovely climate, good health and free outdoor life' made her stay there for the rest of her life.<sup>564</sup>

Bush life was demanding in many respects but colonial women's narratives present a generally positive view of their colonial life. Women made little of their hardships, let alone their failures, and their narratives depict them adjusting well to their new circumstances. They must have felt that their genteel world was gradually collapsing around them yet they still tried to keep up the image of being respectable women. Marion Amies describes this situation, saying

In the Australian colonies women continued to subscribe to the ideal of accomplished gentility, but the daily circumstances of their lives as pioneers were contrary to that ideal. The conditions under which they lived were akin to those of preindustrial households, and gentility could not be defined by wealth and a compartmentalized domestic environment in which "ladies" did little or no practical housekeeping. Work, paid and unpaid, played an important part in the lives of colonial women. Nevertheless they retained their role as managers of the outward forms that manifested and defined their male relatives' status. Indeed, without the physical appurtenances of gentility, their role became more and more dependant upon their personal qualities.<sup>565</sup>

In their personal narratives colonial gentlewomen sought to convince their readers at home that notwithstanding the hardships of rural life, they were still part of the respectable class. R.W. Connell and T.H. Irving suggest that colonial gentlewomen 'played an active role in maintaining class consciousness through their policing of gentility, and in maintaining contacts

<sup>563</sup> Julie Jeffrey notes the same satisfaction among female pioneers on the Western Frontier in America in the mid-nineteenth century. She points out that despite the roughness of their work and their nostalgia for home they were happy and content. Jeffrey, *Frontier Women* 77.

<sup>564</sup> Adams, *The Letters of Rachel Henning* 23-24, 179. It will be shown in Chapter Four that the bush provided space for a great variety of recreational activities such as walking, riding, hunting and fishing.

<sup>565</sup> Amies, "The Victorian governess" 564. Dorothy Jones arrives at the same conclusion in her comparative analysis of the colonial experiences of Rachel Henning in Australia, Catharine Traill in Canada and Mary Barker in New Zealand. Jones argues that despite the slight differences between their circumstances and times of settlement these three women underwent a strikingly similar change of lifestyle and personal transformation. Jones notes that 'each believes her status of lady provides a standard by which she can measure and judge the life around her. There is, however, a certain irony in the way colonial existence makes demands which undermine a number of important criteria that defined a lady in England.' All three of these women found it necessary to get involved in the actual management of their household and they had to acquire domestic skills that were regarded as unnecessary in England. The consequence of this was that the 'paraphernalia of gentility' was 'diminished'. They nevertheless found their new life liberating. Jones, "Ladies in the bush" 111-116.

through correspondence, visits and entertainments'.<sup>566</sup> Eliza Brown regularly sent her father accounts of their life in the early years of the Swan River Settlement. In addition to writing in detail about the running of the farm, she mentioned that her husband dined at the Colonial Chaplain's in Perth in 1847. She felt it necessary to point out that her family still belonged to the genteel circles even though her husband Thomas's position in life was that of a farmer. She explained that 'I merely mention this to make my story good of a person following the occupation of a peasant still keeping his standing in this country as a gentleman'. In that same year Eliza also made a visit to Perth and had luncheon at the Governor's. She listed the name of people she met during her stay and gave her reasons for socialising with them: 'I am not much of a visitor, but feel it to be for the interest of my family to keep up distant acquaintance with the higher circle that they may feel it to be their natural position when they grow up'.<sup>567</sup> Eliza sought to maintain her family's respectability even though their daily life contradicted many genteel ideals.

Emma Floyd argues that 'the public performance might dwindle in the bush, but the private maintenance of genteel notions would not be so easily renounced. British gentlewomen had been invested with these notions, and the guarding of them was, for many, simply a matter of self-respect'.<sup>568</sup> Women tried to safeguard their own and their family's respectability also because they were expected to be seen as the civilising force. Women were looked up to because of their superior moral virtues. They created and sanctified the home that provided shelter from the harsh outside world.<sup>569</sup> The gentlewoman was therefore seen as the 'Angel in the house'.<sup>570</sup> She set the standards of behaviour and ensured that her family followed her path. It was women's moral duty to set an example and they acted as 'God's police'.<sup>571</sup>

An object that symbolised nineteenth-century genteel values the most was the piano. It was an 'emblem of social status'.<sup>572</sup> All throughout the Western world the skill of playing the

<sup>566</sup> R.W. Connell, et al., *Class Structure in Australian History - Poverty and progress* (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1992): 57. Gorham notes that women were the indicators of social status who assured that 'the private sphere acted as an effective indicator of status in the public sphere'. Deborah Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (London: Croom Helm, 1982): 8.

<sup>567</sup> Cowan, *A Faithful Picture* 94, 99.

<sup>568</sup> Floyd, "Without artificial constraint" 87.

<sup>569</sup> Carol Christ, "Victorian masculinity and the Angel in the House" in Martha Vicinus, ed., *A Widening Sphere - Changing roles of Victorian women* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977): 146.

<sup>570</sup> The "Angel in the House" was the title of a poem written by Coventry Patmore. Ibid.

<sup>571</sup> Anne Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1994): 342, 347.

<sup>572</sup> Mary Burgan, "Heroines at the piano: Women and music in nineteenth-century fiction" *Victorian Studies* Vol. 30, No. 1, (1986): 51.

piano was a 'benchmark of gentility, on a par with the employment of servants'.<sup>573</sup> The level of familiarity with musical instruments differed considerably according to gender. 'The performance of music was generally not considered suitable for gentlemen.' Music for gentlewomen, on the other hand, was almost a compulsory accomplishment. This skill was a necessary tool for attracting a potential husband, and for married women it served as a pastime. Women practised playing the piano or the harpsichord so that they could display their talent on social occasions to their family and guests. As Simon McVeigh notes 'music was a prime vehicle for middle-class aspirations, and few homes with serious social pretensions lacked a piano'.<sup>574</sup> The absence of the piano in a genteel home had several consequences as Mary Burgan points out: it implied that gentlewomen were 'deprived of the exercise of their special training, of any leading role in family recreation, and of one of their few legitimate channels for self-expression'.<sup>575</sup>

It comes as no surprise therefore that an amazing number of settlers brought their pianos with them to the colonies despite the inconveniences their actual transport caused both during the long sea voyage and on the bullock dray if they were heading up-country. Their insistence on having this symbol of high culture with them even in rough conditions suggests that these people wished to retain some of the characteristics of their former lifestyle. Humphrey McQueen estimates that approximately 700,000 pianos were brought to Australia during the nineteenth century.<sup>576</sup> Roger Covell summed up the essence of the piano in the genteel performance.

Middle-class values have rarely expressed themselves with more touching gallantry and tenacity than in the sacrifices and discomforts endured by countless families in order to bring this cumbersome symbol of higher values to their chosen home in small unstable ships and on grinding bullock drays.<sup>577</sup>

Several women mentioned their pianos in their life-writings. There was a piano in one of the log huts in the newly settled Palmerston in the early 1870s. Harriett Daly pointed out that music was an essential part of their camp life and they spent many evenings singing to the accompaniment of the piano.<sup>578</sup> The piano must have meant a great deal to the Daly family to have been taken with them to the colony. Louisa Geoghégan worked as a governess for the Hines

<sup>573</sup> Marjorie Theobald, *Knowing Women - Origins of women's education in nineteenth-century Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 9.

<sup>574</sup> Iain McCalman, ed., *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age - British culture 1776-1832* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001): 128, 612. Gentlemen certainly sang. Simon McVeigh notes that 'it was far more fitting for a man to take part in a convivial afterdinner glee, and this remained the principal form of male domestic music, whether at home or in more formal glee clubs'. *Ibid.*, 612.

<sup>575</sup> Burgan "Heroines at the piano" 51.

<sup>576</sup> Humphrey McQueen, *A New Britannia* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1986): 115.

<sup>577</sup> Cited in *Ibid.*

<sup>578</sup> Daly, *Digging, Squatting and Pioneering in the Northern Territory of South Australia* 52-53.

family and she noted in her letter on 19 February 1867 that Mrs Hines had a piano. She pointed out that ' "bush life" is a strange mixture of roughing and refinement'.<sup>579</sup>

Even men acknowledged the perseverance and cheerful attitude with which gentlewomen coped with their rough life in the bush and sought to maintain their gentility to the outside world. John Hunter Kerr, a pioneer Victorian squatter from Scotland who arrived in Melbourne in 1839 at the age of eighteen, recalled the story of a Mrs A. and her two daughters. In his narrative John recounted that a lawsuit ruined the fortune of Mr A. at home who therefore decided to start a new life in Victoria with his family. After he bought a tract of land he suddenly died. His wife did not give up the station, however, and carried on her husband's business. They lived in a slab hut and employed a maid-of-all-work. John pointed out in his narrative that 'the household ménage was rough in the extreme, and it was wonderful to see the ease with which these ladies, brought up to the comforts of civilized life, adapted themselves to their altered circumstances'. The eldest daughter led an idle life and whenever John Kerr visited them she was usually reclining on a chair, reading a novel or playing the piano. The youngest daughter, in sharp contrast, worked very hard to 'supplement the services of the maid-of-all-work'. In addition she was also the milkmaid. John noted that 'she appeared to submit cheerfully to the arrangement which imposed so large and unequal a share of the household labour on her willing shoulders'. A few years later their life became 'normal' again. Both of the girls married well and in this way the 'hardships of the family terminated'.<sup>580</sup>

Life in the bush was an extraordinary experience for most colonial women who tended to appear enthusiastic about it and praised their newly found freedom and love of the open air. Women concealed and made light of their inner conflicts and difficulties and pretended as if nothing had changed around them. They kept up the image of a genteel mode of life and tried to convince both their home audience and themselves that under the harsh circumstances they were still living the lives of respectable women. The piano showcased the aspirations of many women who wished to retain their genteel performance even in rough conditions.

### Conclusion

The world of Victorian gentlewomen was centred round the family, the household and a supportive group of other women. Women were not supposed to work because their main goal in life was to look after the wellbeing of their family. In addition to the bearing and rearing of

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<sup>579</sup> Clarke, *The Governesses* 103-105.

children, women were expected to coordinate the household activities and spent their remaining time in idleness. When gentlewomen settled in rural Australia they sought to continue their genteel way of life. The circumstances, however, demanded adjustments and changes. Emma Floyd argues that 'British gentlewomen could not, even willingly, relinquish all the ideals of gentility that had informed their lives from such an early age, but these women individually adapted those new ideals in the new colonial environment'.<sup>581</sup>

Life in the bush was an extraordinary and at the same time unusual experience for British women. The unreliability and acute shortage of domestic labour force in colonial Australia periodically turned respectable women's idleness to actual work. Gentlewomen in colonial Australia had to learn to do housework when no servant was available and they also made themselves useful on the station as storekeepers and account keepers. Migration set women apart from their social acquaintances and rural life placed them in isolated areas. Far from the support and company of other women, migrants suffered from loneliness and it was difficult to arrange for female assistance when needed. Religious facilities, among other things, were not as extensively established in the colonies as they were in Britain and as a result colonial women's spiritual lives suffered badly.

Colonial women were not crushed by the challenges that their new circumstances imposed on them. The great majority of female settlers and visitors managed to cope with the new demands and learnt to enjoy their new life. They underwent considerable changes physically, mentally and emotionally but to the outside world they pretended to have remained unaffected by the obstacles. In their new roles many women felt liberated from the restraints of genteel life that locked them within the four walls of the house in Britain. Many women revealed their happiness and satisfaction with their new life and some of them even looked at their own rough living conditions as a humorous episode.

Colonial women's gentility also underwent changes in the bush. On the one hand, women were deprived of some essential components of the genteel mode of life such as religious service, social life and a sufficient number of servants, but on the other hand, the incorporation of housework and station work enriched them personally and raised their self-esteem. The colonial circumstances therefore liberated and at the same time had the potential to degrade British gentlewomen.

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<sup>580</sup> Kerr, *Glimpses of Life in Victoria* 31-34.

<sup>581</sup> Floyd, "Without artificial constraint" 102.

# Chapter Four

Ways of Seeing the  
Bush

## Introduction

The writing of nineteenth-century Australian history is deeply concerned with the notion of settlers' relationship with the land. It is a widely held myth that the early colonists did not like Australia and perceived it as a hostile and alien land.<sup>582</sup> It is often claimed that it was only by the end of the nineteenth century that the settlers learnt to appreciate the strange and peculiar beauty of Australia. At least this is how the Heidelberg School of artists and the writers associated with the *Bulletin* came to be interpreted. A number of scholars have questioned the validity of this argument and drawn attention to the variety of ways the bush was described in nineteenth-century non-fictional writing.<sup>583</sup> What these critics neglected, however, was the comparative study of male and female responses. While some female examples do occur in critical writings they are there only to support general arguments.<sup>584</sup> Very few critical analyses have been written about the female perception of the environment in the nineteenth century.<sup>585</sup>

In this chapter I wish to show what British migrant women made of the surrounding environment. I intend to point out their great variety of reactions towards the bush. Although negative terms do appear in women's descriptions, a positive appreciation is the dominant tone

<sup>582</sup> John Rickard, *Australia – A cultural history* (London: Longman, 1996), 41.

<sup>583</sup> Alan Frost surveys the critical literature between 1954 and 1973 and shows that the belief in early colonists' negative responses to the New South Wales landscape was rather widespread. His article contradicts this stream of argument by drawing attention to the variety of responses that can be found in early explorers and settlers' journals. Alan Frost, "What created, what perceived? Early responses to New South Wales" *Australian Literary Studies* Vol. 7, No. 2, (1975): 185-205. Eric Rolls blames such literary figures as Adam Lindsay Gordon and Henry Lawson for distorting the general image of the land. Rolls notes that he has read many descriptions of Australia by early observers and these writers expressed their admiration for the country. Eric Rolls, *From Forest to Sea* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1993): 162.

<sup>584</sup> John Barnes mentions Rachel Henning and Louisa Anne Meredith's admiration for the Australian landscape but he treats their cases together with similar male responses. Female experiences support his main arguments only as far as they prove that positive attitudes to the land were not uncommon in the nineteenth century. John Barnes, "Through clear Australian eyes': Landscape and identity in Australian writing" in P.R. Eaden and F.H. Mares, eds, *Mapped but not Known – The Australian landscape of the imagination* (Netley, SA: Wakefield Press, 1986): 94-96. Allan Frost looks at Mrs Macarthur and Mrs Elizabeth Hawkins' letters and quotes from them to support his argument concerning the great variety of responses early colonists had towards the landscape. But he also neglects to consider female attitudes to the land as a separate category. Frost, "What created, what perceived?"

<sup>585</sup> Delys Bird's article "Gender and landscape: Australian colonial women writers" is a brief study in this field. Bird draws on a few of the sources I use in this thesis, and analyses the way women coped with their new environment and circumstances. Delys Bird, "Gender and landscape: Australian colonial women writers" *New Literatures Review* No. 18, (1989): 20-35. Graham White discusses Louisa Atkinson's attitude to the landscape in his article "Louisa Atkinson: Celebrant of the colonial landscape". In addition to examining her journalistic writing White also looks at her treatment of the landscape in her fictional works. Graham White, "Louisa Atkinson: Celebrant of the colonial landscape" *Southerly* No. 1, (1991): 113-126. Much critical attention has been paid to female attitudes to the landscape in nineteenth-century novels by women writers. See for example Susan Martin, "She'll Rewrite Mate: Ideas of the self and the landscape in nineteenth century Australian women's novels" (Ph.D. thesis, Monash University, 1989); and Kay Schaffer, *Women and the Bush: Forces of desire in the Australian cultural tradition* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

in their narratives.<sup>586</sup> Furthermore, I want to show that many women stepped outside the boundaries of their homestead and garden to enjoy the bush. Rather than being shut inside four walls and living in ignorance about the beauties of the outside world, women made the effort to observe and even learn about the Australian environment. The way they described the surrounding environment was very much influenced by their European background. The identification of how images of Britain influenced women's ways of seeing the Australian landscape will be another major theme of this chapter.

### Landscape Description

This section sets out to show the most frequently used terms colonial women applied in their narratives for describing the rural landscape. It will also offer some interpretation as to what each of these concepts might have meant in the nineteenth century. One limitation of this section is that it will not differentiate specific geographical areas.<sup>587</sup> My aim here is to highlight the common language colonial women used to communicate their views and impressions.

The word 'bush' acquired a special meaning in the Australian context. In England it usually meant a shrub, whereas in North America and South Africa it came to refer to forested areas. This latter meaning was transplanted in New South Wales where it soon underwent a rapid change. In Australia the term the 'bush' came to be used for areas outside the settlements but was also a general term for the country. Later it was even applied to areas without trees or any vegetation.<sup>588</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the following definition for the word 'bush': 'Woodland, country more or less covered with natural wood: applied to the uncleared or untilled districts in the British Colonies which are still in a state of nature, or largely so, even though not wooded; and by extension to the country as opposed to the towns.'<sup>589</sup> Colonial women were also

<sup>586</sup> Susan Martin arrives at the same conclusion in her thesis on nineteenth-century fiction by women. Martin, "She'll Rewrite Mate" 160.

<sup>587</sup> Christopher Mulvey adopts a different approach in his study. In his book he examines the ways nineteenth-century English and American travellers looked at specific geographical areas of America and England. He discusses British travellers' impressions of America and American travellers' views of England. His study focuses around a few famous British and American landmarks and the way visitors perceived them. He analyses British travellers' reactions to places such as the Niagara Falls, the Mississippi and New York while he looks at the treatment of Stratford-upon-Avon, Westminster Abbey and Chester in English travel books. Christopher Mulvey, *Anglo-American Landscapes - A study of nineteenth-century Anglo-American travel literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>588</sup> G.A. Wilkes, *Exploring Australian English* (Parramatta: Sydney University Press, 2001): 17-18.

<sup>589</sup> *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 2nd ed. Vol. 2: 689. J.W. McCarty offers another interpretation from the perspective of an economic historian. He argues that the land surrounding the major colonial cities functioned as hinterland. The size and rate of growth of the city was influenced by the size and rate of growth of its hinterland. The bush therefore had an economic impact on the city. J.W. McCarty, "Australian capital cities in the nineteenth century" *Australian Economic History Review* Vol. 10, No. 2, (1970): 120.

aware of the peculiar usage of the word 'bush'. In 1903 Ada Cambridge defined the Victorian bush at the beginning of her autobiographical narrative *Thirty Years in Australia*: 'When I speak of the Bush, it is understood that I do not mean a place of bushes. The term, with us, is equivalent to "the country" – the country generally though particularly and originally its uncultivated parts.'<sup>590</sup>

Some colonial women like Fanny Macleay<sup>591</sup> in the 1820s and 1830s, Emma Macpherson<sup>592</sup> and Clara Aspinall<sup>593</sup> in the 1860s capitalised the letter 'b' in the word 'bush'. Henry Lawson recalled in a letter to G. Robertson in 1917 that 'it was I who insisted on the capital B for "Bush" '. Graeme Davison notes that Lawson applied this convention from about 1895-6 but also suggests that he was not the first writer to do so.<sup>594</sup> As the above examples prove even colonial women adopted this usage several decades before Lawson did.<sup>595</sup>

The bush was an area that made different impacts on different people. The bush was not a single entity - it had a changing face, but there were a number of common reactions that were duly acknowledged in the writings of nineteenth-century female settlers and visitors. There were areas that the Europeans found beautiful and others made little impact on them. It is this changing aspect of the land that Mary McConnel recorded on her journey from Brisbane to Cressbrook in 1849. On the way to this station she wrote that 'we had a few, a very few, miles of pretty country [...], but soon there was a sad change, when we reached what was called in irony "Bullock's Delight". It was a terrible piece of country.'<sup>596</sup>

Apart from such simple expression of their views on the land women used other, more sophisticated terms, as well. The concept of the 'picturesque' often appeared in their narratives.

<sup>590</sup> Ada Cambridge, *Thirty Years in Australia* (London: Methuen, 1903): 72. Men interpreted the meaning of the word 'bush' in exactly the same way. William James Woods pointed out on the way to Daylesford, Victoria in the mid-1880s that the 'bush' was a word that represented the 'uncultivated country'. William James J. Woods, *A visit to Victoria* (London: Wyman, 1886): 18. Samuel Mossman and Thomas Banister explained that this term was 'indiscriminately applied to all descriptions of uncleared land, or to any spot away from a settlement, as a person in England would speak of the country when they are out of town'. Samuel Mossman, et al., *Australia Visited and Revisited – A narrative of recent travels and old experiences in Victoria and New South Wales* (London: Addey, 1853): 62.

<sup>591</sup> Beverley Earnshaw et al., eds, *Fanny to William – The letters of Frances Leonora Macleay, 1812-1836* (Sydney: Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, Macleay Museum, University of Sydney, 1993): See for example 99, 104, 115.

<sup>592</sup> Emma Macpherson, *My Experiences in Australia – Being recollections of a visit to the Australian colonies in 1856-7. By a Lady* (London: J.F. Hope, 1860): See for example 241.

<sup>593</sup> Clara Aspinall, *Three Years in Melbourne* (London: L. Booth, 1862): See for example 157, 181.

<sup>594</sup> Graeme Davison, "Sydney and the Bush" *Historical Studies* Vol. 18, No. 71, (1978): 191.

<sup>595</sup> Men were no exceptions. See for example John Hunter Kerr, *Glimpses of Life in Victoria by 'A Resident'* (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 1996): 27.

<sup>596</sup> Mary McConnel, *Memories of Days Long Gone By: By the wife of an Australian pioneer* (Brisbane?: M. McConnel, 1905): 17.

Negative adjectives such as 'melancholic' and 'monotonous' were also used in their descriptions. The image of Australia as a 'wilderness' was another common way of seeing the landscape. These concepts were all familiar European notions that were widely applied to the Australian bush.<sup>597</sup> The frequent occurrence of these notions indicates a common background in education and social standing. It is this shared heritage that explains why these British gentlewomen drew on the same pool of aesthetic language. John Barnes notes that 'ways of seeing the landscape are learned, responses are conditioned by a whole range of factors, including education and social status'.<sup>598</sup> Each of these responses will be considered in turn.

'Picturesque' was a term that colonial gentlewomen often applied to the Australian bush. 'The country is very picturesque for the greater part of the way' revealed Mary Spencer as she was travelling from Bontharambo, a station near King River north of present-day Wangaratta, to the diggings at Beechworth, Victoria, in 1854.<sup>599</sup> The picturesque as an aesthetic theory dated from the late eighteenth century but it remained popular among educated people in the nineteenth century.<sup>600</sup> Simon Ryan notes that natural objects such as rocks, shells, flora and fauna all had 'a developed scientific code of illustration'. Landscape, in sharp contrast, did not have such 'legitimate or ready-made scientific paradigms'. He argues that the 'paradigm which did supply a sufficient vocabulary was the aesthetic of landscape – in particular the concept of the picturesque'.<sup>601</sup> Gilpin William, the famous theoretician of the picturesque, suggested in 1792 that 'the province of the picturesque is to survey nature; not anatomise matter. It throws its glances around in the broad-craft style. It comprehends an extreme tract at each sweep. It examines parts, but never descends to particles.'<sup>602</sup> Paul Duro points out that 'an interest in irregularity, ruggedness, rusticity, intricacy, singularity, and chiaroscuro' characterised the picturesque landscape.<sup>603</sup>

<sup>597</sup> Andrew Hassam's examination of nineteenth-century middle-class emigrants' ship diaries also points to the fact that European images were dominant tools in describing the Australian coastline. He argues that 'in these diaries "Australia" is written according to the European codes of pictorial description brought with them by the emigrants, be they the codes of landscape painting or the codes of landscape gardening'. Andrew Hassam, "Writing the coastline of Australia: Emigrants' diaries and 'The long looked for shores'." *University of Toronto Quarterly* Vol. 61, No. 2, (1992): 204.

<sup>598</sup> Barnes, "Through clear Australian eyes" 100.

<sup>599</sup> A. Cooper, ed., *Aunt Spencer's Diary (1854)* (Newtown: Neptune Press, 1981): 55.

<sup>600</sup> J.M. Coetzee, *White Writing: On the culture of letters in South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988): 39-41.

<sup>601</sup> Simon Ryan, "Exploring aesthetics: The picturesque appropriation of land in journals of Australian exploration" *Australian Literary Studies* Vol. 15, No. 4, (1992): 282.

<sup>602</sup> Cited in *Ibid.*, 283.

<sup>603</sup> Paul Duro, "Picturesque" in Iain McCalman, ed., *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age – British culture 1776-1832* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001): 646-647.

Simon Ryan notes that the notion of the picturesque aimed to create a framed picture within which the landscape appeared as a text. This method enabled the landscape to be analysed in exactly the same way as other works of art. Ryan argues that

the 'picturesque' works to delimit the continuity of the universe, to produce a frame which positions the viewer so as to create a text of the landscape. The land is framed as a painting, a technique which allows pre-existing notions of how to 'read' works of art to be applied to the land. By framing the Australian landscape, the explorers combat its threatening vastness and unfamiliarity.<sup>604</sup>

Several colonial women referred to the picture-like quality of the landscape. Lady Jane Franklin made an excursion to Port Davey and Macquarie Harbour in Tasmania in December 1838. She recorded in her diary on 20 December that her party was sailing towards Muscle Bay and passed by two hills called Mount King and Snowridge. The scenery had a true picture-like composition and had a foreground as well as a background.

We [...] continued our course in a direct line towards the head of the water before us, and which terminates in a rounded beach bordered by a hedge of flowering tea trees with a wall of lofty foliage behind it, leaving a dark gap, however, in the middle, where a small creek enters the bay. The hills rising behind this foreground complete a picture of great beauty.<sup>605</sup>

The tendency to view the surrounding landscape in terms of a picture proves women's understanding of elementary pictorial composition. Gentlewomen were also instructed in the basic compositional techniques. Shirley Foster and Sara Mills claim that colonial gentlewomen's familiarity with the picturesque was therefore not a coincidence. The labelling of the landscape as picturesque shows women's sensitivity towards the kind of landscape that artists of the picturesque, such as Claude Lorraine, Nicolas Poussin and Salvator Rosa, would have depicted on their canvas.<sup>606</sup> Louisa Clifton's diary entry illustrated Louisa's ease with the picturesque subject matter. She noted that the bushfires they saw from their barque at Port Leschenault on 3 April 1841 was 'most beautiful, worthy the pencil of a Claude Lorraine'[sic].<sup>607</sup> While many men also viewed the landscape through the frame of the picturesque<sup>608</sup> women seemed to be more attuned to appreciating the picturesque thanks to their training in compositional techniques.

Colonial women's awareness of the picturesque value of the Australian landscape shows that they had certain ideas and expectations of what good pictures were made of. Painting and sketching were two appropriate accomplishments for gentlewomen. Certain areas impressed the

<sup>604</sup> Ryan, "Exploring aesthetics" 283.

<sup>605</sup> George Mackaness, ed., *Some Private Correspondence of Sir John Franklin and Lady Jane Franklin (Tasmania, 1837-1845)* (Sydney: D.S. Ford, 1947) Vol. 1: 51.

<sup>606</sup> Shirley Foster et al., eds, *An Anthology of Women's Travel Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002): 92.

<sup>607</sup> Lucy Frost, ed., *No Place for a Nervous Lady* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1984): 54.

<sup>608</sup> Samuel Mossman and Thomas Banister noted in New South Wales in 1851 that the view of the Coolangatta Mountain was 'exceedingly picturesque'. When they outlined this view in their narrative they described what they saw in the foreground and background of this imaginary picture. Mossman, *Australia Visited and Revisited* 275.

observers to such an extent that they sought to paint them. When Rachel Henning went for a ramble in the bush in Exmoor in 1864 she found some spectacular rocks that captured her attention. She wrote in a letter to her sister Etta that 'I made two sketches, but they do not give any idea of the place. Nothing but a first-rate coloured drawing could do so.'<sup>609</sup> Landscape drawing and painting were popular genteel accomplishments for women<sup>610</sup> and some of them even included their sketches in their narratives.<sup>611</sup>

Besides the concept of the picturesque, the image of 'wilderness'<sup>612</sup> was often recalled in writings about the bush. In her diary Mary Spencer tried to describe the Victorian bush on the way to the Ovens diggings in 1854: 'It means *such* an extent of country covered with trees; some large, some small, no sign of human habitation except here and there a few camps or tents; some inhabited by blacks.'<sup>613</sup> John Rennie Short argues that the term 'wilderness' had a special significance for people who lived in or came from countries with 'settled agriculture'. For them the word wilderness denoted a contrast that could be made between 'cultivated and uncultivated land, savage and settled' areas.<sup>614</sup>

The wild bush could also be appreciated aesthetically. There were a few settlers who saw beauty in a virgin landscape. Elizabeth Fenton left Hobarton on 12 July 1830 for their property Fenton Forest. The road took them along the Derwent River where they saw several farmhouses. The clearing had not been finished in that area and a lot of stumps were left behind standing along the cultivated fields. Elizabeth did not like what she saw. She was relieved when they entered another section of the road in the vicinity of New Norfolk that led them through a pristine forest. She recorded in her diary that 'at these specimens of agricultural taste my spirits fell an octave lower, and only revived when no trace of man's agency defaced the beautiful

<sup>609</sup> David Adams, ed., *The Letters of Rachel Henning* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1963): 181.

<sup>610</sup> See for example K.R. von Stieglitz, ed., *Early Van Diemen's Land - Sketches by Emma von Stieglitz* (Hobart: Fullers Bookshop, 1963); and Joan Kerr et al., *From Sydney Cove to Duntroon: A family album of early life in Australia* (Richmond: Hutchinson, 1982): 10, 39, 41, 48, 54, 55.

<sup>611</sup> Patricia Clarke notes that Henrietta Foott was a gifted painter. She illustrated her memoir *Sketches of Life in the Bush* with some of her own sketches of the surroundings. Patricia Clarke, *Pen Portraits: Women writers and journalists in nineteenth-century Australia* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1988): 93. Some men also enjoyed sketching and drawing. Edward Snell illustrated his Australian diary with a lot of landscape drawings and sketches. Tom Griffiths, ed., *The Life and Adventures of Edward Snell* (North Ryde: Angus & Robertson, 1988): See for example 260-261.

<sup>612</sup> The terms 'wilderness' and 'picturesque' form one category in the interpretation of William Lines. He argues that both of them suggest a way of looking at the bush as if they were objects. Picturesque scenes achieve this by their picture-like quality. Wilderness differs from the picturesque scenery in the sense that its limitless dimensions fail to form a definite scene, in other words, a picture. It is a 'state of mute externality'. In both cases the observers are in the position of outsiders who stand before the scene and form an opinion of it. William J. Lines, *An All Consuming Passion: Origins, modernity, and the Australian life of Georgiana Molloy* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1994): 121.

<sup>613</sup> Cooper, *Aunt Spencer's Diary* 40.

<sup>614</sup> John Rennie Short, *Imagined Country: Environment, culture and society* (London: Routledge, 1991): 5.

wilderness'.<sup>615</sup>

The wilderness often implied emptiness: it was wild because it was not under the control and influence of human activity. At least so it seemed to many European colonists who failed to see the hand of Aboriginal firestick farming on the Australian landscape. As a result of British colonisation the wilderness was quickly transformed and humanised. Unlike Elizabeth Fenton, many were happy to see the result of civilising forces. Louisa Clifton was amazed to notice what an improvement clearing had brought to the area that ran along the estuary and their tent city at Australind in Western Australia in 1841. She wrote in her journal that 'it is astonishing how much the hand of man improves nature (unless particularly picturesque), throwing an air of interest upon a scene otherwise tame and unstriking'.<sup>616</sup> Louisa seemed to appreciate the virgin landscape only if it abided by the rules of the picturesque.

'Monotony' was another term that was often applied to the Australian landscape.<sup>617</sup> Ellis Rowan complained about the monotonous scenery on her way from Myola to Muldiva in Queensland in the early 1890s. Ellis was born in Melbourne in 1848 and married Frederic Rowan in 1873 who encouraged her to travel in search of beautiful flowers, birds and insects to paint. Ellis also visited New Zealand and America and painted many plants for the first time ever.<sup>618</sup> After she crossed the Cairns range the scenery changed drastically. She wrote in a letter to her husband that 'once over the coastal ranges, a feature of these northern latitudes, the belts of jungle become less frequent, and the country assumes a dull and uninteresting aspect, mile after mile of shadeless, gray, sombre-looking gum-trees, poor and scantily clothed, stretch away in indefinite monotony'.<sup>619</sup> There was no sign of change and Ellis Rowan seemed to be bored by the endless succession of gum trees of the outback in an area better known today as the Gulf Savannah.<sup>620</sup>

When a landscape was labelled monotonous it very often implied a lack of human habitation. This was what Emily Skinner noted on her way from Melbourne to the Victorian

<sup>615</sup> Mrs Fenton, *Mrs Fenton's Tasmanian Journal 1829-1830* (Adelaide: Sullivan's Cove, 1986): 54-55. There were also many other colonists who witnessed the clearing of the land with regret, as it will be shown in Chapter Five.

<sup>616</sup> Frost, *No Place for a Nervous Lady* 61-62.

<sup>617</sup> John Rickard also notes that many colonists complained about the landscape that appeared monotonous to them. Rickard, *Australia* 49.

<sup>618</sup> Margaret Hazzard, "Marian Ellis Rowan" *Australian Dictionary of Biography* Vol. 11: 465-6.

<sup>619</sup> Mrs Rowan, *A Flower-Hunter in Queensland and New Zealand* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1898): 52-53. What made Lucy Gray regard one particular area as monotonous was that there was no sign of change. She was journeying from Townsville to her husband's station on the Flinders River in 1868 and recorded in her journal that one day 'they had a fair specimen of Australian bush. The same thing mile after mile, scattered gum trees, without undergrowth, except grass, at this time of the year very brown. I found it very wearisome and monotonous.' Lucy Gray, "Journey to Hughenden" *Queensland Heritage* Vol. 1, No. 1, (1964): 17.

goldfields in 1854: 'For a long time after passing Kilmore, the country seemed very monotonous – no sign of life visible for miles, nothing but an endless succession of gum trees. At that time there was little cultivation on that road.'<sup>621</sup> Sameness was equated with monotony. No wonder that in what was perceived as such a featureless and remote landscape, many travellers lost their way in the bush.<sup>622</sup> The indigenous Australians, in sharp contrast, did not find the landscape featureless. The colonists often employed them as trackers because of their incredible knowledge of the country.

The bush often transmitted a certain air of gloominess. Mary McConnel looked back and recalled that 'I thought the "bush" a dreary place'. She was of this opinion during her very first contact with the bush. In 1849 she made a journey with her husband from Brisbane to Cressbrook where he had established a sheep and cattle station eight years previously.<sup>623</sup> Ellis Rowan faced a 'melancholic' piece of country in Muldiva, Queensland, where she went in search of flowers with an Aboriginal boy. They were looking for a very rare plant that grew only on a certain part of those limestone rocks. She wrote in a letter to her husband that 'there was a painful melancholy in the bush here, an unspeakable solitude among these masses of weatherbeaten peaks'.<sup>624</sup>

The writer Marcus Clarke is widely held responsible for the dissemination of the idea of the bush as a melancholic place. He wrote in his Preface to Adam Lindsay Gordon's *Sea Spray and Smoke Drift* in 1876 that the Australian scenery was predominantly melancholic and gloomy. He asked 'what is the dominant note of Australian scenery? That which is the dominant note of Edgar Allan Poe's poetry – Weird Melancholy.' He described the trees that shed their bark not their leaves, the 'grotesque' and 'ghostly' animals, the natives that lived in fear of the Bunyip and performed a peculiar 'fire dance' where they painted themselves like skeletons. Clarke arrived at the conclusion that in the Australian bush 'all is fear-inspiring and gloomy'.<sup>625</sup> Two paintings by Louis Buvelot and Nicholas Chevalier had inspired Marcus Clarke to make the

<sup>620</sup> Chapter Five will show that colonists did not take easily to the gum tree.

<sup>621</sup> Edward Duyker, ed., *A Woman on the Goldfields – Recollections of Emily Skinner 1854-1878* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1995): 43. Many men also noted the monotonous nature of the Australian landscape. Samuel Mossman and Thomas Banister travelled through Victoria and New South Wales in 1851 and came to the conclusion that the 'Australian scenery in general' had a 'monotonous aspect'. Mossman, *Australia Visited and Revisited* 251.

<sup>622</sup> It will be shown later in this chapter that several European colonists got lost in the bush, unable to find their way back to human settlement. Since they could not support themselves in such a hostile environment they tragically perished. Certain parts of Australia remained unsettled and many attempts to find lost people were unsuccessful.

<sup>623</sup> McConnel, *Memories of Days Long Gone* By 18.

<sup>624</sup> Rowan, *A Flower-Hunter* 65-66.

above-mentioned comments on the Australian landscape in 1874. Two years later he replanted some of his thoughts into his introductory remarks to Gordon's poetry.<sup>626</sup> It is debatable whether Clarke personally saw the bush as a melancholic place or he described it under the influence of romantic literary ideals.

Tim Bonyhady notes that Marcus Clarke was not the first writer to point out the melancholic aspect of the Australian landscape. The theme of the gloomy and melancholic landscape was widely used from the early decades of the nineteenth century in colonial literature but it was Clarke who 'linked these aspects of the bush in such a simple yet forceful way'. Clarke's remarks proved influential in the 1880s and 1890s especially in literature, and painters such as H.J. Johnstone, J.W. Curtis and Henry Rielly painted their landscapes in this manner.<sup>627</sup> There were quite a few colonists, too, who were familiar with Clarke's vision of the Australian landscape and referred to him in their narratives.<sup>628</sup>

Solitude was another common feeling that the bush inspired. The terms 'solitary bush' and 'lonely bush' were also parts of Henrietta Foott's vocabulary in describing the landscape of outback Victoria and New South Wales in the 1860s.<sup>629</sup> Rosa Praed began her girlhood recollections of Queensland with a description of the loneliness of the Australian bush:

Words fail for painting the loneliness of the Australian bush. Mile after mile of primeval forest; interminable vistas of melancholy gum-trees, [...] All wild and utterly desolate; all the same monotonous grey colouring, except where the wattle, when in blossom, shows patches of feathery gold or a belt of scrub lies green, glossy and impenetrable.<sup>630</sup>

Rosa seems to have concluded that the loneliness of the Australian bush was the consequence of its wild and vast terrains that conveyed a certain degree of melancholy.

Adjectives such as wild, solitary, monotonous and melancholic suggest that colonial gentlewomen found the vast areas of remote parts of colonial Australia both frightening and boring. Colonists came from the more evenly populated country of England where their eyes got used to the constantly changing landscape of cities, towns, villages and green pastureland. There were a variety of views in their home country that pleased and fascinated these women. Australia, on the other hand, was thinly populated and there were huge tracts of land outside the colonists' control where the settlers felt lonely and isolated. Describing it in terms of its

<sup>625</sup> Cited in Michael Wilding, ed., *Marcus Clarke – For the term of his natural life, short stories, critical essays and journalism* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1988): 645-646.

<sup>626</sup> L.T. Hergenham, ed., *A Colonial City: High and Low Life – Selected journalism of Marcus Clarke* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1972): 361-368.

<sup>627</sup> Bonyhady, *Images in Opposition* 122-129.

<sup>628</sup> The next section will show that colonial women were aware of Clarke's peculiar perception of the bush.

<sup>629</sup> Mrs James Foott, *Sketches of Life in the Bush, or, Life in the interior* (Sydney: Gibbs, Shallard, 1872): 13, 22.

monotony, gloominess and isolation could have reflected the way some colonists felt in remote parts of Australia where civilisation seemed far away. In a way they may have projected their own feelings on to the landscape. Tim Bonyhady argues that 'because of their preoccupation with the advance of European settlement, early colonists generally responded unfavourably to wilderness areas'.<sup>631</sup> As we have seen earlier, only very few of these women were able to appreciate the vast wilderness.

Edward Curr noted that early explorers like Sturt and Oxley often wrote unfavourably about the tracts of countries they passed because their eyes were not used to appreciating the Australian landscape. He argued that

Brought up in the old country, where the features of nature are on a small scale and the presence of man everywhere visible, they appear never to have been able to overcome early associations, or to reconcile themselves to the bush. Transplanted from an island, continental features affected them unpleasantly. Forests, which took weeks to traverse; plains, like the ocean, horizon bounded; the vast length of our rivers when compared with those of England, often flowing immense distances without change or tributary, now all but dry for hundreds of miles, at other times flooding the countries on their banks to the extent of inland seas, wearied them more in the contemplation than by travel.<sup>632</sup>

Curr's commentary supports my hypothesis that one of the reasons why many settlers found the Australian bush monotonous was that they were simply not used to seeing unspoilt nature and such vast expanses of unsettled country.

Another common form of landscape description was to compare the areas with other regions of the world. Lady Brassey had travelled much of the world and in July 1887 she recorded that the tablelands of the Darling Downs in Queensland reminded her of the prairies of South America.<sup>633</sup> The next section will show that, understandably, colonists also liked to compare Australia with Britain.

As we have seen so far, colonial women tended to describe the Australian bush in mostly the same way as their menfolk did. There were, however, some subtle differences between the way men and women perceived the bush. Firstly, while many women keenly explored the environment, others often viewed it from the safety of their house. I argued in Chapter Three that the verandah functioned as an extension of the home. Furthermore, it also provided a viewing point that enabled women to observe their surroundings without stepping outside the private sphere. Bernice McPherson argues that the verandah offered them 'a "view" of the world more

<sup>630</sup> Mrs Campbell Praed, *My Australian Girlhood: Sketches and impressions of bush life* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1902): 9.

<sup>631</sup> Bonyhady, *Images in Opposition* 60.

<sup>632</sup> Edward M. Curr, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria Then Called the Port Phillip District (from 1841 to 1851)* (Echuca: Rich River Printers, 2001): 178-179.

revealing and accessible than that from within the confines of the house by collapsing the opposition between the private and the public'.<sup>634</sup> Robert Dixon points out that this 'veranda-diorama' was a common feature in nineteenth-century writings by women. Its origins can be traced back to women's sketchbooks where they recorded sketches of rooms and gardens as seen from their window or verandah. Dixon remarks that these conventions shed light on how women constructed their sense of identity and prove the centrality of the home in the female world. He also notes that men rarely applied this technique.<sup>635</sup>

Autobiographical narratives revealed the importance of the verandah in women's everyday lives and often showed that women viewed the surrounding environment from there. Louisa Clifton was one of the many female settlers who took pleasure in painting. Her diary entry for 27 March 1841 in Australind noted that she and her friend Mary 'attempted to sketch the lovely view from the verandah'.<sup>636</sup> Louisa Meredith described the scenery around her Tasmanian house Riverdale in the 1840s as she saw it from the verandah.

From the front window of our dining-room, where I now sit, I look through the veranda over the grass plat and flower borders, now past their summer beauty, but still gay with noble hollyhocks, carnations, tiger lilies, and other autumn flowers. A hawthorn hedge [...] overhang two ranges of beehives, and conceal the paling fence, behind which passes the public road; and beyond its other hedge, which is of gorse, lie sweet fields of clover, where the children's five pet lambs, and some favourite horses or cows, lead a luxurious life. Beyond these, again, is another gorse hedge, and other larger meadows, also fenced with a grand chevaux de frise of gorse [...]. Still again beyond flows the Swan River, a noble brand stream.<sup>637</sup>

Men tended to see the country in terms of its pastoral and agricultural values more than women did.<sup>638</sup> As discussed in Chapter Three, there were a few women who ran pastoral estates and such women were most probably skilled in seeing the land in terms of its suitability for feeding the stock. Their point of view, however, was not shared by the majority of female colonists. Rosina Ferguson's letter from South Australia clearly illustrates the different ways she and her husband saw the country. Whereas Rosina noted the enormous size of the native trees and grass and the plants' ability to regenerate quickly after a fire, she relied on her husband's

<sup>633</sup> Lady Brassey, *The Last Voyage, to India and Australia, in the 'Sunbeam'* (London: Longmans, Green, 1889): 340.

<sup>634</sup> Bernice McPherson also shows how dominant the image of the verandah was in both paintings and literary texts throughout the nineteenth century. Bernice McPherson, "The verandah as a feminine site in the Australian memory" in Jeanette Hoorn, ed., *Strange Women - Essays in art and gender* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1994): 67-80.

<sup>635</sup> Robert Dixon, "Public and private voices" in Laurie Hergenhan, ed., *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1988): 135.

<sup>636</sup> Frost, *No Place for a Nervous Lady* 49.

<sup>637</sup> Mrs Charles Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania, During a Residence of Nine Years* (London: John Murray, 1852) Vol. 2: 269-270.

opinion regarding the prospect of agricultural and pastoral activities.

The trees is [sic] about 15 & 18 feet round the butt. On arrival of the surveyors, the[y] had set fire to the grass which was about 2 feet long. It has burnt the heart out of some of the trees and the bark of others, yet the[y] are growing and as fine a green as a laurel bush. So dear father you may fancy how fertile a soil it is. Ferguson bids me tell you he is satisfied beyond his expectations with the appearance of the country. The soil in some parts is a fine brown mould very suitable for growing corn and barley and as fresh as a mole hillock. Other parts is [sic] clayey and a heavy soil adapted for wheat. The sheep walks is [sic] beautiful with fine hills. Likewise he says by care and industry please God to spare us & give us his countenance our intention of comeing [sic] here will be accomplished in a few years.<sup>639</sup>

Many men were able to appreciate both the aesthetic and economic value of the land. Edward Curr was a Victorian squatter in the early 1840s who was looking for new grazing land for his sheep. He set his eyes on the Moira, which was a tract of land on the south side of the Murray. After examining this country he noted in his narrative that 'the grass under foot, as yet undefiled by flock or herd, was as green and fresh as Eden, and the landscape generally bathed in a soft, hazy, sunlight, such as Monsieur Buvelot would love to depict. But we were just then intent on sheepfeed, and not on scenery.'<sup>640</sup> His comments show that he was aware of the kind of landscape that fascinated the great painters but he disregarded the aesthetic aspect of the land because he was more interested in finding good grass for his sheep.

The above examples show that colonial women were interested in their immediate surroundings and were keen to describe its peculiarities. They looked at the bush in a great variety of ways. Women used contemporary European aesthetic terms such as the 'picturesque' and compared the country with other parts of the world. They were sometimes frightened by the remoteness and wildness of the Australian countryside, seeing the unsettled areas of the bush as monotonous, gloomy and solitary. Although they shared the same language of appreciation with men, women had a distinctive perspective on the landscape. The verandah was a viewing platform on the edge of their house that provided them with a glimpse of the outside world from the safety of their private sphere. Furthermore, women's exclusion from the pastoral business meant that they failed to examine the landscape in terms of its economic value.

<sup>638</sup> Susan Martin notes the same trend in men's fiction. She argues that 'it is very rare to find a sheer visual appreciation of the landscape in men's fiction, without it being put into human context. Martin, "She'll Rewrite Mate" 178.

<sup>639</sup> Colin Kerr, ed., *A Exelent Coliney' - The practical idealists of 1836-1846* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1978): 74-75.

<sup>640</sup> Curr, *Recollections of Squatting* 167. The same double vision of the land - both aesthetic and economic - characterised the way Samuel Mossman and Thomas Banister perceived the area surrounding Sandy Creek near the Goulburn River in Victoria in 1851. They noted that 'the glimpses of the surrounding scenery which open up as you proceed are very pretty; and as a whole it may be considered a fine rich tract country, with plenty of grass on it for sheep and cattle, well watered apparently, and presenting a number of spots admirably calculated for homesteads and farms'. It is evident from their text that they were writing to an audience of intended emigrants and for this reason they wanted to emphasise the country's suitability for settlement. Mossman, *Australia Visited and Revisited* 124.

### Seeing through English Eyes

Colonial gentlewomen's ways of seeing the landscape were also shaped by memories of their home country. English ideas of beauty had a strong hold over them and provided them with a reference against which they measured the new country and its peculiar flora. As a rule any landscape or plant that reminded them of England, or specimens of actual English plants, appealed to these women.

Rather than describing the strangeness and the novelty of the new landscape, colonial women sought certain areas and land formations that brought back memories of home and resembled English landscape features. Delys Bird is of the opinion that this strategy had its purpose. She argues that

by using an accessible term, they were able to displace or deny that strangeness, bringing the landscape under their linguistic and cultural control. The effort to come to terms with the new landscape, then, most typically goes not into expressing its difference as difference but into strategies to demystify that difference. Appropriating the landscape by naming it [...] made it comprehensible, beginning the process of demystification.<sup>641</sup>

It is interesting to note that Bird talks about women's 'linguistic and cultural control' of the environment. Physical control was, of course, part of the male domain.

English ideas of beauty and nature haunted the colonists for a long time after their first arrival in the colonies. There was a constant need among them to compare their new home with the old one. Rachel Henning was staying in Bathurst, New South Wales in 1856 and informed her sister Etta in England that she often walked up to the top of a nearby hill where a 'curious' scenery opened up to her. She did not exactly know how to describe it. She noted that 'the view from the top is not exactly beautiful, but very curious, being so utterly un-English'.<sup>642</sup> She did not really know what to make of that scenery because it was so unlike England. She called it 'curious' because she could not regard it as beautiful. Beautiful and English seemed to imply the same thing for her.

It was very common from the late eighteenth until the mid nineteenth centuries to describe certain parts of the Australian bush as resembling an English park. This analogy acquired the status of a cliché.<sup>643</sup> The term 'park' originally referred to a fenced-in area in England where deer were grazing. By the early 1800s it denoted an enclosed area that covered several square kilometres and was dotted with trees and lawns. Sheep and deer could often be

<sup>641</sup> Delys Bird, *Gender and Landscape: Australian colonial women writers* (London: University of London, July 1989): 9.

<sup>642</sup> Adams, *The Letters of Rachel Henning* 41.

<sup>643</sup> Bonyhady, *Images in Opposition* 46.

seen grazing there.<sup>644</sup> In the middle of the eighteenth century the landscape gardener Lancelot 'Capability' Brown created a famous concept of the park. His parks were built on undulating ground and the wide expanse of lawn was dotted with single trees as well as clumps of trees. Water was a significant part of these parks in Britain. Brown's parks were seen as 'natural' in comparison with the previously fashionable formal landscape gardens. Tim Bonyhady notes that it was the artist Sydney Parkinson who first presented the Australian landscape as a park in his account of Captain Cook's first voyage, and many early colonists followed his way of seeing the country.<sup>645</sup>

The following examples will show that many colonial women were touched by landscape formations with undulating ground and pleasant arrangements of trees. Sarah Felton came out to Sydney in 1832 where she married her cousin Felton Matthew and the couple settled down in Windsor near Parramatta. Felton worked as a surveyor and Sarah often accompanied her husband on these surveying expeditions. Her diary entry for 19 March 1833 described a piece of country near the estate of Ludenham in the vicinity of the Nepean River northwest of Campbelltown, where the landscape reminded her of a park even though the grass was burnt out.

Leaving the estate of Ludenham, [...] the road passes through a country comparatively thinly timbered, and broken into many ridges or narrow ranges, so that when green it has quite a parklike appearance, and you ascend and descend a succession of gentle slopes, though still on a considerable elevation, till you descend nearer the banks of the river again, into a level tract called the Flats.<sup>646</sup>

Elizabeth Ramsay-Laye noted that the scenery along the road from Castlemaine to Mount Franklin in the early 1850s resembled an English park. She explained the source of resemblance: 'The road to Mount Franklin was like a ride in a beautiful English park with its gentle undulations, deep shadowy glades, and open plains, sometimes diversified by groves of trees and avenues, through which glimpses of the most lovely scenery charmed the eye.'<sup>647</sup> The term 'park' was also used as in 'gentleman's park'<sup>648</sup> and 'nobleman's park'.<sup>649</sup>

<sup>644</sup> Daniel Pool, *What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew - From fox hunting to whist - the facts of daily life in 19<sup>th</sup>-century England* (New York: Touchstone, 1993): 349.

<sup>645</sup> Tim Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth* (Carlton South: Miegunyah Press, 2000): 77-78.

<sup>646</sup> Olive Havard, "Mrs Felton Matthew's journal" *Royal Australian Historical Society* Vol. 29, Part. II, (1943): 101. See also Lucy Frost, *A Face in the Glass - The journal and life of Annie Baxter Dawbin* (Melbourne: William Heinemann, 1992): 59.

<sup>647</sup> Elizabeth P. Ramsay-Laye, *Social Life and Manners in Australia - Being the notes of eight years' experience by a resident* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1861): 48.

<sup>648</sup> Jane Isabella Watts, *Family Life in South Australia Fifty-Three Years Ago Dating from October 1837* (Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 1978): 100.

<sup>649</sup> Anne Drysdale, "Miss Anne Drysdale's diary" in P.L. Brown, ed., *Clyde Company Papers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952) Vol. 3: 79. Male colonists also recognised the country's park-like characteristics. When Samuel Mossman and Thomas Banister crossed the Columbine stream in Victoria in 1851 they noted in their narrative that 'the view up and down the river is very picturesque and park-like'. They described this park-like landscape in exactly the same manner as gentlewomen did: they pointed out the undulating hills, the 'open

Tim Bonyhady claims that one reason why colonists liked to compare the Australian landscape to English parks was that in this way they could claim certain privileges that they only dreamed about in England. Only the gentry and the aristocracy owned parks in England and Bonyhady argues that 'not even the wealthiest colonist could hope to acquire such an estate at "home"'.<sup>650</sup> So often when the colonists compared a piece of country to an English park their class aspirations became evident. I argued in Chapter One that some colonists settled down in Australia with the intention of climbing up the social ladder. At home they did not have the means to acquire such an estate. Land was more accessible in the colonies and by comparing it to English parks the settlers could feel that their dreams and aspirations had come true and that they were residing in a similar country to that which the English gentry and aristocracy owned at home. In a way the colonists could feel that they were their equals.

Furthermore, another reason why many colonists compared the Australian countryside to English parks was that in this way they could associate the surrounding landscape with English ideals. The settlers brought with themselves to the bush not only their assigned servants, pianos and religion but also ideals of gentility that regulated the lives of respectable women and described the kind of landscape that was associated with genteel living. Emma Curtin argues that 'the association [with English gentleman's park] incorporated that need for familiarity in an alien environment, as well as the desire to create gentility in the colonies'.<sup>651</sup>

Another interesting aspect of the use of the term 'park' was that it was considered a distinctively British form of landscape.<sup>652</sup> Tim Flannery notes that the British colonists who saw the Australian landscape in terms of an English park were greatly mistaken. He argues that the British and Australian woodlands were created in a different way. Fertile soil, seasonal change and human involvement shaped the outlook of the English park. In Australia, in sharp contrast, infertility and fire were the two major components of life. Instead of the soft and rich pasture, the ground was covered only by grasses that consisted of clumps of long and brownish stems.<sup>653</sup> Flannery's ecological approach to the appreciation of the Australian landscape as an English park shows that Europeans described the alien landscape by familiar terms even though both the

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forestland, with an abundance of grass' in the environs of the Columbine stream. Mossman, et al., *Australia Visited and Revisited* 41. The scenery about Willunga, South Australia in February 1850 reminded Edward Snell of a 'gentleman's park in England'. Griffiths, *The Life and Adventures of Edward Snell* 78.

<sup>650</sup> Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth* 78.

<sup>651</sup> Emma Jane Curtin, "In Awe of Mrs Grundy: British gentility and emigrant gentlewomen in Australia, 1830-1880" (PhD thesis, La Trobe University, 1995): 76.

<sup>652</sup> Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth* 78-79.

<sup>653</sup> Tim F. Flannery, *The Future Eaters: An ecological history of the Australasian lands and people* (Chatswood, NSW: Reed Books, 1994): 349.

colour and shape of the trees and the physical form of the grass were different. Only the clumps of trees and the open spaces may have created the impression of an English park, as undulating ground and flowing water were not as evident in the 'parks' in Australia. The colonial landscape therefore lacked many of the features of the English park as 'Capability' Brown defined it, but it was nevertheless perceived in this manner. The colonists adopted this widely-used English concept to describe a type of landscape that bore only a slight resemblance.

Tim Bonyhady also argues that the colonists did not want to admit publicly that the open landscape was the deliberate creation of Aboriginal land management. He suggests that it says a great deal about European perceptions of the inferiority of the Aboriginal way of life. The settlers looked at the English park as a 'product of civilisation'. If they had regarded the open woodlands and grasslands a result of conscious Aboriginal activity they would have had to recognise it as a product of Aboriginal civilisation. It was easier for them to think of it as a natural landscape rather than as a symbol of Aboriginal ingenuity.<sup>654</sup> Elizabeth Fenton's diary reveals that she regarded the park-like scenery between her house and the garden in Fenton Forest in 1830 as nature's work. The Fentons did not transform that patch of land but kept it 'as left by nature'.<sup>655</sup> It did not occur to her that the Aborigines had established this kind of environment over thousands of years.

Colonial gentlewomen were delighted whenever they encountered a landscape that reminded them of their home country in one way or another. As we have seen, the resemblance was not always justifiable but these homesick women revelled in the sight of anything that had a home-like appearance. Clara Aspinall, for example, did not see much beauty in the Australian landscape. Whenever she found a nice spot it was because it resembled English scenery. Clara made a five-month-long trip to country Victoria in 1860. She wrote that Australia 'cannot certainly bear comparison with British scenery; at the same time, I must add that I have seen some very pretty spots, and some very fine views in Australia; but whenever this happened to me, my first exclamation always was, "How very lovely! How very English!"'<sup>656</sup>

The introduction of English plants increased the colonists' comfort in having a familiar landscape around them. The presence of hedgerows, sweetbriars and winding lanes were powerful English images. Alice Mary Frere was a visitor in 1865 and was attracted to Tasmania

<sup>654</sup> Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth* 78-79. Chapter Six will explain why the colonists tended to consider Aboriginal civilisation inferior to British culture.

<sup>655</sup> Fenton, *Mrs Fenton's Tasmanian Journal* 71.

<sup>656</sup> Aspinall, *Three Years in Melbourne* 162-163. Another woman called Sarah Matthew noted in her diary in New South Wales in 1833 that 'the view from the summit of the hill beyond the town on the Appin Road, always pleased

immediately. She felt that if she had to live in the colonies she would wish to settle down in Tasmania. She thought that there was 'something homelike' there. The gentlemen's places were 'exactly like those of a fine country place at home, with all the dear old English flowers in the borders, and such may hedges in the fields'.<sup>657</sup> Tasmania, in particular, often pleased visitors with its resemblance to England but there were other such places, as well.<sup>658</sup>

A few women, on the other hand, were disappointed to find recreated English scenery in Australia. Marianne North, the renowned botanical illustrator who landed in Tasmania in January 1881, spent a couple of days at Deloraine and was disillusioned with what she saw. She missed the original character of the place and felt sorry at the loss of the native vegetation. She noted in her diary that 'the country was not in the least attractive to me; it was far too English, with hedges of sweet-briar, hawthorn, and blackberry, nettles, docks, thistles, dandelions: all the native flowers (if there were any) were burnt up'.<sup>659</sup> As a lover of natural diversity in search of the beautiful and extraordinary she was obviously disappointed at seeing the familiar English plants in another country. She must have felt disappointed to have travelled so far across the world to Tasmania, only to paint the same old plants of England.

Australian flowers - just like the scenery - had to resemble English flowers to please the majority of colonial women. Louisa Anne Meredith believed that the most beautiful things were, by nature, English. When she spent two weeks in Newtown, Tasmania, in 1840, she noted that 'the most English, and therefore the most beautiful things I saw here, were the hawthorn hedges'. She came to realise how strong her fondness for this plant had grown in the colonial circumstances:

Let no one who has always lived at home, enjoying unnoticed the year's bounty of rainbow-tinted

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me from its decidedly English character'. Havard, "Mrs Fehon Matthew's journal" 118.

<sup>657</sup> Alice Mary Frere, *The Antipodes and Round the World* (London: Hatchards, 1870): 129. Many men also noticed the Englishness of this colony. Edward Wilson was impressed by the sight of 'compartments with beautifully close hedges of sweetbriar' in Tasmania in the 1850s and noted that the 'effect, both on the eye and nostril, is excessively pleasing'. Edward Wilson, *Rambles at the Antipodes* (London: W.H. Smith, 1859): 54. When Augustus Prinsep was approaching Hobart in 1829 by boat, the surrounding farms brought 'old England and all its dear recollections home' to him. Mrs Augustus Prinsep, ed., *The Journal of a Voyage from Calcutta to Van Diemen's Land: Comprising a description of that colony during a six months' residence* (Hobart: Melanie Publications, 1981): 50. Chapter Five will show that acclimatisation societies introduced various plants in Australia to recreate Britain and also to comfort the homesick settlers.

<sup>658</sup> The Hill sisters were struck by the Englishness of Mount Barker in South Australia. They took many pleasant drives and walks during the five days they spent there in 1873 and were 'much struck by the English look of the district with its luxuriant gorse and sweetbriar still in bloom, its well-made roads and winding lanes bordered with hedgerows, its comfortable cottages, trim gardens, and enclosed fields. The colouring, too, of sky and earth, with gleams of sunlight and intervals of misty rain, were homelike.' Rosamond Hill, et al., *What We Saw in Australia* (London: Macmillan, 1875): 58-59.

<sup>659</sup> Helen Vellacott, ed., *Some Recollections of a Happy Life: Marianne North in Australia and New Zealand* (Caulfield: Edward Arnold, 1986): 90.

blossoms, fancy he knows the full value of English flowers, or the love that the heart can bear for them. I thought I always held them in as fond admiration as any one could do, but my delight in these hawthorn hedges proved to me how much my regard had strengthened in absence.<sup>660</sup>

English flowers were attractive because these women had memories associated with them and they could relate events or long years of contact with them. This is what was missing from their relationship with the Australian flowers. Delys Bird argues that 'the loss of self suffered by emigrant women in their shift to the colonies is most significantly conveyed through their apprehension of the loss of associations; associations tied culturally to the identification of the feminine in feelings and emotions and linked to nature'.<sup>661</sup> Rachel Henning explained her early dislike of native flowers to her brother-in-law Mr Boyce in her letter dated 29 March 1855. She was staying in Appin, a station about 16 kilometres south of Campbelltown in New South Wales.

I do not care enough about the Australian flowers to take much trouble with them. I often wonder what can be the difference. I suppose it is the want of any associations connected with them. I often see very pretty flowers in the bush and just gather them to take a look at them, and then throw away again without any further interest, while at home every wildflower seemed like a friend to me.<sup>662</sup>

For the people of the Victorian era things had to have sweet associations before they could be enjoyed. This is what Robert Dixon terms 'the aesthetic cult of associationism'. He argues that childhood memories influenced people's ideas and images of the beautiful. He explains that

material objects appear [...] beautiful because the spectator endows them with sentiments associated with other scenes and places stored in the memory [...]. In this way, the mind was thought to pass through trains of associated images and emotions that carry it far from the scene actually present to the eye.

The effect of this was that the early settlers tended to judge their new surroundings by comparing them with past images of their home.<sup>663</sup> Louisa Anne Meredith's verse 'Recognition' expressed her feelings on encountering the native Speedwell that closely resembled the English Speedwell. Robert Dixon notes that this poem 'demonstrates one of the basic principles of associationist psychology – that a single object has the potential to set off a complex train of thought which carries the mind far from the original scene'.<sup>664</sup> In this poem Louisa highlighted her joy on finding a familiar-looking English plant and noted the flow of old-time memories that came back to her at the sight of the Speedwell. She wrote

What joy it is, in distant climes, to meet

<sup>660</sup> Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania* Vol. 1: 26.

<sup>661</sup> Delys Bird, "The self and the magic lantern: Gender and subjectivity in Australian colonial women's writing" *Australian Literary Studies* Vol. 15, No. 3, (1992): 128.

<sup>662</sup> Adams, *The Letters of Rachel Henning* 26.

<sup>663</sup> Robert Dixon, "A 'Complicated joy': The aesthetic theory of associationism and its influence on Tasmanian culture" in Michael Roe, ed., *The Flow of Culture: Tasmanian Studies* (Canberra: Australian Academy of the Humanities, 1987): 122-129.

<sup>664</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

Some dear old Friend!  
 How the heart bounds, the well-known face to greet!  
 Whilst crowding memories, both sad and sweet,  
 Their discords blend,

In one soul's-melody of gladdest tone;  
 And gasping forth  
 The bliss-drown'd words, we cry, "My dear! My own!"  
 Almost so felt I, when before me shone,  
 On foreign earth,

The blue-eyed speedwell of my childish days,  
 [...]  
 ... a breath of English air  
 Seems wafted o'er me; and a landscape fair,  
 Neath chequer'd skies - <sup>665</sup>

The sight of the Speedwell flower in Australia carried Louisa back to her English childhood. She was blissfully happy because memories of the past rushed before her and for a moment she could imagine she was once again in England surrounded by a 'fair' landscape and beneath 'chequered skies'. The image of her former home came vividly to her mind as a direct consequence of seeing an English flower in Australia.

John Robert Dicksee's painting "A Primrose from England"<sup>666</sup> (Picture 1) expresses the same feeling settlers experienced at the sight of an English flower. This flower was not native to Australia and its absence was greatly felt by nostalgic colonists.<sup>667</sup> Dicksee painted a room that was crowded with people who came to see and admire the primrose. This English flower is the focal point of not only the painting but also of the eyes of the people who all lean in its direction. Both the direction of their eyes and the movement of their bodies express their desire to see and be close to this English plant. It is also interesting to point out that not men but women are seated around the table and Dicksee painted the female figures with more light and precision than he did the male ones. The painting seems to suggest that the English primrose had an illuminating effect on the women, who 'brightened up' both physically and emotionally at the sight of this plant.

<sup>665</sup> Louisa A. Meredith, *Some of My Bush Friends in Tasmania - Native flowers, berries and insects drawn from life, illustrated in verse and brightly described by Louisa Anne Meredith* (London: Day, 1860): 77-78.

<sup>666</sup> J.R. Dicksee, "Primrose from England" (1856) Picture Collection, National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an5577434>

<sup>667</sup> Brian Elliott, et al., eds, *Bards in the Wilderness - Australian colonial poetry to 1920* (Melbourne: Nelson, 1970): 239. A male Scottish migrant, William Gay, also wrote fondly of this plant in his poem "Primroses". He kept this flower on his desk and every time he looked at it he was reminded of the beauties of God's creation. He wrote that 'They speak of things above my verse, / Of thoughts no earthly language knows'. Even though William Gay does not mention his native home in relation to the primrose it is quite evident from his writing that he had his home country in mind while he was praising this flower. It was a magical and divine flower in his eyes because it grew on his native land far away from his colonial residence. *Ibid.*, 263, 127.



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J.R. Dicksee: A primrose from England

Picture 1

**An English flower could become the focus of nostalgia and patriotism in the colonies. J R Dicksee expresses the special treatment of an English flower by placing it in the centre of the composition and giving it an extra amount of light. Many people seem to be rushing towards this store to admire a bunch of primrose but it is the privilege of the well-dressed and respectfully-looking women who are allowed the closest proximity to these treasured symbols of the mother country.**

Flowers could also bring images of home to men, as well. Robert Dawson arrived in New South Wales as the chief agent of the Australian Agricultural Company in 1825. He was exploring the area around Port Stephens with a group of Aboriginal people when he came across a beautiful piece of land. He noted that

The low grounds were everywhere bespangled with wild tares and butter-cups, whose pink and yellow blossoms reminded me of an English meadow, and called up in a moment so keen a

recollection of home, with its thousand fond associations, as can be understood only by those who have been estranged from its hallowed enjoyments.<sup>668</sup>

These examples suggest that floral images could make an impact on men even though flowers were mainly associated with women. My readings suggest, however, that women wrote more passionately and in much more detail about their love of plants and flowers than men did.

With the passing of time colonists acquired new associations that helped them appreciate the new landscape. Associationism made people more aware of the necessity of living on the land in order to enjoy it.<sup>669</sup> This is what Annie Baxter came to realise at Yesabba. She recorded in her journal on 7 November 1843 that 'somehow this country with all its disagreeables [...] has become endeared to me – Every tree almost about here, has its association'.<sup>670</sup> Her attachment to the local flora established a personal link with the Australian nature that in turn led her to rejoice in her new home. Jennifer Bennett argues that 'plants, always women's helpmates, eased the transition to a new life on a different continent'.<sup>671</sup>

Georgiana Molloy underwent the same experience. At first she disliked the local flowers because she had no associations with them. She described the native flowers around Augusta that she sent to Captain James Mangles at the beginning of 1838 in the accompanying letter: 'I am of opinion that these flowers are not so interesting as our own, and after the novelty is past, soon cease to please; they possess no association, nor does anything about them attract but the lustrous colour. Very few have any scent and I quarrel much with their excessively minute corollae.' But Georgiana soon developed a strong love of the native plants that became her passion and her life-long interest. By collecting and sending them to the English botanist Captain Mangles, the plants acquired meaning. Her rambles in the bush in search of flowers came to mean 'one of the most delightful states of existence' for her. Every flower Georgiana beheld reminded her of those she collected for Captain Mangles.<sup>672</sup> On looking back she admitted that 'I should never have bestowed on the flowers of this Wilderness any other idea than that of admiration'.<sup>673</sup> Associationism helped her overcome her initial dislike of Australian flowers and turned her into one of the most respected female botanical collectors of the nineteenth century.

As well as the need for associated images, women also had other hurdles standing in the

<sup>668</sup> Robert Dawson, *The Present State of Australia* (London: Smith, Elder, 1831): 198.

<sup>669</sup> Dixon, "A 'Complicated joy'" 122, 138.

<sup>670</sup> Frost, *No Place for a Nervous Lady* 118.

<sup>671</sup> Jennifer Bennett, *Lilies of the Hearth - The historical relationship between women and plants* (Camden East: Camden House, 1991): 84.

<sup>672</sup> Alexandra Hasluck, *Portrait with Background - A life of Georgiana Molloy* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1960): 156, 194, 168.

<sup>673</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

way of their enjoyment of the Australian environment. Australia seemed a topsy-turvy continent because many things seemed to work in exactly the opposite way to England. The concept of 'antipodal inversion' was a very widespread notion of Australia. Visitors noted the reversal of the seasons, the odd animals, the birds without song, the flowers without scent and the trees that shed their bark and not their leaves. John Rickard argues that 'such oddities, even when inaccurately perceived, were popularised, particularly in attempts to interpret the new continent to a distant British audience'.<sup>674</sup> The following examples will highlight some cases where the European observers realised the different nature of the Australian continent.

Very often the first impression, as Georgiana Molloy noted, was that of novelty. Adrian Mitchell claims that the concept of the 'novel' frequently occurred in early Australian writing. It referred to the 'essential and inescapable fact about the whole of Australia'.<sup>675</sup> When Elizabeth Fenton first arrived in Tasmania she was bewildered. She expressed her opinion of the forest near Hobart Town in her diary in November 1829: 'I turn myself to these dark woods, whose aspect is to me all beauty and novelty.'<sup>676</sup>

The reversal of the seasons was especially apparent at Christmas. Janet Millett recalled that 'never did the weather seem so little in accordance with our feelings as at Christmas, when the heat was so great as to make all exertion a burden'.<sup>677</sup> The transition to the appreciation of a southern-hemisphere Christmas took some time. Elizabeth Townbridge noted in her journal in 1864 that after a while she became accustomed to the Australian Christmas.

For a long while after I settled here I could hardly believe it to be Christmas at all without the frost, snow, holly, ivy, great fires, bright lights, and close curtains of the happy homes of the old land; but now I can throw open my dwelling to the refreshing breeze, if fortunately there happen to be one, and look out on (to old-world eyes) these strange Christmas sights as joyously as anyone.<sup>678</sup>

The concept of antipodal inversion was noticeable in many areas, not just the reversal of the seasons. The Duchess of Buckingham, who stayed in Australia for a couple of months in 1892-3 as a visitor, noted the reversal of some natural phenomena. She found it strange that the month of January referred to the middle of the summer period, the south wind brought cold air

<sup>674</sup> Rickard, *Australia* 48-49.

<sup>675</sup> Adrian Mitchell, "No new thing - The concept of novelty and early Australian writing" in P.R. Eaden, et al., eds, *Mapped but not Known* (Setley, SA: Wakefield Press, 1986): 55.

<sup>676</sup> Fenton, *Mrs Fenton's Tasmanian Journal* 41.

<sup>677</sup> Mrs Edward Millett, *An Australian Parsonage or, The settler and the savage in Western Australia* (London: Edward Stanford, 1872): 113. See also Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania* Vol. 1: 99-100.

<sup>678</sup> Elizabeth Townbridge, "A year of bush life in Australia" *Sharpe's London Magazine* (1869): 265. After more than a decade Rachel Henning also got used to the idea of a warm Christmas. She wrote to her sister in a letter on 1 December 1872 that 'it seems quite strange to us now to associate Christmas with cold and frost and snow. Here it brings the idea of intense heat.' Adams, *The Letters of Rachel Henning* 263. Janet Millett underwent the same change and after five years she, too, learnt to accept a hot Christmas as the norm. Millett, *An Australian Parsonage* 114-115.

and even the moon looked different. She thought that everything was 'topsy turvy'.<sup>679</sup> The trees were also strange because they were evergreens and shed their bark instead of their leaves. The sight of the eucalypt tree in Sydney's Domain in 1839 made Louisa Meredith realise that she was 'at the antipodes of England, or very near it, where everything seems topsy-turvy'.<sup>680</sup> For the colonists the English seasons and plants were the normal and the Australian seasons and plants were abnormal because they were different to the English order of things.<sup>681</sup>

Notwithstanding the novelty and strangeness of the new land and the lack of associations, the settlers also had various expectations. There was a widespread belief in England throughout the nineteenth century according to which the Australian flowers did not have any scent and the birds did not sing.<sup>682</sup> The origin of this idea is rather obscure.<sup>683</sup> Clara Aspinall was one of the many colonists who started her bush trip with this expectation in mind. She described her first encounter with the Victorian bush in 1860 and how her background readings misled her. She spent most of her three years in Melbourne and made only a short visit of about five months up-country. She recalled in her narrative that 'the first time I rode through the Bush I expected, from what I had read, that, instead of the carolling, joyous sound, so pleasant to the ear in a ride through English woods, there would be a death-like stillness'. She was, however, pleasantly surprised. She continued in her memoir that 'to my surprise, though the smaller birds did not sing as do our home-songsters, there was a constant, cheery, carolling sound going on amongst the

<sup>679</sup> Alice Anne Montgomery *Glimpses of Four Continents: Letters written during a tour in Australia, New Zealand, and North America, in 1893* (London: John Murray, 1894): 88-89.

<sup>680</sup> Mrs Charles Meredith, *Notes and Sketches of New South Wales During a Residence in that Colony from 1839 to 1844* (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1973): 40. Miss Eleanor Parkinson arrived in Melbourne in 1857 and worked as a governess with the Roadknight family in the early 1860s. They made an excursion to Cape Otway in Victoria in 1863 during which time Eleanor kept a journal. They travelled from the Roadknight family's property near Gerangemete to Glen Aire Station just west of the Cape Otway Lighthouse. On their way to the Cape Mr Roadknight drew Eleanor's attention to the native currants. She was looking for them on the ground when she was reminded to turn her head up and look for them on top of the shrubs. She learnt from this incident that 'I must expect things to grow in exactly the opposite ways to our proper English fashion'. Eleanor Parkinson, *Journal of an Expedition to Cape Otway in 1863* (Apollo Bay: Apollo Bay and District Historical Society, 1993): 43.

<sup>681</sup> Even colonial men perceived Australia in this manner. See for example Allan L. Peters, ed., *Recollections - Nathaniel Hailes' adventurous life in colonial South Australia* (Kent Town: Wakefield Press, 1998): 8.

<sup>682</sup> Brian Elliott shows how widespread this idea was in the nineteenth century, both in prose descriptions and in poetry. Brian Elliott, "Antipodes - An essay in attitudes" *Australian Letters* Vol. 7, No. 3, (1966): 51-75.

<sup>683</sup> Brian Elliott tried to trace the origin of this myth. He does not claim, however, that he succeeded in hunting down its source. He suggests that Gordon's famous line of 'land where bright blossoms are scentless, and songless bright birds' (It appeared in the poem "A Dedication", prefixed to the volume *Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes* Ibid., 65.) was not the original source of this myth. He assumes that a much earlier writer, James Backhouse, might have been the Australian locus classicus of this myth. Gordon may have been familiar with Backhouse's Australian text *Narrative of a Voyage to the Australian Colonies* in 1843 in which he described the native birds as songless and the flowers as scentless. Brian also points out that another Englishman called William Cobbett wrote about the American birds and flowers in a similar fashion in his 1838 account *A Year's Residence in the United States of America* that Backhouse may have read. Elliott nevertheless concludes that whoever started this notion may have been badly affected by immigration and his homesick spirit may have led him to the formation of such a false idea.

gum-trees'.<sup>684</sup>

Several other colonists observed how false the idea of songless birds turned out to be. While Kathleen Lambert was staying at her brother's property at Montefiores near Bathurst for health reasons in the middle of the nineteenth century she, too, disputed this common myth. She argued that Australian birds sounded different to English ones but it did not mean that their voices were unpleasant: 'Some writers have stated the Australian birds do not sing. This is a mistake; they have not a continuous song like many of the English birds, such as the lark and thrush, but they have some very sweet notes, especially the bellbird, young magpies, and many others, and enliven the bush with their songs'.<sup>685</sup> Many colonists advised people to listen to the birds themselves instead of being misled by others. Louisa Atkinson suggested in a sketch in which she described life in the bush in August that the 'woods are vocal with song'. She described the cooing of the pigeons, and the 'rejoicing notes of robin redbreast' and the 'peculiar note of whipbird'. She therefore questioned the belief that the Australian birds were songless. She noted that people who held such a view should spend some time in the woods. Their false impression may have arisen in places where 'would-be sportsmen had destroyed most of the feathered tribes'.<sup>686</sup>

Many colonial women enjoyed the music of the native birds. Clara Aspinall took much delight in them. She admitted that she was often 'unpatriotic' and thought more highly of the Australian magpies' melody than that of their English counterparts. She recalled that one of her most cherished pastimes in the bush was sitting down on a fallen log with a book in her hands and listening to the magpies' 'matinées musicales'.<sup>687</sup> The bellbird and the kookaburra were two very interesting local birds and colonists often commented on their peculiar voice. Emma Macpherson called the bell-bird a 'sweet songster' with a 'clear singing tone'.<sup>688</sup> The Laughing Jackass had a very telling name. The Aborigines called this bird the Kookaburra and this term

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Brian Elliott, "Birds without song and flowers without smell" *Southerly* Vol. 18, No. 3, (1957): 157-158.

<sup>684</sup> Aspinall, *Three Years in Melbourne* 205.

<sup>685</sup> Kathleen Lambert, *The Golden South - Memories of Australian home life from 1843 to 1888 by 'Lyth'* (London: Ward and Downey, 1890): 128.

<sup>686</sup> Louisa Atkinson, *A Voice from the Country* (Canberra: Mulini Press, 1978): 8. Alan Frost shows that this notion did not hold true even in the early settlement of New South Wales. He argues that early observers of the landscape such as Phillip and Tench did indeed acknowledge that the local flowers were scented and that the birds could sing. Alan Frost, "The conditions of early settlement: New South Wales, 1788-1840" in John Carroll, ed., *Intruders in the Bush: The Australian quest for identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992): 76-77. See also Peters, *Recollections* 9. John Hunter Kerr wrote that 'the birds of Australia, which by a calumny of travellers have been denied the gift of song as unjustly as her wild flowers have been declared bereft of perfume, are numerous and beautiful'. Kerr, *Glimpses of Life in Victoria* 179.

<sup>687</sup> Aspinall, *Three Years in Melbourne* 204-205.

became widely accepted by 1890 when it appeared in an article in the Melbourne paper *Argus*.<sup>689</sup> Its peculiar voice astonished British ladies. This is how Emily Skinner reacted on first hearing it in 1854 when she was on her way to the Victorian goldfields to join her fiancé: 'I heard continued peals of unearthly laughter, which, I thought must proceed from an insane person at least. I found that it was the singular cry of the Laughing Jackass, familiar enough since, but sounding so strange when heard for the first time.'<sup>690</sup> The Duchess of Buckingham described the kookaburra as a bird that sits 'in the trees and laugh[s] at [...] [its] own jokes'.<sup>691</sup>

Only a small minority of female visitors accepted the myth of songless birds. Fanny Rains, for example, found no evidence to contradict this view. She took it for granted that 'Australia is sadly deficient in singing birds' although she did mention the magpie and the laughing jackass that uttered a 'peculiar note'. She spent only a very short period in Australia and this might explain her lack of detailed knowledge about the country.<sup>692</sup>

Australia also abounded in fragrant flowers, as several colonial women pointed out. Louisa Anne Meredith believed that the people who disseminated such false notions about the flowers being scentless must have been 'too much prejudiced to admit the natural impressions of their senses'. She then went on in her book *My Home in Tasmania* to list some of the fragrant flowers such as the native lilac, the white lily and the heaths. She particularly enjoyed the smell of the wattle. She believed that it had a 'most delicious' and 'rich odour'. In fact it had such a strong scent that Louisa advised anybody against keeping it indoors. Eucalypt trees also emitted a pleasant fragrance and whenever Louisa passed a tree in full blossom its smell seemed to 'hang around so lusciously as to be almost palpable to taste as well as smell'.<sup>693</sup>

I pointed out in the previous section that in his introduction to Adam Lindsay Gordon's poetry in 1876, Clarke commented on the Australian landscape. He emphasised its melancholic nature and compared it to other continents. He also wrote that 'in Australia alone is to be found

<sup>688</sup> Macpherson, *My Experiences in Australia* 106. Henry Kendall wrote about the 'silver-voiced bell-birds, the darlings of daytime!' in his poem "Bell-birds". Elliott, *Bards in the Wilderness* 76.

<sup>689</sup> Edward E. Morris, ed., *A Dictionary of Austral English* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1972): 252.

<sup>690</sup> Duyker, *A Woman on the Goldfields* 45.

<sup>691</sup> Montgomery, *Glimpses of Four Continents* 89. Many men were also pleased by the laughing sound of this bird. An anonymous Queensland resident noted that 'no one can help laughing when he first sees this uncouth fellow sitting on a limb of a gum-tree nearly bursting with laughter'. An eight years' resident, *The Queen of the Colonies; or, Queensland as I knew it* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1876): 241.

<sup>692</sup> Fanny L. Rains, *By Land and Ocean* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1878): 19, Preface – unpaginated. Mrs A. Campbell was another woman who never heard a singing bird even though she lived in the Victorian goldfields for a while. Mrs A. Campbell, *Rough and Smooth: Ho! For an Australian gold field* (Quebec: Hunter, Rose, 1865): 48. William James Woods was a male traveller in the mid-1880s and he, too, failed to hear singing birds and smell scented flowers. Woods, *A Visit to Victoria* 25.

<sup>693</sup> Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania* Vol. 2: 68-69.

the Grotesque, the Weird, the strange scribblings of Nature learning how to write. Some see no beauty in our trees without shade, our flowers without perfume, our birds who cannot fly, and our beasts who have not yet learned to walk on all fours.<sup>694</sup>

Ellis Rowan did not share Clarke's views and criticised him in one of her letters that she eventually published in her book in 1898. Ellis made a visit to Somerset at Cape York in the early 1890s where she was very much impressed by the native plants and flowers, many of which were entirely new to her. In a letter to her husband she blamed Marcus Clarke for wrongfully interpreting the bush. In her view he was 'a little too sweeping in his condemnation'. She pointed out that

however eloquent such a description may undoubtedly be, the writer has allowed his wish for effect to mar his accuracy; and, although our landscapes may frequently present only the sad or savage aspect of Nature, the flowers of the Australian bush are beautiful, and noted for delicacy of form and richness of colour to such an extent, that in external loveliness they may well challenge comparison with the tenderly-nurtured children of the gardens and conservatories of the older world. To stigmatise them as without scent is, moreover, a grave injustice, for many of them emit freely a perfume which fills the surrounding air with fragrance.

She listed the acacias and three types of boronias as plants with 'exquisite' and 'delicate' fragrance.<sup>695</sup> Ellis Rowan's reference to this work reinforces the argument that Clarke's text was indeed widely read and discussed.

This section has shown that colonial gentlewomen tended, perhaps inevitably, to see the Australian bush through English eyes. Rather than adopting a new system of language to describe the novelty of the colonies, women applied familiar English terms to the strange Australian landscape. They liked to depict the bush in terms of an English park even though the comparison was not always accurate. As for the appreciation of the native flora and fauna the colonists faced several obstacles. Firstly, the beauty of the English flowers had a strong hold over them. Colonial women were very happy to see characteristic English plants as part of the landscape because they created a more home-like atmosphere. Women found it difficult to get to like the local flowers because they lacked associations with them. They needed time to develop an attachment with them and learn to appreciate them. Secondly, English books misinformed them about the birds and flowers. They were told that the native birds and flowers compared badly to their English counterparts but this statement did not hold true as many colonists realised. In conclusion, the memory of English landscape, flora and fauna strongly influenced the way colonists looked at Australia.

<sup>694</sup> Wilding, *Marcus Clarke* 647.

<sup>695</sup> Rowan, *A Flower-Hunter* 138. William James Woods also quoted Marcus Clarke's famous passage in his travel narrative *A Visit to Victoria*. He was on the train to Daylesford from Melbourne and remarked that Clarke's comments 'exactly set forth my own impressions' of the bush. Woods, *A Visit to Victoria* 18-19.

### The Bush as a Recreational Ground

The bush was not only judged by its aesthetic qualities and its resemblance to England but also by the many possibilities it offered for entertainment and relaxation. The temperate climate enabled the colonists to enjoy a more out-of-doors life than they did in Britain. Women enjoyed taking a stroll, going for a ride, fishing and bathing. The bush also provided an excellent setting for social gatherings such as picnic parties and hunting expeditions.

Visitors and settlers delighted in the pleasant climate of the Australian seaboard.<sup>696</sup> They pointed out that the winter was mild and extremely cold temperatures were rare. The summer heat gave concern for some<sup>697</sup> but overall the pleasant climate appealed to the emigrants. The Australian sunshine and clear blue sky made many colonists happy. The magically blue Australian sky was always the centre of admiration among the English colonists who were used to the mostly dull and grey colouring of the English firmament. Mary Spencer expressed her delight in her Victorian diary in 1855:

The sky here is certainly far more beautiful than an English sky; we see the cerulean blue, so often attempted by painters. Would that I could give a description of a sunset at the Lake when the blue is reflected in its clear margin. Thousands of trees of every description begird, as it were, the horizon; nothing else visible except the sky and the river.<sup>698</sup>

I showed in Chapter One that many British people left the old country in search of a warmer climate. But not everybody appreciated the brightness and warmth of the Australian sun at first. Some colonists needed time to get acclimatised. At the beginning Rachel Henning disliked sunny days because there were too many of them. She much preferred the cool autumnal days because they reminded her of England. She told her brother-in-law Mr Boyce in a letter from Appin on 29 March 1855 that 'I like this autumn weather, for it feels like England. [...] I was tired of the perpetual glare of sunshine. Fine days here bring me no pleasure as they do in England: they are too hot and too numerous, and besides, you cannot enjoy them by taking nice walks - there are no walks to take.' Her opinion was to change, however. By 1867 Rachel was

<sup>696</sup> Rickard, *Australia* 42.

<sup>697</sup> Mrs T. Holder Cowl spent three years at Normanton in the Gulf of Carpentaria in the early 1870s. She described the heat as one of the 'hardships' of her residence there. She distinguished two kinds of heat: the 'intense furnace heat' and the 'boiling vapour heat'. Mrs T. Holder Cowl, *Some of my Experiences During a Voyage to the Gulf of Carpentaria and Three Years' Residence at Normanton in the Early Seventies* (Brisbane: Besley & Pike, 1907): 31. Eliza Brown also suffered from the heat in the Swan River Settlement. For three months of the year they felt 'very uncomfortable [...] at this trying time'. Everything was still, not even the birds, the cattle or the sheep made any noise. The morning and evening hours were pleasant and the heat became unbearable for about six hours when everybody laid down in the shade but few could fall asleep. Eliza did not want to complain, however, and admitted that she preferred the heat to the 'bitter cold of an English winter'. Peter Cowan, ed., *A Faithful Picture: The letters of Eliza and Thomas Brown at York in the Swan River Colony 1841-1852* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1991): 56.

<sup>698</sup> Cooper, *Aunt Spencer's Diary* 51.

happily married and was living on the Myall River, near Stroud, New South Wales. Her letter to Etta dated 20 March showed her joy at the climate: 'I wish I could send you a little of our sunshine. England is a far better country than this in many respects, but there is nothing like the bright warm Australian climate for comfort and also, I think, for cheerfulness. It is difficult to be out of spirits when the warm sun is shining.'<sup>699</sup> Rachel needed time to accept the Australian climate and had to adjust her new lifestyle to it.

Bob Reece argues that the salubrious climate was appreciated by many men for reasons other than recreational. He notes that the mild climate was also advantageous for economic considerations. Unlike Canada and the northern states of America there was no harsh winter in Australia and thus the settlers could continue working in the open air all throughout the year. Many male writers also emphasised that the favourable climate produced healthy people<sup>700</sup> as well as good-quality fruits and vegetables. Colonial Australia was therefore seen as an asset to the English crown. Edward Williams, who visited the Moreton Bay settlement in the 1850s pointed out that 'the climate of Moreton Bay is favourable to vegetable, and other forms of animal, life as it seems to be to man'.<sup>701</sup>

Chapter Three has shown that colonial women had little time at their disposal. They were busy with housework and station matters but whenever they had some free time they liked to spend it the way they did in Britain. Emma Macpherson noted the importance of leisure hours in the life of gentlewomen in the bush. Her short experience of bush life in Keera in New South Wales showed her the value of recreational activities after a hard day's work.

Not that I mean to assert that existence in the bush is wholly void of its pleasures, for, independently of the happiness always following duties well filled, there is an intense appreciation of the hour or two's leisure, which those who have the whole day at their command can hardly understand. The evening ride over hill and dale, the strolls by the banks of the river, the perusal of some new book – which like angels' visits, come few and far between – are indeed sources of great enjoyment.<sup>702</sup>

Recreational activities not only provided entertainment and relaxation, they also served to reinforce genteel values: they proved that even gentlewomen who had to work in the bush were indeed ladies because some portion of their time was taken up by leisurely activities. Emma Floyd argues that 'genteel activities were used to escape the rigors of arduous chores. Such activities also helped distinguish gentlewomen from the "lower" orders of working women in the

<sup>699</sup> Adams, *The Letters of Rachel Henning* 27, 235.

<sup>700</sup> Bob Reece, *Australia, the Beckoning Continent: Nineteenth century emigration literature* (London: University of London, 1988): 9. An anonymous Queensland resident also emphasised the suitability of the pleasant climate for work all year round. An eight years' resident, *The Queen of the Colonies* 184-185.

<sup>701</sup> Wilson, *Rambles at the Antipodes* 21.

<sup>702</sup> Macpherson, *My Experiences in Australia* 200.

more volatile social climate.<sup>703</sup>

Scholars have paid scarce attention to the depiction of colonial gentlewomen's recreational activities in rural areas.<sup>704</sup> I will argue that colonial women found plenty of amusements in the Australian bush. They enjoyed walking and riding and they delighted in other activities such as fishing, bathing, hunting and picnics. These activities were not considered as sport in the modern sense of the word. Janet Dunbar points out that gentlewomen would have looked at 'an "athletic woman" with horror'. Recreational activities nonetheless provided plenty of exercise for these women.<sup>705</sup>

Walking was perhaps the most simple form of relaxation. When Emma Macpherson was writing her Australian reminiscences in Scotland she looked back on her ramblings through the bush as something that 'I enjoyed more than I did anything else in the colony'.<sup>706</sup> Going for a walk in the bush not only provided much needed recreation but it was also an excellent opportunity both to socialise with others and to get to know the area. Louisa Clifton often noted in her diary how large the party was with whom she went strolling at Australind in 1841. She also recorded the kind of scenery that opened up before them. On 20 June she was accompanied by a great number of people to the nearby swamp and was charmed by the scenery that opened up from that point.<sup>707</sup> It must have been entertaining to take a walk in the company of other people<sup>708</sup> but at the same time it was also a necessary precaution against losing one's way in the

<sup>703</sup> Emma Floyd, "Without artificial constraint: Gentility and British gentlewomen in rural Australia" in Rita S. Kranidis, ed., *Imperial Objects* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998): 92-93.

<sup>704</sup> Joan Perkin discusses the characteristics of Victorian women and devotes one chapter to women's recreational activities. Perkin concentrates chiefly on such amusements as shopping, dancing and reading, and only a very few rural entertainments such as riding and seaside holidays are mentioned. Joan Perkin, *Victorian Women* (London: John Murray, 1993): Chapter Five: Time of their own – Women's interests and entertainments 93-112. James William Cumes provides only a brief discussion of colonial women's recreational activities in his book *Their Chastity was not Too Rigid – Leisure times in early Australia*. He analyses the development of Government balls and dinners, horseracing, cricket and the theatre in colonial Australia, but touches only lightly on rural entertainments and women. James William Cumes, *Their Chastity was not Too Rigid – Leisure times in early Australia* (Melbourne: Longman, 1979): See especially 204 – 210 on colonial gentlewomen and 240-247 on entertainment in rural areas. Jennifer Isaacs is more informative about rural recreation but she, too, tends to be descriptive rather than analytical. Jennifer Isaacs, *Pioneer Women of the Bush and Outback* (Willoughby, NSW: Lansdowne Press, 1990): 225-238.

<sup>705</sup> Janet Dunbar, *The Early Victorian Woman – Some aspects of her life (1837-57)* (London: George G. Harrap, 1953): 92. In Chapter VIII she also discusses various leisurely activities in which gentlewomen in Britain were involved. 86-94.

<sup>706</sup> Macpherson, *My Experiences in Australia* 44.

<sup>707</sup> Frost, *No Place for a Nervous Lady* 75.

<sup>708</sup> Melissa Harper notes that the bush became 'a place of rest and recreation' for many urban Australians in the second half of the nineteenth century. Contemporary newspapers promoted pleasure trips to the bush by publishing articles about several 'beauty spots'. By the late 1860s there were some guidebooks on the market such as *Guide for Excursionists from Melbourne* and *Guide to Excursionists from the Mainland to Tasmania*. At first such excursions were the privilege of the middle and upper classes but by the end of the century even many working-class families could afford these trips to the bush. Harper points out that these people went walking to enjoy the scenery and the

bush.

Rambling in the bush was equally amusing for men. Edward Curr, for example, loved exploring unknown territory in Victoria 'for a little change of life' in the 1840s.<sup>709</sup> As a man, however, he was more mobile and could venture into farther places than most women. For Edward walking in the bush implied not only a form of recreation and the act of observing nature but it also freed him from the drudgery of everyday station life. It was in a way an escape for him. Jane Cannan's husband also liked taking a walk in his free time. Jane and David arrived in Melbourne in 1853 and stayed there for four years before they returned to England. Jane noted in her letter home that she often went for a walk with her husband. She wrote that 'sometimes we have two walks a day, and sometimes one long one of five miles [...] as there is more time to be sociable now, than when he was so busy and so tired with his days work [sic]'.<sup>710</sup> This piece of information suggests that men's leisure hours depended on their work schedules.

Apart from walkers, the bush was also a favourite area with horse riders. Riding was very popular among gentlewomen in Britain. There were parks in the cities and country lanes on the outskirts of towns where they could go for a ride.<sup>711</sup> Marion Amies notes that riding was a necessary skill in the bush for colonial ladies. While in general it was considered a form of exercise and displayed the rider's social status, horse riding had more practical implications in Australia. It was a crucial skill for those women who lived on isolated stations. The ability to ride secured them a link with the outside world. Those who could not ride were deprived of independence and social contact. Among other things they could not go visiting or even to church.<sup>712</sup> As we have seen, the lack of female companionship cut very deep into the heart of lonely bush women.

Several colonial ladies wrote about the pleasure horse riding gave them during their life in the bush. Harriett Daly enjoyed riding in the vicinity of Palmerston in the early 1870s. She liked exploring the nearby country and took delight in the wonderful scenery of the area. She loved the waterfalls at Doctor's Gully, the white beach at Fanny Bay and in general the tropical vegetation. Horse riding gave her the opportunity for enjoyment. She recalled in her

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physical exercise. They were not yet bushwalkers in the modern sense of the word. They were only 'recreational walkers' as she defines them. The bushwalking movement started only in the 1920s. Melissa Harper, "Sensuality in sandshoes" *Australian Historical Studies* Vol. 31, No. 115, (2000): 287-288.

<sup>709</sup> Curr, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria* 406.

<sup>710</sup> Jane Dorothea Cannan, Letters 1853-1856. MS 401, National Library, Canberra, Letter to Mrs Cannan dated Melbourne 7 July 1856.

<sup>711</sup> Janet Dunbar, *The Early Victorian Woman* 92.

<sup>712</sup> Marion Amies, "The Victorian governess and colonial ideals of womanhood" *Victorian Studies* Vol. 31, No. 4, (1988): 553.

reminiscences that 'we were able to make up riding parties, and to explore more fully the country about Palmerston. These rides were the greatest joy of our lives. After a hard day's work it was pleasant to mount our horses, ride out of camp, and along the bridle tracks.' She found these country excursions a liberating experience. She could go anywhere she wanted and there were no boundaries to restrict her movement. Harriett pointed out that 'there was a sense of boundless freedom in the country'.<sup>713</sup>

Colonial women may have felt 'a sense of boundless freedom' while they were going for a ride but they still rode side-saddle.<sup>714</sup> They insisted on riding side-saddle even though there were probably only a few people around to see them. They did not want to give up on this ladylike form of horse riding. The side-saddle was disregarded only in cases of emergency, as Catherine Rees noted. In 1893 she was a seven-year-old-child and lived with her family on a property in the Blackall Ranges near Brisbane. While her father was away working on the land their flour supply suddenly ran out. Her mother could not stand to see her family starving so she decided something drastic had to be done. 'Mother had no alternative but to go out into the rain and round up a horse. She donned a pair of Father's trousers, put his saddle on the horse and rode astride! – a thing "not done" in those early days -- a distance of three miles to McCarthy's small store.' Catherine's mother could not bear to see her children go hungry, so she broke the rules about women having to wear proper dress and riding side-saddle for the sake of her children. She arrived safely at the store in the pouring rain and the children did not have to start the day without hot bread for breakfast.<sup>715</sup>

Lakes and rivers were also made use of for recreational purposes. Bathing and fishing were two other popular pastimes colonial women could indulge in. Mary Spencer took great delight not only in her walks but also in bathing during her short stay in Victoria in 1854. She noted in her diary that she often went bathing with Emily Josephine Clarke, the young daughter of her niece, when she was staying at the Junction where the Murray and Ovens rivers united north of Wangaratta. She wrote on 10 February 1855 that 'we frequently walk to the banks of the

<sup>713</sup> Mrs Dominic D. Daly, *Digging, Squatting and Pioneering in the Northern Territory of South Australia* (Victoria Park, WA: Hesperian Press, 1984): 57-58, 62.

<sup>714</sup> Perkin, *Victorian Women* 106. Janet Millett recorded in her Western Australian memoir in 1872 that the colonial girls were keen horse-riders and considered their side-saddle 'as a possession much to be coveted'. Millett, *An Australian Parsonage* 167. The side-saddle was seen as necessary equipment for women even as late as 1902. When Jeannie Gunn wished to accompany her husband to Elsey Station in the Northern Territory the station men placed several obstacles in her way. Among other things they were reluctant to provide a side-saddle for her. Mrs Aeneas Gunn, *We of the Never-Never* (London: Hutchinson, n.d.): 15.

<sup>715</sup> Catherine E. Rees, "Recollections of the Early Days in Maleny" P 994.3 REE C2, John Oxley Library, Brisbane, (1977): 9.

Murray where we bathe almost daily – no fear of being seen except by cockatoos, magpies or crows. We bathe in a kind of creek, formed by the windings of the river where there is a firm bed of sand.<sup>716</sup> In the nineteenth century the two sexes did not mix at the beach and women and men swam separately.<sup>717</sup>

Lakes and rivers provided other forms of entertainment such as fishing. It was another popular pastime and quite a few colonial women recorded their fishing excursions. Maggie Simson was one of them. She was born in Tasmania in 1861 and after the death of her parents her aunt Ellen brought her over to Victoria in 1874 to live in Geelong. When she turned twenty-three years old she spent almost three months in Casterton. She recorded in her diary on 28 January 1884 that she attended a picnic by the river in company of some other young people. She spent almost the whole day fishing and caught some blackfish.<sup>718</sup>

Hunting was very popular even in Australia and colonial ladies also took an active part in this elitist recreational pastime. Tom Griffiths argues that 'in the imperial culture, hunting was an elite sporting and intellectual pursuit, class-conscious and recreational: it was a quest for sport, science and trophies, a "refined" hunting and gathering'.<sup>719</sup> When English colonists settled in Australia they also transplanted the tradition of hunting. The Hill sisters remarked in their narrative how strong was the passion for hunting in the blood of the Anglo-Saxon race regardless of their place of residence: 'so ingrain [sic] in the Anglo-Saxon is the love of galloping over fields and jumping fences and streams in hot pursuit'.<sup>720</sup> Bill Thorpe points out that in Australia hunting was therefore 'a natural extension of social and sporting precedents formed in Britain'.<sup>721</sup>

Hunting in Australia took a slightly different form and appealed to people on a much wider scale. Traditionally, fox and deer were the chief prey of the hunters but these animals were

<sup>716</sup> Cooper, *Aunt Spencer's Diary* 51.

<sup>717</sup> Rachel Henning went on a day trip with her sister Annie, her brother Biddulph and Mr Taylor near Exmoor on 10 October 1864. They reached the Broken River and while the two men went to inspect a pasture land the two women 'took the opportunity of their absence to get a beautiful bathe in the river' – as Rachel recalled in her letter the following day. Adams, *The Letters of Rachel Henning* 181-182.

<sup>718</sup> Euphemia Grant Lipp, ed., *Onward Then!: A lovely diary* (Canberra: A.E. Grant Lipp, 2001): 24. Elizabeth Ramsay-Laye was particularly fond of fishing. In her reminiscences she vividly described several occasions when she practised this hobby. On one occasion they went fishing in a creek near Castlemaine, Victoria and she succeeded in catching crawfish. Ramsay-Laye, *Social Life and Manners in Australia* 44-45. See also 98-99; Emma Macpherson also enjoyed fishing occasionally. Macpherson, *My Experiences in Australia* 250.

<sup>719</sup> Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 12. For a discussion of the evolution of hunting in the English context see James Urry, "Savage sportsmen" in Ian Donaldson, et al., eds, *Seeing the First Australians* (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1985): 55-57.

<sup>720</sup> Hill, *What We Saw in Australia* 174.

<sup>721</sup> Bill Thorpe, "Aborigines, settlers and the fauna war in colonial Queensland" *Journal of Australian Studies* No. 19, (1986): 21.

not to be found in Australia. They were later introduced to recreate the English environment.<sup>722</sup> In the Australian circumstances kangaroos were the most popular prey. Louisa Meredith noted that 'a kangaroo is sometimes hunted as a substitute for the old country fox, and, being wild and swift creature, is said to afford excellent sport'.<sup>723</sup> Koalas and possums were also hunted for pleasure.<sup>724</sup>

In nineteenth-century Australia, colonial ladies were active participants of hunting parties. Paul de Serville notes that hunting was 'one of the few areas of great energy and danger where women could compete with men on equal terms'.<sup>725</sup> Elizabeth Ramsay-Laye enjoyed a kangaroo hunt from time to time. She was once invited for a visit to Mr G.'s property on the banks of the Yarra River. They saw some kangaroos on the hills that tempted their party for a hunt. So the following morning they took a dog with them and left for the bush in search of kangaroos. They saw several mobs but in the end killed only one kangaroo. Elizabeth boasted of her achievement in her narrative: 'I am proud to say I was in at the death, and a more exciting run it would have been impossible to have had'.<sup>726</sup> Elizabeth considered this sport as the most enjoyable outdoor amusement she had in the colony. Her reasons were as follows:

it combined so much the exhilarating gallop on a good horse, and lovely scenery to admire when slowly riding, and so many new and interesting objects to attract the attention, with the wild excitement of following the graceful animals as they started off with such tremendous leaps as must be witnessed to be believed.<sup>727</sup>

In addition to the excitement of the chase, Elizabeth also appreciated the surrounding natural environment during the ride. She also compared kangaroo-hunting to fox-hunting and noted that the former was 'nearly equal in interest' to its English counterpart.<sup>728</sup> This statement shows that she had obviously participated in hunting expeditions even at home.

<sup>722</sup> Linden Gillbank, "The origins of the Acclimatisation Society of Victoria" *Historical Records of Australian Science* Vol. 6, No. 3, (1986): 372.

<sup>723</sup> Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania* vol. 1: 35.

<sup>724</sup> Kangaroos were not the only animals that the hunters set their eyes on in Australia. Introduced species like foxes were also hunted. Fanny Barbour recalled going fox-hunting in the bush near Bundaberg on 1 September 1887. In her diary she noted that 'we had great sport [...]. We shot any quantity of foxes.' Other native animals were also appreciated. She also recorded in her diary the shooting of a 'native bear' and some parrots two days earlier. Fanny H. Barbour, "Jottings", or Diary MS 8694 La Trobe Library, Melbourne (12 July 1887 - 20 May 1888): 48, 44. Possum-hunting was another favourite activity. Ada Cambridge also indulged in this pastime in the early 1870s in her second home 'Como' in Yackandandah. There was a romantic lake nearby which attracted a great colony of possums. Both she and her dogs 'enjoyed such 'possum hunts as we never had elsewhere'. Cambridge, *Thirty Years in Australia* 66.

<sup>725</sup> Paul de Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees - The upper class in Victoria 1850-1880* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1991): 139.

<sup>726</sup> Ramsay-Laye, *Social Life and Manners in Australia* 147.

<sup>727</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>728</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

Emily Bowring's sketch entitled "Kangaroo Hunting"<sup>729</sup> (Picture 2) shows a man and a woman as they are galloping after a mob of kangaroos. The gentlewoman is riding side-saddle. Two greyhounds help them in their hunt and they are riding their horses in park-like scenery. It is interesting to point out that it is the male hunter who is depicted in the foreground of the picture and the woman is seen slightly in the background. This makes the impression as if the man was in charge of the hunt while the woman was only accompanying him in this pursuit.<sup>730</sup>



*Kangaroo Hunting*

Emily Bowring: Kangaroo hunting

Picture 2

**Kangaroo hunting was a popular pastime among gentlewomen who usually rode side-saddle. The male and female hunters depicted on this picture are chasing a mob of kangaroos in a park-like area.**

<sup>729</sup> K.R. von Stieglitz, ed., *Sketches in Early Tasmania and Victoria by Emily Bowring* (Hobart: Fullerton Bookshop, 1965): 16.

<sup>730</sup> Samuel Thomas Gill painted a series of kangaroo hunting pictures. S.T. Gill, Kangaroo hunting No. 1., Picture Collection, National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an6016180>, Kangaroo hunting No. 2., <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an6016187>. Women are not depicted in these pictures.

Kangaroo hunting was also popular among men.<sup>731</sup> But some men pursued this activity not only for recreation and fun, but also for necessity. For James Hamilton the killing of kangaroos was a part of his job. He was a pioneer Victorian settler and he recorded in his narrative that while he was shepherding at Bringalbert, later known as Uram Uram Springs, in the 1850s he had to kill a great many kangaroos. In one particular year he killed as many as two thousand of them. He admitted that kangaroo hunting was not a 'wanton sport' but a necessity because they ate too much grass. He pointed out that 'as we were paying a big rent to the Government, [...] we could not afford to feed kangaroos'.<sup>732</sup>

The bush also provided the ideal setting for large gatherings of people. In addition to hunting parties, the picnic was another great social occasion in a rural environment. Both city-dwellers and small town residents enjoyed this form of entertainment. It was also English in its origins and was a 'characteristic nineteenth-century institution'.<sup>733</sup> These outings enjoyed wide popularity. Jennifer Isaacs notes that family and community picnics were very frequent sources of relaxation.<sup>734</sup> Ada Cambridge recalled that 'picnics were our joy, also our forte' in their fourth home in Coleraine 32 kilometres away from Ballarat where they lived at the end of the 1870s. She was at that time enjoying a busy social life as the wife of the local parson. Ada also thought that the surrounding country was particularly appealing to picnic parties.<sup>735</sup> Louisa Meredith called the picnics at her Tasmanian home at Cambria 'rural banquets' and 'sylvan banquets',<sup>736</sup> while Fanny Barbour looked on one picnic she had in Heidelberg near Melbourne on 25 November 1887 as a 'Bohemian excursion'.<sup>737</sup>

Apart from providing a pleasant place for eating and socialising, the picnic also provided an excellent opportunity to discover the country.<sup>738</sup> For this reason picnics were beloved by city

<sup>731</sup> Francis W.L. Adams wrote about the excitement of kangaroo hunting in his poem "The kangaroo hunt". Douglas B.W. Sladen, ed., *A Century of Australian Song* (London: Walter Scott, 1888): 37-38.

<sup>732</sup> James C. Hamilton, *Pioneering Days in Western Victoria - A narrative of early station life* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1923): 22.

<sup>733</sup> Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987): 156.

<sup>734</sup> Isaacs, *Pioneer Women of the Bush and Outback* 235.

<sup>735</sup> Cambridge, *Thirty Years in Australia* 137.

<sup>736</sup> Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania* Vol. 1: 100-101.

<sup>737</sup> Barbour, "Jottings" 127-131.

<sup>738</sup> Clara Aspinall participated in a few picnics during her stay in Victoria in the late 1850s. While mainly the social aspects of these picnics remained in her memory she nevertheless described the surrounding country to a certain extent. While she was on a short visit up-country in 1860 she attended a picnic near Kyneton. She was particularly impressed with a rock formation called Dryden's Rock. Aspinall, *Three Years in Melbourne* 38, 201. Not everybody, however, had an eye for the beauties of nature. Blanche Mitchell is a good case in point. She was a colonial-born girl and kept a diary when she was a teenager in Sydney between 1858 and 1861. She recounted two picnics: one took place at Coogee on 13 February 1858, while the other was in early January 1859 at Bradley's Head. She did not devote any space to landscape appraisal because she was too busy describing the social aspect of

people. Elizabeth R. Laye noted in Melbourne that dinners and balls were popular events on the social calendar but she believed that picnic parties were 'by far the most enjoyable of the city amusements'.<sup>739</sup> But such an entertainment was not only the privilege of the city folk. For those in the country the picnic was a great opportunity to be together with other people. Sarah Midgley lived with her family at Yangery Grange in Victoria in the 1850s. She kept a diary of her everyday life between 1851 and 1861 and in it she often described the picnics she attended. On 27 November 1857 she took part in a picnic at Tower Hill Island. They went to see a former volcano and enjoyed the view of the surrounding area that opened up from the top. They also had lunch there. Sarah recorded it as a 'very pleasant and interesting day'.<sup>740</sup>

I have argued in this section that the salubrious climate was not only an attraction for migrants seeking good health but it also enabled colonial gentlewomen to participate in a great variety of outdoor activities. The bush provided space for recreational activities such as walking, bathing, fishing and riding. Informal social gatherings such as picnics and hunting expeditions also took place there. These activities made contact with nature a personal experience and helped women get to know the surrounding environment. Furthermore, these recreational activities affirmed colonial women's gentility in a society where circumstances demanded some physical work from them.

Colonial men also took advantage of these recreational activities and accompanied their womenfolk on their walks or rides; they also took part in picnic parties and hunts as the above examples suggested. For most of them these activities must have provided a great means of relaxation after a hard day's or week's work on the station. Gentlewomen also needed a rest after their share of work, but as I pointed out earlier they tended to use these outdoor activities to reaffirm their gentility. Their walks or rides were therefore more than simple recreational activities.

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the outing. Blanche Mitchell, *Blanche - An Australian diary 1858-61* (Sydney: John Ferguson, 1980): 34-38, 161-162.

<sup>739</sup> Laye, *Social Life and Manners in Australia* 97. Survey Paddock, a large wooded park on the banks of the Yarra River, was considered to be the most popular spot for these 'bushing parties'. Elizabeth first went there with her Castlemaine friends by boat. They very much enjoyed the scenery of gentlemen's houses and gum trees along the river. Elizabeth noted that 'the scenery, from the twistings and windings of the river, was ever presenting new aspects, and many an exclamation of delight escaped us in chorus as new scenes were thus unfolded to our view'. *Ibid.*

<sup>740</sup> H.A. McCorkell, ed., *The Diaries of Sarah Midgley and Richard Skilbeck: A story of Australian settlers 1851-64* (Melbourne: Cassell, 1967): 48-49. Men also attended picnic parties. Richard Skilbeck, Sarah's cousin, recorded picnics in his diary. *Ibid.*, 157. See also 188.

### The Bush as a Threat

The bush could also pose major threats to the settlers. Its unfamiliar vastness, venomous snakes and terrifying dimensions in times of extreme weather conditions could all be menacing. The colonists sometimes found themselves defenceless against the forces of nature.<sup>741</sup> From time to time bushfires and floods swept through their grazing land and destroyed their property and homes, their cattle were drowned in floods or died of thirst during times of drought. Poisonous snakes were always a concern and there was also the danger of getting lost in the bush. Apart from providing the scene for recreational activities the bush could also shatter the lives of many. In her recollections Alice Hughes summed up some of the dangers that faced the settlers. She recalled that in her South Australian childhood in the 1840s her mother set certain limits to the children's liberty. They lived only two kilometres away from the little township of Wellington but her mother was afraid 'the blacks would steal us, the snakes bite us, or that we should get drowned in the river, or lost in the scrub'. They were therefore asked to play under the shade of a tree only.<sup>742</sup>

As the previous section showed, colonial women liked to take a ramble or a ride in the bush. They were not always safe forms of relaxation, though, and many colonists got lost. They usually blamed the monotonous and unremarkable nature of the Australian trees for not finding their way back. Even though colonial women recorded fatalities arising from people losing their way in the bush, it appears that none of our gentlewomen died this way. If lost it was not for long and in the end they all reached home safe and sound.

Lucy Gray's journal recorded two years of station life in Hughenden on the Flinders River in northern Queensland in the late 1860s. Her husband was often away working on the cattle station and Lucy regularly went for a ride on her own. She recorded that she found herself lost in the bush one day, but luckily her ordeal did not last long. She had the presence of mind to retrace her steps to the familiar path. Eventually, she reached a place that she knew well where she met her husband and his workmates. But rather than admitting the agonies she went through, Lucy decided not to let the others know what had happened to her. She noted in her diary that 'they were surprised to see me out there at that time. Of course I did not tell them that I had lost my way.'<sup>743</sup>

<sup>741</sup> Jennifer Isaacs notes that dust, drought, heat and flies often caused inconveniences to female settlers in the bush. Isaacs, *Pioneer Women of the Bush and Outback* 30-33.

<sup>742</sup> Mrs F. Hughes, *My Childhood in Australia* (London: Digby, Long, 1892): 15.

<sup>743</sup> Lucy Gray, "Life on the Flinders River (1868-70)" *Queensland Heritage* Vol. 1, No. 2, (1965): 18. Rachel Henning was luckier and she did not have to bear the burden of such a misfortune entirely on her own. For her this

Colonial women feared their children might lose their way in the bush. Katherine McKell recalled that during her childhood in the 1850s and 1860s at Bolwarrah Station in the vicinity of Geelong, she and her sister Bella were only allowed to play near the homestead and were not permitted to go to the creek banks. It was a park-like area without tall bushes and grasses and so they were easily seen and heard by their mother or an elder sister. Such an arrangement was necessary because 'there was risk of children straying into the forests and getting lost'.<sup>744</sup> The rate of children who lost themselves in the bush in nineteenth-century Australia was very high.<sup>745</sup> It was such a common occurrence that the lost child became a distinctly Australian theme in colonial literature and art.<sup>746</sup> Stories of children lost in the bush also occur in women's non-fictional works and even in poetry.<sup>747</sup> They were included in the autobiographical writings as extreme examples of the threatening nature of the bush. They showed how easily human lives could be lost in the depths of the Australian scrub. The frequent recounting of these incidents signalled just how real that possibility was.

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episode in her life turned out to be a cheerful night never to be forgotten. On 10 October 1864 Rachel went on an excursion with her sister Annie, brother Biddulph, and Mr Taylor, the sheep overseer. They spent a pleasant afternoon on the banks of the Broken River eight kilometres from Exmoor in Queensland. Rachel discovered some interesting rock formations and made two sketches of them. On the way back, however, they lost themselves. They entered into such a deep discussion that they did not pay attention to where their horses were taking them. They tried to find the right path but they kept returning to the river. Luckily they made light of the situation and when they got back to the river the third time they 'all laughed, for it seemed as if we were bewitched and were condemned to wander up and down the Broken River for the rest of our natural lives', as Rachel recalled in her letter the following day. It was by then pitch dark. In the end they managed to reach home that night. This incident seemed rather 'absurd' to them firstly because it happened in the vicinity of their home and secondly because Biddulph had the reputation for being a 'very good bushman'. Despite the inconveniences Rachel enjoyed the 'moonlight ride home'. Adams, *The Letters of Rachel Henning* 181-182.

<sup>744</sup> Katherine McKell, *Old Days and Gold Days in Victoria (1852-1873). Being the memories of a pioneer family* (Melbourne: Edward A. Vidler, 1924): 25.

<sup>745</sup> Leigh Astbury, *City Bushmen* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1985): 158.

<sup>746</sup> Leigh Astbury argues that this theme was mythologised on account of its symbolic meaning. He writes that 'the lost child occupied a significant place in the larger contemporary preoccupation with questions of man's mortality against the forces of nature, and as a motif became a means of questioning and coming to terms with the nature of the Australian bush'. *Ibid.*, 158-175. Peter Pierce in his book on the lost child archetype elaborates a number of plausible shades of meaning this motif acquired in the literature of the 1880s. He writes about an Australian anxiety that ran deep among the settlers. Losing one's way in the bush stood for the lost battle that colonists were unsuccessfully trying to fight against the Australian continent. It perhaps indicated a deep sense of guilt for undertaking such a hopeless initiative. Peter Pierce, *The Country of Lost Children - An Australian anxiety* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 6. John Sheekter also wrote about this literary theme and he argues that the lost child became a figure of 'national determination'. It is this political aspect of this motif that Marcus Clarke's short story of 'Pretty Dick' and Joseph Furphy's lost children in *Such is Life* amply illustrate. John Sheekter, 'The lost child in Australian fiction' *Modern Fiction Studies* Vol. 27, No. 1, (1981): 62.

<sup>747</sup> Little Bell in Louisa Meredith's verse 'Lost' did not listen to her mother's warnings and wandered away from home while her mother went to see a sick old woman. The girl went chasing the singing birds and the beautiful butterflies and soon lost her way. A search party was launched as soon as her absence was noted but they never succeeded in tracing her footsteps. All they ever found was a 'little stringless shoe'. As shown earlier Louisa was an ardent admirer of nature and it is interesting to note that she, too, was aware of the dangers the bush could pose to little children. Little Bell was drawn to the bush by the attractive bush animals and in their happy companionship she failed to realise that she was entering dangerous territory. Her tragedy was the direct consequence of her curiosity

In her reminiscences Janet Millett recorded the story of a three-year-old toddler called little Tommy who wandered away from home. His mother was under the impression that Tommy had gone to see his father at work but when her husband returned and asked about Tommy they realised that they had lost sight of him. The search went on for days and weeks but without any success. A few months later somebody finally found little Tommy's earthly remains less than two kilometres away from his home. Janet blamed the very nature of the bush itself that rendered such incidents almost unavoidable. She argued that

The scenery possesses sufficient variety to please the eye but no strikingly distinctive features to remind a person that he has wandered from the way, or to help him to regain it. The trees shut out the distant view and seem to be endlessly repeated, and if the traveller fares along, either thinking of nothing, or too much absorbed in meditation to pay attention to the road, one quarter of a mile's aberration may place him in circumstances which, for utter loneliness and forlorn destitution, can find no parallel excepting on a raft at sea.<sup>748</sup>

Rosa Praed agreed that the principal reason for anybody getting lost was that there was 'not a landmark to guide' the traveller. She also added that in some cases the trouble could have been avoided if only the necessary precautions had been taken.<sup>749</sup> Ethel Pedley advised 'little people' in her book *Dot and the Kangaroo* that 'the best way to get found quickly is to wait in one place until the search parties find one'. She pointed out that 'the more one tries to find one's way home, the more one gets lost'.<sup>750</sup> Even though her book recorded a fictional version of the 'lost in the bush' theme, Ethel gave wise and practical advice to her young readers in the event they found themselves lost in rural areas.

Frederick McCubbin's painting "Lost (1886)"<sup>751</sup> (Picture 3) indicates the frustration a young woman felt when she found herself lost in the bush. McCubbin did not wish to paint the despairing expression on the face of this girl. Rather, he chose to show only her figure which takes up only a tiny portion of this picture. McCubbin is intent on capturing the Australian bush, depicting nature as still overwhelmingly powerful and alien. This forest does not resemble the European forest because it is not so much green as brownish-yellow. No wonder the girl lost her sense of direction because there is nothing to guide her: no creeks, no rock formations, no hills, no horizon, only the gumtrees that seem to surround her in endless monotony. In addition to

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and love of nature's playmates. Meredith, *Some of My Bush Friends in Tasmania* 83-95.

<sup>748</sup> Millett, *An Australian Parsonage* 264-265.

<sup>749</sup> Praed, *My Australian Girlhood* 106-107.

<sup>750</sup> Ethel Pedley, *Dot and the Kangaroo* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1980): 109.

<sup>751</sup> Jane Clark, et al., eds, *Golden Summers - Heidelberg and beyond* (Sydney: International Cultural Corporation of Australia, 1985): 64.



Frederick McCubbin: Lost (1886)  
Picture 3

This picture depicts a female person among towering (presumably mountain ash?) trees. It could be late summer or early autumn because she is wearing a straw hat possibly to protect her against the sun, the grass is burnt up and the eucalypt trees are shedding their bark. The girl seems to be in despair but it is not her tragedy that is highlighted in this picture. McCubbin entitled this painting "Lost" to reflect on the fate of many colonists who found themselves lost in the Australian bush. The human figure, however, is dwarfed by the huge gum trees that seem to put this human tragedy into the background. It is the beauty of the natural environment that is emphasised in this picture. The human misfortune seems more like an excuse for a landscape painting.

describing the dreadful situation of this lost girl, the picture also keeps the audience in suspense. We will never know what happened to this girl in the end: Did they eventually find her? Did she find her way home? Or did she perish? Even though the title of this painting indicates that it is about a girl who lost her way in the bush, it could better be described as a landscape painting. In sharp contrast to earlier Australian landscape paintings that included Aboriginal people, cattle or sheep in addition to the native vegetation, this landscape composition has a European figure in it. Her presence suggests danger rather than security which seems to imply that the Australian bush was beginning to be humanised but was not yet completely under the influence of the colonists.

Children occasionally vanished in the bush for other reasons, as well. Judith Godden notes that it was a common fear among the settlers that the Aborigines might steal their children.<sup>752</sup> But rather than stealing children, Aboriginal trackers were often instrumental in finding the lost ones. An illustration in the *Bulletin* entitled "Tracked!"<sup>753</sup> (Picture 4) depicts a happy scene. An indigenous man cooees to the rest of the searching party that he has found the lost child in the bush. The young girl (or boy?) lies by the bank of a creek but there is no indication whether she is alive or not. She seems to be missing one of her shoes which could be an indication that she has walked a long way from home. The happy face of the Aboriginal tracker indicates, however, that he might have arrived just in time to save the little girl's life. For the sake of propriety, though, the indigenous man is shown dressed in European clothes. The bush is drawn on this lithograph without any dominant features. Only a few shrubs can be seen in

<sup>752</sup> Judith Godden, "A new look at pioneer women" *Hecate - A women's Interdisciplinary Journal* Vol. V, No. 2, (1979): 18. Jane Roberts also encountered the story of a lost child during her seven-week-long stay in Fremantle in 1830. While there she learnt of a gentleman settler's eldest boy who went missing. Several search parties were launched to find him but every effort seemed unsuccessful. It was only a few weeks later when Jane had already arrived in Van Diemen's Land that she got news of the finding of the lost boy. In this instance the child went missing not because he was lured by the bush but because he was taken by the Aborigines. The indigenous Australians did not harm the little boy in any way. They were just curious and some Aboriginal men wished to show a 'white' boy to their womenfolk. Jane Roberts, *Two Years at Sea* (London: John W Parker, 1837): 35-37.

<sup>753</sup> Picture Collection, National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an8929052>



"TRACKED!"

National Library of Australia      nla.pic-an130,3052-w

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Garret & Co.: Tracked!

Picture 4

**Aboriginal trackers were often influential in finding lost people in the bush. The tracker's happy face and the proximity of water suggest that the little girl or boy might still be alive though greatly weakened by the agony of finding herself or himself lost in the bush.**

the foreground while some gum trees stand rather faded in the background. The picture appears to contribute to the image of the characterless bush usually given by the settlers as their reason

for getting lost.

Mary Boothby was an English woman who settled down with her husband at Tintinara Station 960 kilometres from Adelaide in 1864. She recalled in her memoir that when a shepherd's child went missing, her

husband had the great bell rung, and roused the station, and going up to the huts he enlisted the services of all available men, also summoning the best trackers among the tribe of blacks who possess to an extraordinary degree the faculty of tracing a lost person by signs on the ground and places they have passed through.

Mary stayed with the devastated mother until the men's return. Sadly, they did not succeed in finding the lost child.<sup>754</sup> As Mary's story demonstrates, it was usually the men who set about finding the lost one with the assistance of Aboriginal trackers. Women, like Mary Boothby, tended to stay behind and wait anxiously for the return of the search party.

Incidents retold by women writers concerning children and adults lost in the bush highlighted just how dangerous it could be to go for a walk or a ride in the bush, regardless of one's age or sex.<sup>755</sup> European colonists put aside their racial and other misconceptions about the Aborigines and greatly depended on their tracking skills and knowledge of the bush in their efforts to find the lost person.

There were other perceived dangers in the bush. Many lonely women were afraid of being attacked by 'wild' Aboriginal men, bushrangers, swagmen and male labourers while their husbands or fathers were working away on the station. Rose Paterson expressed her fear of the men who were 'working on the extension of the railway line from Yass passing through Illalong to Galong'. These 'navvies' were camping outside the house at Illalong, an isolated sheep station between Binalong and Yass in western New South Wales. In a letter dated 20 February 1875 Rose wrote about the anxiety that the lack of male protection brought about on such a remote property. She told her sister Nora in Queensland that

Andrew is away tonight [...]. There are such numbers of navvies camped quite close here that I feel rather nervous at being quite without protectors, at night particularly, as I feel sure that if a man were to walk into the room while I am writing I should be so petrified with fear that I should not be able to utter a single sound to arouse the friendly [sic] to my assistance.<sup>756</sup>

<sup>754</sup> Mary Boothby, "Memories of my bush life" *Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia* Vol. 12, (1989): 133-134.

<sup>755</sup> Men could also get lost in the bush. Rachel Henning recalled the story of a shepherd at Exmoor in 1864 who lost his way in the Flinders and came across the corpse of a gentleman who had probably also lost his way and perished. Adams, *The Letters of Rachel Henning* 168. John Hunter Kerr recalled that he had also become lost occasionally in the bush 'for several hours' because the 'general absence of salient features in the landscape renders it very difficult to recover a track once lost'. He also praised the Aboriginal trackers and pointed out that 'their keen faculty of observation rendered them expert trackers, while their frugal habits and powers of endurance qualified them to bear fatigue and exposure without much inconvenience'. Kerr, *Glimpses of Life in Victoria* 39-43.

<sup>756</sup> Rose was a colonial-born woman and married Andrew Bogle Paterson in 1862 when she was only eighteen years old. Colin Roderick, ed., *Rose Paterson's Illalong Letters 1873-1888* (East Roseville: Kangaroo Press, 2000): 42, 38-39.

Swagmen were another great annoyance for isolated women. Barbara Baynton's classic story "The Chosen Vessel" is perhaps the most well-known literary representation of this theme. It describes a lonely woman's agony when a swagman attempts to enter her isolated bush home.<sup>757</sup> Bushrangers also posed a potential danger to unprotected women. John Hunter Kerr pointed out that bushrangers often carried out their attacks 'by daylight' when the homesteads were 'left chiefly in charge of females, the men being absent on their out-of-door work'. They posed an equal threat to men and John stated that these bushrangers were 'a terror to the district'.<sup>758</sup> Sarah Musgrave recalled an incident in her personal narrative *The Wayback*. She was born in outback New South Wales in 1830 and lived on Burrangong Station. On an afternoon in 1835 she wandered away from the homestead a short distance when the Aboriginal women warned her of the approaching bushrangers. She immediately hurried back to the safety of the house with two men chasing her. Only her mother, the housekeeper and some children were at home then. The bushrangers Scotchie and Whitton were notorious for their cruelty. While they were searching the house for valuables two hundred black women came to the colonists' rescue. Their sheer number and loud screaming frightened the two men away. The two bushrangers continued to terrorise the district for some time but the police never managed to catch them.<sup>759</sup>

The bush posed a great threat to the settlers in many other ways.<sup>760</sup> Colonists also dreaded the consequences of the extreme weather conditions. While the colonists delighted in the Australian climate because it was mild and pleasant and made way for an outdoor lifestyle, the rainfall was unpredictable and long periods of drought made life difficult. Bushfires were also common and much-feared in dry circumstances. When the rain arrived it often resulted in

<sup>757</sup> Barbara Baynton, "The chosen vessel" in Barbara Baynton, *Bush Studies* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1980): 132-140.

<sup>758</sup> Kerr, *Glimpses of Life in Victoria* 35.

<sup>759</sup> Sarah Musgrave, *The Wayback* (West Wyalong: Bland District Historical Society and Young Historical Society, 1984): 8-12.

<sup>760</sup> Ringbarked trees were particularly dangerous. Judy Woolcot, one of the most popular fictional characters, died when a ringbarked tree fell on her. She was the main protagonist in Ethel Turner's classic children's book *Seven Little Australians*. Ethel Turner was born at Doncaster in England in 1872 and arrived in Sydney with her mother and sisters at the age of nine. She was educated at Sydney Girls' High School. She ran a monthly magazine called the *Parthenon* with her sister Lily for three years. She wrote short stories and children's columns for papers like the *Illustrated Sydney News* and the *Town and Country Journal*. Clarke, *Pen Portraits: Women writers and journalists in nineteenth-century Australia* 246-248. Judy was on a two-month-long holiday with her sisters, brothers and stepmother at Yarrahappini, 500 kilometres away from Sydney on the 'borders of the Never-Never Land'. Judy was looking after her youngest brother when she noticed that a nearby tree was about to fall down. She tried to protect him and while doing so the ringbarked tree crashed on her. She died soon after this unfortunate event. What started to be a happy country holiday at her grandparents' station ended in tragedy. It was their first time so far away from home in the bush. These city children enjoyed the pleasures of country-life such as cattle-drafting and picnics but this dreadful event during their short stay in the bush left a deep scar on their hearts and memories for ever. Ethel Turner, *Seven Little Australians* (London: Ward Lock, 1978): 135-192.

excessive flooding. All these natural disasters jeopardised the colonial enterprise of many settlers.

Bushfires were dreaded events in the life of the settlers. Alice Hughes described the horrifying aspects of the bushfire: 'If you are near enough to feel the heat, it is dreadful, the smoke suffocating, [...] the smuts flying everywhere, and the noise of the roaring flames deafening.' She once witnessed a bushfire on her family's South Australian station in the 1840s that threatened their house. She wrote in her reminiscences that 'never shall I forget the pain of that fire and heat; our heads and faces were sore and scorched, and burnt copper colour, our lips were swelled, our tongues dry and parched. It was a pain even to breathe.'<sup>761</sup>

Colonial women acknowledged the devastation bushfires posed to their property and stock, but they usually described them from the outsiders' point of view. Louisa Atkinson's depiction of a bush fire<sup>762</sup> (Picture 5) indicates that women sought to protect their children while men were trying to put out the fire and save the house.



Louisa Atkinson: *The bush fire*  
Picture 5

**Bushfires were common in rural Australia and posed a danger to human lives and property. Approaching bushfires have forced a mother and her six children to leave their isolated log hut. One man is helping carry the most essential belongings while three other men are attempting to put the fire out and save the property. The woman and the children's facial expressions suggest fear of this natural disaster and anxiety over their loved ones and their home.**

<sup>761</sup> Hughes, *My Childhood in Australia* 109, 111.

<sup>762</sup> Louisa Atkinson, *Gertrude, the Emigrant; A tale of colonial life* (Canberra: School of English and Australian Scholarly Editions Centre, University College, ADFA, in association with Mulini Press, 1998): 117.

Samuel Calvert's picture "Bush Fire in Australia"<sup>763</sup> (Picture 6) shows that it was the men who were battling with the blazes that were threatening their bush hut, while women protected the household. One gentlewoman is also depicted with a can of water while the other woman is apparently too scared by the sight of the blaze to do anything. It is without a doubt that women also helped in emergencies such as these, but these efforts were not emphasised in their accounts. Men, on the other hand, vividly described their own efforts in their narratives. James Hamilton, for example, stressed that on one occasion at Bringalbert in Victoria he was battling with the fires for 'three days and three nights without going to bed'.<sup>764</sup>

Several female writers were aware that some of the bushfires were deliberately lit by the Aborigines. Mary Thomas did not blame the Aborigines for this custom, though. She understood that it was their way of securing the food supply. By burning the bush they aimed to drive the kangaroos out to an area where they could easily hunt them. Snakes, which also formed part of Aboriginal diet, were also forced out of their holes by the fire. While the fires were essential in securing the food supplies of the Aborigines, they damaged the grazing fields of the white settlers.<sup>765</sup> Rhys Jones shows in his article on Aboriginal fire management or 'fire-stick farming' that providing an abundant food supply was not the only reason why the indigenous Australians regularly burnt the bush. Fires were used for signalling to a far-away group of people or another tribe, as well as for clearing the ground or simply for fun.<sup>766</sup> Louisa Meredith noted that even some Tasmanian pastoralists used the fires to secure fresh grass for their stock. Back-burning was occasionally employed and Louisa pointed out that the regular reduction of accumulated fuel could greatly reduce the devastating power of uncontrolled fires.<sup>767</sup>

Rivers could pose potential dangers to the settlers, as well. Some people drowned in rivers,<sup>768</sup> and floods were also much feared. Lucy Ann Edgar summed up the frightening images

<sup>763</sup> Picture Collection, National Library of Australia <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an8927792>

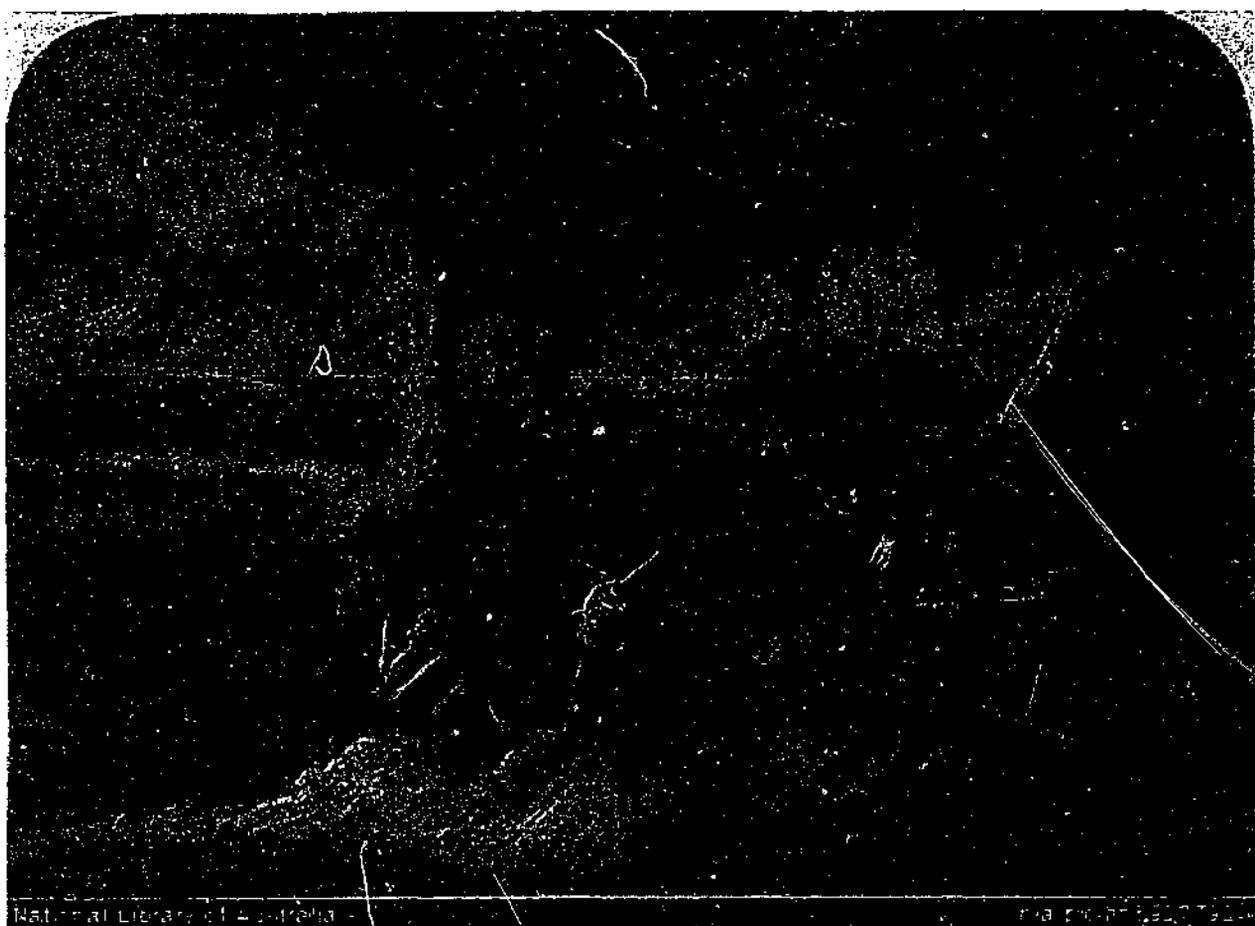
<sup>764</sup> Hamilton, *Pioneering Days in Western Victoria* 37.

<sup>765</sup> Evan Kyffin Thomas, ed., *The Diary and Letters of Mary Thomas 1836-1866: Being the early days of South Australia* (Adelaide: W.K. Thomas, 1915): 110-111. Some men were also familiar with Aboriginal fire management. Edward Curr acknowledged that the Aborigines transformed a huge continent with their fire-stick farming. He pointed out that 'it may perhaps be doubted whether any section of the human race has exercised a great influence on the physical condition of any large proportion of the globe than the wandering savages of Australia'. Curr, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria* 185-186.

<sup>766</sup> Rhys Jones, "Fire-stick farming" *Australian Natural History* Vol. 16, No. 7, (1969): 226-227. Tim Flannery shows that many early and later European commentators like James Cook and Ernst Giles also realised that the natives were systematically burning the bush. They also understood the importance of fire in the Aboriginal way of life. Flannery, *The Future Eaters* 217-218.

<sup>767</sup> Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania* Vol. 1: 109.

<sup>768</sup> Eliza Brown's five-year-old son drowned on 15 December 1844 in the river Avon in Western Australia. Vernon went there with his brother Aubrey on that fatal Sunday morning while their parents were perusing some papers. He climbed a tree in an attempt to find a bird's nest but the branch he was standing on broke and he fell into the river.



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Samuel Calvert: Bush fire in Australia

Picture 6

**Women occasionally helped put out the bush fire but their long dresses might have prevented them from being of any use. This picture depicts a group of people who are desperately trying to save their log hut and fenced property. Their efforts, however, seem to be in vain because everything around them is already on fire and they do not seem to have much more than a few cans of water to put out this high-intensity fire.**

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His three-year-old brother could not help him out of the water and their parents arrived at the scene too late to be of any assistance. They called the doctor but he could not help the poor child. Cowan, *A Faithful Picture* 74-75. The well was another source of potential tragedy. Georgiana Molloy lost her nineteen-month-old son Johnnie on 11 November 1837 at Augusta. She left him at her servant's care on that fatal morning while she was preparing to bake and churn. The servant girl was under the impression that Johnnie was playing with his sister and father but his absence was soon discovered. They went searching for him and after a while found his body in the well. Having no medical help nearby at Augusta they were unable to save his life and Johnnie soon died in his parents' arms. Hasluck, *Portrait with Background* 154-155.

that were associated with this natural phenomenon:

The flood, the flood! [...] That terrible foe, that destroyer of human life and property, that mighty force before which stone and iron, the strongest and best works of man, give way as if they were but toys – the dreaded, unexpected, devastating flood.<sup>769</sup>

In 1864 Henrietta Foott's family at Jandra on the Darling River also suffered from unusually heavy rains. Their house was flooded and they had to evacuate to a nearby sand-hill. She recalled the time when they had to leave their house: 'we resembled the dove in Noah's Ark that could find no resting-place'. They had to pitch up tents on that hill and spent seven weeks there before it was safe to return.<sup>770</sup>

Floods and bushfires were dreaded events in the life of the settlers but at the same time they provided grand spectacles for the observers. In 1866 Rachel Henning was fortunate enough to live in a house on the Myall River that stood on a hill and was therefore protected from the flood. She noted that 'a flood is a rather fine sight when seen from a hill like this'.<sup>771</sup> Bushfires were also great spectacles from a distance. Alice Hughes experienced several bushfires on her station home near Wellington in the 1840s. She observed that

It is a wonderful sight to see a fire at night full blaze; the flames rush along, devouring everything that comes before them, leaping from tree to tree. Perfect skeletons of trees stand like living coals of fire for several seconds before they shiver and fall in fragments to the ground, throwing up millions of sparks like a most beautiful piece of firework.<sup>772</sup>

Drought caused yet another environmental and human series of tragedies. "Silverleaf" devoted an entire article entitled "Seasons of drought" in the *Illustrated Sydney News* in 1881 to the description of station life in the drought. She had personally experienced the effects of the drought season on Terembone Station in north-western New South Wales.<sup>773</sup> In her view bush women found their 'comforts curtailed' and their 'cares increased' at such times. Not even their garden could be a source of pride and joy any more. Jessie Lloyd claimed that 'the most painful thing connected with a drought is man's helplessness, he feels as impotent to contend against its silent, stealthy persistence as he is to resist the inroads of the mighty ocean'. She noted that while man could fight a flood or a bushfire there was nothing he could do to ease the problem caused by drought. A certain amount of water could be stored to overcome short periods of dry weather but when it dried up 'man can do nothing but fold his hands and wait (oh, that weary waiting!)

<sup>769</sup> Lucy Ann Edgar, *Among the Black Boys: Being the history of an attempt at civilizing some young Aborigines of Australia* (London: Emily Faithfull, 1865): 58.

<sup>770</sup> Foott, *Sketches of Life in the Bush* 46-52.

<sup>771</sup> Adams, *The Letters of Rachel Henning* 223.

<sup>772</sup> Hughes, *My Childhood in Australia* 108-109. See also Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania* Vol. 1: 106-107. Bushfires and floods were sources of great tragedies and spectacular sights at the same time even for male observers. John Hunter Kerr also noted the aesthetic side of bushfires. He wrote that 'a bush-fire on a dark night presents a spectacle of great beauty and brilliancy'. Kerr, *Glimpses of Life in Victoria* 79.

<sup>773</sup> Clarke, *Pen Portraits* 130.

until God in his own good time sends forth the clouds and the rain to replenish the earth and prevent all living creatures from drying upon it'.<sup>774</sup>

Mary Hannay Foott<sup>775</sup> described the effect of the drought on human society in her poem "In time of drought". The first stanza details the sufferings of the sheep and cattle that 'stand / Wistful-eyed, where the waters were, / In a waste of gravel and sand;' while the second one focuses on the empty fields where the seeds cannot germinate and feed the people. Despite the human tragedies the drought can inflict on the people and their animals and crops, Mary suggests in her poem that it is after all God's will and people should accept His decisions. She quotes a line from a Psalm: 'The river of God is full of water' and finishes each stanza with a reference to this phrase.<sup>776</sup> The interesting aspect of this poem is that it only outlines the sufferings of the settlers and their domesticated animals. It makes no mention of the other creatures and plants that are also affected by the drought. The poem shows the western way of life with its focus on grazing animals and fields under cultivation as well as the Christian attitude to life according to which people should submit to God's rule.

Walter Smith's poem "Drought" provides an interesting contrast to Mary's verse. Its subtitle notes that it was 'written in 1877, when the Drought was at its worst'. It is considerably longer than Mary's poem and shows the effect of drought in a much more detailed way. Smith writes about the 'rotting carcasses / Of cattle and of sheep' and 'The starving stock all feebly crawl, / Poor wrecks of skin and bone'. He feels empathy with the settlers whose livelihood will be greatly devastated due to the drought.

Oh! many men who, but last year,  
 Counted their stock with pride,  
 With pockets bare, through empty runs,  
 Will now be doomed to ride.  
 O Demon Drought! that sweeps away  
 The hard-earned wealth of years.<sup>777</sup>

Smith only writes about men in his poem and how they were ruined by the drought. His verse assumes that men felt the impact of drought much more than women did. Women were also

<sup>774</sup> 'Silverleaf', "Seasons of drought" *Illustrated Sydney News* Vol. XVIII, No. 4, (23 April 1881): 10. For another example of how families were affected by the drought see Musgrave, *The Wayback* 37, 39.

<sup>775</sup> Mary Hannay Foott knew country life. She was born in Scotland in 1846 and arrived in Melbourne at the age of seven. In 1874 she married Thomas Wade Foott and became Henrietta Foott's daughter-in-law. First they lived at Bourke, New South Wales, and in 1877 they moved to their station Dundoo on the Yowah Creek in the far west of Queensland. The drought of 1883 destroyed much of their sheep and they were on the verge of financial ruin. It was probably this fateful drought that inspired Mary to write the above-mentioned poem. The following year Thomas died and Mary left the station. She opened a school in Brisbane and wrote poetry and articles for the local papers. She published a collection of poems entitled *Where the Pelican Builds and Other Poems* in 1885. Clarke, *Pen Portraits* 210-214.

<sup>776</sup> Elliott, *Bards in the Wilderness* 116.

<sup>777</sup> Sladen, *A Century of Australian Song* 453-455.

influenced by this environmental tragedy but men, as managers of their crops and stock, were much more aware of the financial damages that droughts caused. There is no mention of God's will in this poem perhaps because the author does not want to see this drought as a divine act. Mary's poem and Jessie Lloyd's article show that women were generally more inclined to attribute such events to God's will than men. I argued in Chapter Three that women tended to be more religious than men and the comparison of these three texts seems to point to the same conclusion.

In addition to being dependent on the mercy of the weather, settlers also had to tolerate certain bush animals. Insects<sup>778</sup> and dingoes<sup>779</sup> were often difficult to put up with, but snakes were perhaps the greatest annoyance in the bush. Henry Lawson in his short story "The Drover's Wife" gives perhaps the most famous literary account of lonely bush women's fear of the snake. This story also shows how a bush woman had to fight a bushfire and a flood while her husband was away droving.<sup>780</sup>

The snake is the 'symbol of evil' in Christian art<sup>781</sup> but in the Australian bush it was a real danger. Interestingly enough snake bites were not very common and only very few women complained about the actual misery of snake bites. It was the feeling of constant threat that registered with the colonists. Furthermore, the sheer presence of this reptile in the house or garden seemed to invade the domestic sphere of women. Alice Hughes stated in her South

<sup>778</sup> Mary Macleod Banks devoted a whole chapter to pests in her memoir of early Queensland life at Cressbrook. She separated the outdoor pests from the indoor ones. She listed ants among the indoor pests. The industrious white ants destroyed the wooden frame of the house while the flying ants left their wings in the sauce or the soft butter. Flies and mosquitoes were also troublesome. Outdoor pests 'were the torment of the pastoralist' as Mary noted. Grasshoppers and locusts were among this group of animals and they were responsible for destroying the grass. Mary Macleod Banks, *Memories of Pioneer Days in Queensland* (London: Heath Cranton, 1931): Chapter XII: 67-72. Edward Snell was tormented by mosquitoes and fleas during his stay in South Australia in the early 1850s and he regularly complained about them in his diary. Griffiths, *The Life and Adventures of Edward Snell* 86, 126, 260, 272.

<sup>779</sup> Dingoes were also a problem. Their howling at night was very annoying for most settlers. Mrs J.H. Young was a Scottish woman who arrived in Sydney with her family in 1837. She recorded the early years of her life in a magazine article in the *Sydney Mail* in 1926. Even at the age of ninety-three she could clearly remember the annoyance the dingoes caused with their howling. She recalled that when her sixth brother was born her father left the army and took up a cattle station on the Upper Macleay. The dingoes were still in great abundance in that area then. They howled dismally around the house and this set the family dogs barking. One night the whole family awoke to a strange noise. When they went out to see what was going on they found their dog Nettle fighting with a dingo. Her father went to the dog's help and hit the dingo with a shovel. This intervention put the dingo and thus the wrestling to an end. Mrs J.H. Young, "Ninety years ago - The story of a pioneer family of Port Macquarie" *Sydney Mail* Vol. XXX, No. 761, (8 December 1926): 13. Male settlers disliked the dingoes not only because of their howling but also because they often preyed on their stock. John Hunter Kerr noted that the dingo 'evinced a decided predilection for mutton, and has consequently drawn upon his head the inveterate enmity of all white men'. Kerr, *Glimpses of Life in Victoria* 171. See also Rolf Boldrewood, *Old Melbourne Memories* (Melbourne: William Heinemann, 1969): 106.

<sup>780</sup> Henry Lawson, *Henry Lawson Favourites* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1987): 12-18.

<sup>781</sup> James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* (London: John Murray, 1991): 285.

Australian childhood memoir that snakes 'destroyed our peace of mind a good deal'.<sup>782</sup> One would expect that women asked for the help of their menfolk to kill them, but the danger seemed so immediate that women learnt to kill snakes by themselves. Alice Hughes recounted that they became 'expert [...] at snake-killing'.<sup>783</sup>

The presence of snakes threatened colonial gentlewomen's enjoyment of their recreational activities in the bush. Katherine McKell recalled that snakes were 'the one fear that had kept us from venturing into dangerous scrub in search of wild raspberries' during her childhood on the Lyon Banks Estate.<sup>784</sup> Emmeline Macarthur recollected a number of snake-related incidents during her married life at Canning Downs in the late 1840s. She recalled that 'snakes abounded in that country [...]. I had a great fear of them; some were very deadly and would kill a horse very rapidly.' She was one of the few colonial writers who was bitten by a snake. Her husband George quickly bound her wrist with a bundle of quill pens. An Aboriginal man happened to be nearby and came to her assistance and sucked her wound. As was usual in such cases she was not allowed to go to bed at night and recovered quickly.<sup>785</sup>

Clearly, the bush could turn into a place of horror in times of extreme weather conditions. Bushfires, floods and long periods of drought left devastating marks on the settlers' lives and property. Bushfires, floods and droughts that destroyed property and stock affected men financially. John Hunter Kerr noted that 'much loss accrues to the colonial farmer from the singularly capricious nature of the Australian climate, with its alternating cycles of drought and flood'.<sup>786</sup> Their wives and daughters must also have felt the burden of their family's financial misfortune even though the running of the station was chiefly men's business. Men probably did not have much time – nor perhaps the inclination – to consider the aesthetic beauty of the

<sup>782</sup> Hughes, *My Childhood in Australia* 37. Isabella Ferguson recounted her first encounter with a snake in Australind in 1843 in a letter to her aunt. She pointed out that 'it was the first snake out of a show I had ever seen'. She then wrote that snakes were especially abundant after bushfires. She admitted her fear of them: 'the floor of our tent is covered with rushes and I am here quite alone, and I cannot say I am altogether free of fear knowing that such animals are not far off, last night we heard a rustling in the tent but could find nothing'. Prue Joske, *Dearest Isabella – The life and letters of Isabella Ferguson 1819-1910* (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1989): 26-27. Chapter Five will show that certain animals were welcome in the home. Snakes, on the other hand, could never be seen as pets that would bring joy to people in their homes.

<sup>783</sup> Hughes, *My Childhood in Australia* 41.

<sup>784</sup> McKell, *Old Days and Gold Days in Victoria* 99.

<sup>785</sup> Jane de Falbe, ed., *My Dear Miss Macarthur – The recollections of Emmeline Maria Macarthur (1828-1911)* (Kenthurst: Kangaroo Press, 1988): 50. Men were equally afraid of snakes and also filled their narratives with snake stories. See for example Hamilton, *Pioneering Days in Western Victoria* 88-89. John Hunter Kerr also noted how widespread the fear of snakes was even though not many people died of snakebites. He wrote that 'every summer has its new stock of snake stories, which are published with elaborate details in the local papers, yet it is a matter of thankfulness that, as a rule, they tell of hairbreadth escapes – very rarely of deaths'. Kerr, *Glimpses of Life in Victoria* 182-184.

<sup>786</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

bushfires and the flooded rivers when they were occupied with the task of trying to save their property and stock.

### Conclusion

Women applied a rich and diverse language to describe the landscape and in doing so they drew on their existing vocabulary of aesthetic terminology. Their view was mediated by contemporary European artistic theories and they reacted more positively to the kind of land formations that reminded them of the English countryside. The comparison was not always well-founded but nevertheless these women rejoiced in the slightest resemblance and cherished the image of the recreated English countryside in the colonial landscape.

The bush was appreciated not only by the senses but in other ways, too. Colonial women could enjoy the bush or take physical exercise, such as walking or riding. From the social point of view the bush provided an excellent setting for picnics and hunts. Unfavourable weather conditions, however, could wreak havoc in the lives and properties of the colonists. Drought, bushfires and floods turned the fortunes of many. Venomous animals like the snake, or annoying insects, on the other hand, were a nuisance to the travellers and settlers alike.

Most men considered the economic value of the land and usually described it in this way, as well as aesthetically. Such a perception revealed a dual vision of the environment that the great majority of women lacked. Women neglected to comment on the economic value of the land simply because it was outside their sphere of interest. They concentrated more on the recreational aspects of the bush because they wished to emphasise and practise their former genteel mode of life in the new and often rough context of the Australian bush. Women's aesthetic appreciation of the country was influenced by English ideas of the beautiful, their need for genteel recreational pursuits was adapted to fit the new environment, and the extreme weather conditions affected their families' economic livelihood.

There were many aspects of the bush that pleased colonial women but there were other aspects that they disliked. They felt threatened by the remoteness and vastness of the Australian wilderness and the unpredictability of the weather, but on the other hand, women enjoyed the mild climate, picturesque scenery and English-like land-formations. The Australian bush was therefore a loved and hated terrain at the same time. On the whole, colonial women tended to grow fond of their new environment because it offered them more possibilities especially in the area of outdoor recreation. The next chapter will argue that the study of natural history was another sign of colonial women's attachment to rural Australia.

# Chapter Five

*Flora and Fauna*

## Introduction

This chapter examines women's perception of and reaction to the natural wonders of the far-away British colonies. Mention will be made of a few women whose appreciation reached high scientific and aesthetic standards, but the emphasis is on common and everyday examples. In particular my inquiry will concern women's relationship with the native flowers and some bush animals. I will also look at early forms of environment protection.

## Natural History

A wide-scale interest in the natural world characterised educated Europeans in the nineteenth century. People were encouraged to appreciate nature and wonder at its amazing creatures and creations in an age when industrialisation and urbanisation were changing society. This section will seek to answer to what extent colonial women engaged in the study of natural history.

While in the seventeenth century a scientific interest in the natural world was the privilege of the upper classes, this trend underwent an enormous change in the following 200 years. By the early nineteenth century more and more people became involved in the various forms of nature studies. By this time natural history involved the study of nature in a more direct way. It was now a hands-on experience and people were encouraged to encounter nature in a close and personal way. While explorers were opening up pristine territory for British colonisation in far-away places such as Australia, ordinary people were inspired to discover their local environment. In England railroads made it easier for all classes of people to travel and see other landforms and natural habitats. Natural history was therefore made accessible to a wide spectrum of society.<sup>787</sup>

In her comprehensive study of natural history, Lynn Merrill points out that in the nineteenth century there was a subtle difference between science and natural history. The two disciplines had been more or less the same for centuries but by this period the two had separated. Science gradually referred to meticulous research into individual natural phenomena, while natural history examined nature as a whole. The pursuit of science became more and more professionalised while natural history still offered scope for the amateur.<sup>788</sup> Natural history was a 'field study of nature' and could appeal to anyone with an interest in the environment. Lynn Merrill explains that 'natural history is aesthetic science, nature closely examined to enhance the pleasure that an ordinary person takes in it. It offers pleasures of detail, form, and complexity, as

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<sup>787</sup> Lynn L. Merrill, *The Romance of Victorian Natural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989): 7, 8, 11.

well as evocative connotation and human associations.' It included the study of plants and animals as well as rocks, fossils and landforms.<sup>789</sup>

The study of natural history was widespread. People undertook the observation of the natural environment even in the vicinity of their homes. Shell-collecting, for example, was very popular.<sup>790</sup> Louisa Meredith noted that while she was residing with her family at Cambria near the mouth of the Swan Port in Tasmania in the early 1840s she regularly went walking along Long Beach. She obtained a large collection of shells and her descriptive passages in her book *My Home in Tasmania* proved her expertise on conchology and her familiarity with the name of most of these shells.<sup>791</sup> Animals were often kept at home as pets with the special view of getting to know that species.<sup>792</sup> Louisa Meredith kept a possum as a pet for some time in her home. Willy was her 'little playfellow' and was a great source of delight. Louisa regarded the time she spent with Willy as an opportunity for scientific observation rather than a simple pastime. She explained that her interest in Willy should be attributed to her 'zeal for science' and that she included this episode in her reminiscences with the intention of communicating all the available information for the benefit of the public.<sup>793</sup>

One particular branch of natural history, botany, became associated with women. Originally, women were encouraged in the study of botany as a means of improving their health, but later it became an intellectual pursuit. Jennifer Bennett explains that 'something intrinsically female seemed to be present in plants, and thus their study, unlike that of, say, rocks or stars, was socially acceptable, even encouraged, for women'.<sup>794</sup>

'Botanising' was the channel through which women could express their love of flowers. Women cultivated them in their gardens, collected rare specimens and identified them with the help of the Linnaean system.<sup>795</sup> They also dried and pressed them, arranged them in bouquets and made drawings or sketches of them. Botany was one of the rare dimensions of genteel life that these women did not have to sacrifice on their arrival to the Australian bush. Emma Macpherson's memoir reveals that she was a skilled botanist. During her last visit to Sydney she

<sup>788</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>789</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15.

<sup>790</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>791</sup> Mrs Charles Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania, During a Residence of Nine Years* (London: John Murray, 1852) Vol. 1: 133-137.

<sup>792</sup> Merrill, *The Romance of Victorian Natural History* 10.

<sup>793</sup> Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania* Vol. 2: 9-13.

<sup>794</sup> Jennifer Bennett, *Lilies of the Hearth - The historical relationship between women and plants* (Camden East: Camden House, 1991): 103-105.

<sup>795</sup> Merrill, *The Romance of Victorian Natural History* 31.

was residing a few kilometres out of town where she was surrounded with wild flowers. She made several excursions and collected a large number of flowers. She noted that 'I pressed and dried a great many of them, hoping to be able to give some idea to our friends at home of their great variety and beauty; but they so completely lost their colour, that latterly I took to sketching them'.<sup>796</sup> By sketching the flowers she could preserve their memory and could delight her friends at home with them.

Botany came to have a special meaning for British gentlewomen in Australia. When women settled on the frontier with their family they entered pristine territory where most of the plants were unknown to science. The fact that they were residing at the 'geographical "frontiers" of botanical knowledge' placed them in the privileged position of being able to contribute to science by collecting and discovering new plants. Susan K. Martin claims that women's involvement in botany therefore could no longer be seen as an amateur pastime. While there were a considerable number of male collectors working at the frontier, women had the added advantage of being residents rather than travellers in an area and so they had the time to observe the plants' life cycle in a longer time framework.<sup>797</sup>

Furthermore, many women gained valuable information from the Aboriginal women who often shared with them their knowledge of the native flora.<sup>798</sup> In 1902, at Elsey Station in the Northern Territory, Jeannie Gunn often accompanied the indigenous Australians on their walkabouts and was eager to learn everything she could about the plants and animals of that area. She regarded these outings as 'natural history lessons'. During the walkabouts she was the pupil and the Aborigines were her teachers. She found these lessons 'most interesting'.<sup>799</sup> Maggie Pickering argues that Aboriginal women helped European women make sense of the land around them.<sup>800</sup> By showing and teaching them the peculiarities of the land and being companions in their lonely hours, Aboriginal women planted a growing sense of familiarity with the Australian landscape in the settler women. The time Katherine Parker spent with the local Aboriginal tribe at Bangate Station in northern New South Wales allowed her a special insight into the Australian

<sup>796</sup> Emma Macpherson, *My Experiences in Australia - Being recollections of a visit to the Australian colonies in 1856-7. By a Lady* (London: J.F. Hope, 1860): 51. See also Annabella Boswell, *Annabella Boswell's Other Journal 1848-1851 called "Further recollections of my early days in Australia"* (Cook, ACT: Mulini Press, 1992): 14.

<sup>797</sup> Susan K. Martin, "Gender, genera, genre and geography: Colonial women's writing and the uses of botany" in Caroline Guerin, et al., eds, *Crossing Lines - Formations of Australian culture* (Adelaide: Proceedings of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature Conference, 1995): 30-32.

<sup>798</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>799</sup> Mrs Aeneas Gunn, *The Little Black Princess of the Never-Never* (Melbourne: Robertson & Mullens, 1957): 59, 27.

<sup>800</sup> Maggie Pickering, "Looking through the fawn-skinned window: White women's sense of place in the new worlds of Australia and Canada" *Australian Historical Studies* Vol. 33, No. 118, (2002): 223-238.

bush. She learnt a great deal about the tribe's relationship with the land. She recorded the learning process:

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. How interesting the hearing of them made my Bush life, and how it increased my sympathy for the natives and widened my Bush horizons.<sup>801</sup>

For many men, on the other hand, information about the bush was not only for amusement but was also necessary for survival. Edward Curr recalled that whenever he went on 'hunting rambles' he took a 'blackfellow' with him who was of much help in the camp and provided useful information about the local area. Curr noted that 'a blackfellow [...] is always ready with information on a hundred points connected with bush-craft'.<sup>802</sup> Whereas women sought Aboriginal women's company to learn about the land, the flora and fauna for pleasure and to become aware of the peculiar beauty of their new country, men, on the other hand, needed botanical information for survival. They wanted to know what they could expect from their chosen country.

Colonial women's writings are testimony to their expert knowledge on flowers. Many of them made reference to flowers by their scientific Latin name. This practice reveals not only women's interest in plants but also their familiarity with the contemporary system of classification. The Linnaean system made classification easier and enabled women to indulge in this study.<sup>803</sup> When colonial women described the indigenous flowers by their Latin name they usually ignored their native name. Shirley Foster and Sara Mills claim that

The ignoring of [...] the local names [...] of plants and animals [...] involves implicitly a rejection of the values of that culture. Thus, adopting a scientific voice is not a simple choice. It has benefits for British women travellers in that it allies them to those in positions of high status and indeed situates them within a hegemonic scientific tradition.<sup>804</sup>

Susan K. Martin points out that botany contributed to the European colonisation of the continent. By nature botany was a field of study that aimed to describe the environment in European terms. It involved the 'imposition of classification and naming on a "new" place and its objects'.<sup>805</sup>

<sup>801</sup> Marcie Muir, ed., *My Bush Book – K. Langloh Parker's 1890s story of outback station life* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1982): 146. Men also learnt about the environment from the Aborigines. John Hunter Kerr recalled that he 'was always on very friendly terms with my sable neighbours' near Heidelberg, Victoria in 1839. He often accompanied them on their 'hunting expeditions, and was greatly interested in watching the patient and cat-like cunning with which they tracked and finally captured their game'. John Hunter Kerr, *Glimpses of Life in Victoria by 'A Resident'* (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 1996): 13.

<sup>802</sup> Edward M. Curr, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria Then Called the Port Phillip District (from 1841 to 1851)* (Echuca: Rich River Printers, 2001): 410-411.

<sup>803</sup> Lynn Barber, *The Heyday of Natural History 1820-1870* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1980): 55.

<sup>804</sup> Shirley Foster, et al., eds, *An Anthology of Women's Travel Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002): 90.

<sup>805</sup> Martin, "Gender, genera, genre and geography" 30.

Rather than adopting Aboriginal names for each species they were given Latin names to make them fit into an already existing descriptive system. Australia was being explored, classified and named, and many colonial women took part in this process.

The ultimate power to classify and name the new species rested with male scientists, though. Women, in general, were deprived of the opportunity to get their discoveries published under their name. With a few exceptions<sup>806</sup> they were not members of the scientific elite and thus had no access to academic journals. To recognise and acknowledge the work of female botanical collectors a few plants were named in their honour.<sup>807</sup>

Ann Moyal distinguishes two types of women on the basis of their contribution to knowledge. She lists Georgiana Molloy, Amalie Dietrich and Louisa Atkinson under the heading of 'botanical collectors', while she regards Louisa Anne Meredith and Ellis Rowan as 'excursionists and flower painters'.<sup>808</sup> These women were not scientists in the strict sense of the word. They were, as Ann Moyal defines them, 'acute and discerning observers of nature who studied the landscape of the country, wrote about it, published, and made accurate and ornamental studies of Australian flowers'.<sup>809</sup> Their enthusiasm, devotion and high quality of work in the field of botany and flower painting brought them recognition. Amalie Dietrich was an exceptional woman in many ways. Coming from Germany she undertook her research in Australia as a paid employee of the Godeffroy Museum of Natural History in Hamburg. It is for this reason that Ann Moyal regards her as the first professional woman botanist in Australia.<sup>810</sup>

Georgiana Molloy was one of the earliest and probably by far the most famous female botanical collector. She was a passionate gardener and as a result of a request by Captain Mangles, Fellow of the Royal Society, she began collecting and sending plants and seeds from Western Australia to him in England in 1836. In one of her letters she thanked him for 'being the cause of my more immediate acquaintance with the nature and variety' of the flora at Augusta. Her collections delighted a number of public and private collectors. She was an amateur botanist

<sup>806</sup> See for example Amalie Dietrich. Her contribution to science will be described later in this section.

<sup>807</sup> Martin, "Gender, genera, genre and geography" 34; and Judy Skene, "The power of naming - Women botanical collectors and the contested space of nineteenth-century botany" *Studies in Western Australian History* No. 17, (1997): 12.

<sup>808</sup> Ann Moyal, "Collectors and illustrators - Women botanists of the nineteenth century" in D.J. Carr et al., eds, *People and Plants in Australia* (Sydney: Academic Press, 1981): 334-356.

<sup>809</sup> Ann Moyal, *A Bright and Savage Land* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1986): 99.

<sup>810</sup> Amalie Dietrich worked in Australia from 1863 to 1871 and in this period she sent home carefully selected and described specimens of exotic flora and fauna. Her meticulous research was widely recognised by the international community and she came to be known as 'the fearless Frau Amalie Dietrich'. Several plants and insect species were named in her honour. Moyal, "Collectors and illustrators" 338-342.

who lived for her passion.<sup>811</sup> Louisa Atkinson also needs to be mentioned among the elites of nineteenth-century female botanists. She grew up in rural New South Wales and apart from popularising science in her nature writings she also contributed to this field by identifying new habitats of known species. She made several botanical drawings, as well.<sup>812</sup>

Natural history had its own literary genre. Natural history books were popular in the nineteenth century and they stood somewhere between science and the arts. They were scientific in the sense that they were descriptive, but they were artistic in their presentation. Descriptions and illustrations of far-away places excited the public for their exotic nature.<sup>813</sup> Mostly men achieved success in this field - hardly any women attempted to turn their research into book form.<sup>814</sup> Women's extensive knowledge about the Australian flora and fauna came to be recorded not on the pages of scholarly journals but in travel books, fiction, poetry and children's literature. All these forms were acceptable modes of publication for women in the nineteenth century.<sup>815</sup> Nearly all women whose reminiscences, memoirs and travel books achieved publication included sections or even chapters on the native flora and fauna.<sup>816</sup>

Janet Millett, for example, had two chapters in her *Western Australian reminiscences* in which she described some peculiar Australian plants and animals. She was aware, however, that this topic did not fascinate everybody. At the beginning of her nature writing, therefore, she encouraged her readers to skip chapters IX and X if they showed no interest in this field. She wrote that

there are many persons to whom its study offers small attraction, and I would warn such readers, who may have followed me thus far, that they had better skip the present chapter and the next also, both of which will contain little more than a descriptive list of a few of those birds, beasts, reptiles, and insects which flourished in our Australian house and garden, or which came under our immediate notice in our short excursions in the neighbourhood.<sup>817</sup>

Janet intended to inform her English audience of the extraordinary natural creatures of the colony.

Louisa Atkinson and Louisa Anne Meredith in particular expressed their admiration for Australian nature in a highly artistic way. Louisa made use of a variety of genres. Her poetry, children's literature and memoirs all gave testimony to her profound knowledge of the native

<sup>811</sup> Ibid., 334-338.

<sup>812</sup> Ibid., 342-346.

<sup>813</sup> Merrill, *The Romance of Victorian Natural History* 5, 8, 14.

<sup>814</sup> Barber, *The Heyday of Natural History* 125.

<sup>815</sup> Martin, "Gender, genera, genre and geography" 35.

<sup>816</sup> Lynn Merrill notes that by and large most Victorian travel books contained some natural history. Merrill, *The Romance of Victorian Natural History* 57.

<sup>817</sup> Mrs Edward, *An Australian Parsonage or, The settler and the savage in Western Australia* (London: Edward Stanford, 1872): 178-179.

flora and fauna. Her life writings, *Notes and Sketches of New South Wales*<sup>818</sup> and *My Home in Tasmania*<sup>819</sup> both contained sections on natural history. In *Waratah Rhymes for Young Australia* Louisa claimed to be the first author to 'provide Australian children with simple rhymes on local subjects'. Her verse chiefly described native animals and plants in an easily comprehensible way and she supplied further information in her footnotes. Her poem 'Laughing Jackass', for example, informed readers of the peculiar sound of this bird and its main source of food which, she said, was the snake.<sup>820</sup> Another book by Louisa had a very revealing title in which she declared that she looked at the local animals and plants as her friends. *Some of My Bush Friends in Tasmania* showed Louisa at her best. This was a collection of verse, flower sketches and nature writings that demonstrated her talent and extensive knowledge of the Australian environment from various perspectives.<sup>821</sup> *Tasmanian Friends and Foes* was also aimed at a young audience. To a certain extent it was a revised version of her life-writings. As its subtitle suggested it was *A Family Chronicle of Country Life, Natural History, and Veritable Adventure*. It summed up Louisa's experiences of colonial life and told about the wonderful Australian animals and plants in a simple and easily understandable way.<sup>822</sup>

The nature writings of Louisa Atkinson reveal great love, respect, as well as an extensive knowledge of the Kurrajong and Berrima districts of New South Wales. In an overview of the tone of her landscape images Graham White notes that the sketches in *A Voice from the Country* become 'an instinctive and intuitive appreciation of the Australian landscape and its people. Having few preconceptions drawn from first-hand experience of other lands, she spoke as an Australian, influenced by an inherited English tradition, but not dominated by it.'<sup>823</sup> In addition to describing the rich flora and fauna of these areas Atkinson also provided some practical information. In her sketch entitled "The Wallaby Rocks" she even proposed a few possible get-away places for Sydney families in the districts of Berrima, Nattai, Sutton Forest and the Sassafras during the summer heat.<sup>824</sup>

<sup>818</sup> Mrs Charles Meredith, *Notes and Sketches of New South Wales During a Residence in that Colony from 1839 to 1844* (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1973): Almost every chapter contains natural history sections.

<sup>819</sup> Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania* Most chapters contain natural history sections. See for example Vol. 1: Chapters vii-xi, xiii-xv; Vol. 2: Chapters i-vi, xi-xiii and xvi-xviii.

<sup>820</sup> Louisa A. Meredith, *Waratah Rhymes for Young Australia* (London: Vincent Brook, Day, 1891): Preface, 57-58.

<sup>821</sup> Louisa A. Meredith, *Some of My Bush Friends in Tasmania - Native flowers, berries and insects drawn from life, illustrated in verse and brightly described by Louisa Anne Meredith* (London: Day, 1860).

<sup>822</sup> Louisa A. Meredith, *Tasmanian Friends and Foes - Feathered, furred, and finned: A family chronicle of country life, natural history, and veritable adventure* (London: Marcus Ward, 1881).

<sup>823</sup> Graham White, "Louisa Atkinson: Celebrant of the colonial landscape" *Southerly* No. 1, (1991): 115.

<sup>824</sup> Louisa Atkinson, *Excursions from Berrima and a Trip to Manaro and Molonglo in the 1870's* (Canberra: Mulini Press, 1980): 10. I argued in Chapter Four that many colonists sought recreation in the bush.

For men – besides those who belonged to the scientific elite - natural history did not hold the same level of fascination because it tended to be outside their sphere of interest. While most books by male colonists contained some natural history sections, their writers acknowledged their deficiency in this field of knowledge. Edward Curr<sup>825</sup> and Augustus Prinsep,<sup>826</sup> for example, admitted in their narratives that they were ignorant of botany, and Henry Melville referred his readers to other books for more detailed information.<sup>827</sup> There were some men, however, who described the native flora and fauna in their narratives. Edward Wilson, for example, devoted only a few paragraphs to this topic but he revealed his familiarity with the Latin name of the Bunya tree and the dugong.<sup>828</sup> William Woods included a rather detailed natural history section in his travel book<sup>829</sup> and an anonymous Queensland settler had a natural history chapter in his text.<sup>830</sup> While he described the Queensland plants and animals he mentioned some of the commercial benefits of certain animals such as the dugong.<sup>831</sup> Henry Melville also described some Australian animals with regards to their impact on human settlement. He noted that the Tasmanian tiger was 'exceedingly destructive among sheep' and the 'tiger-cat' was 'very destructive to poultry'.<sup>832</sup> It seems to me that for many men the Australian flora and fauna formed yet another topic that they deemed worthy for the information of future settlers. They felt it their duty to inform the prospective immigrants of the commercial benefits of the land as well as its plants and animals; this sense of duty appears to have motivated men, rather than the passionate interest that led so many women to this field.

The art of botanical drawing also needs to be mentioned in this discussion of colonial women's relationships with natural history. As shown earlier, painting and drawing were considered to be two genteel accomplishments. Many women kept sketch books in which they recorded their impressions of their new country so that their family at home could get a glimpse of their new surroundings.<sup>833</sup> Some colonial women were much more consciously painting for a wider audience. Janine Burke notes that early women artists were mainly concerned with either

<sup>825</sup> Curr, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria* 125.

<sup>826</sup> Mrs Augustus Prinsep, ed., *The Journal of a Voyage from Calcutta to Van Diemen's Land: comprising a description of that colony during a six months' residence* (Hobart: Melanie Publications, 1981): 69.

<sup>827</sup> Henry Melville described some peculiarities of the Australian flora and fauna but added that 'the reader who may be curious to know more respecting the natural history of Van Diemen's Land, must be referred to other works for further information'. Henry Melville, *The Present State of Australia* (London: G. Willis, 1851): 311.

<sup>828</sup> Edward Wilson, *Rambles at the Antipodes* (London: W.H. Smith, 1859): 8, 14.

<sup>829</sup> William James Woods, *A Visit to Victoria* (London: Wyman, 1886): 21-25, 37-40.

<sup>830</sup> An eight years' resident, *The Queen of the Colonies; or, Queensland as I knew it* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1876): 231-281.

<sup>831</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

<sup>832</sup> Melville, *The Present State of Australia* 310.

wildflowers or landscapes. She argues that:

The earliest women artists on record were a hybrid mixture of Victorian gentility, eccentricity, and extraordinary toughness. As well as attempting to civilize the raw, new settlements with small stocks of precious refinements brought from England, and their own carefully nurtured sensibilities, they devoted time to, and probably found welcome relief in, the creative outlets of watercolour painting and sketching. Wildflowers and landscapes formed the basis of these concerns.<sup>834</sup>

Drawing was a popular female pastime and several ladies used this skill to perfection in the interest of science. Ellis Rowan, Marianne North, Elizabeth Gould and Louisa Anne Meredith were perhaps the most famous of them all. Ellis Rowan was a Melbourne-born flower painter and botanical illustrator. She was especially renowned for her paintings of Queensland flowers but she also worked in the United States and the West Indies. She published the letters she sent to her husband from Queensland between 1890 and 1892 in a book under the title *A Flower-Hunter in Queensland and New Zealand*. In her Preface she told her audience that her passionate love for flowers demanded a few sacrifices.

My love for the flora of Australia, at once so unique and so fascinating, together with my desire to complete my collection of floral paintings, has carried me into other colonies, Queensland, and some of the remotest parts of the great continent of Australia. The excitement of seeking and the delight of finding rare or even unknown specimens abundantly compensated me for all difficulties, fatigue, and hardships.<sup>835</sup>

A substantial number of her paintings were bought by the Australian Government in the early 1920s and they are now housed in the National Library.<sup>836</sup>

Marianne North was English-born and studied flower painting in London. She never married but devoted her entire life to travelling and painting. She was chaperoned during her earlier years of travel but chose to go on her own in the last fourteen years of her travelling life. She travelled widely from the United States to South Africa, India, and also to Australia in 1880 and 1881. She was a prolific and widely recognised painter. She offered her botanical works to Kew Gardens in London where they were eventually exhibited in a small gallery.<sup>837</sup>

Elizabeth Gould is remembered as the 'mother' of bird-study and a pioneer woman painter of Australian fauna and flora. She accompanied her husband, the naturalist John Gould, to Van Diemen's Land and New South Wales in 1838.<sup>838</sup> She made about 600 illustrations for her husband's publications, the most famous of which were *The Birds of Australia*, published

<sup>833</sup> Caroline Ambrus, *Australian Women Artists* (Woden, ACT: Irrepressible Press, 1992): 14.

<sup>834</sup> Janine Burke, *Australian Women Artists 1840-1940* (Collingwood: Greenhouse Publications, 1980): 13.

<sup>835</sup> Mrs Rowan, *A Flower-Hunter in Queensland and New Zealand* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1898): vii.

<sup>836</sup> Moyal, "Collectors and illustrators" 350-353.

<sup>837</sup> Helen Vellacott, ed., *Some Recollections of a Happy Life: Marianne North in Australia and New Zealand* (Caulfield: Edward Arnold, 1986): 1-3.

<sup>838</sup> Alec H. Chisholm, *The Story of Elizabeth Gould* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1944): 2.

between 1840 and 1848.<sup>839</sup> Stephen Martin adds that her sketches and accompanying notes on the background vegetation provided helpful references for Mr Gould. Martin concludes that her work 'broadened the understanding of the Australian environment and fostered a sense of familiarity with its flora and fauna'.<sup>840</sup>

Elizabeth Gould was one of a great number of female artists who made botanical sketches and drawings to accompany and illustrate the works of mainly male scientists.<sup>841</sup> But there were some courageous women who published their botanical drawings under their own name. Fanny Elizabeth de Mole brought her collection of wildflower paintings into print under the title *Wildflowers of South Australia*.<sup>842</sup> Just like many women writers, Fanny undervalued her own work. She claimed that 'the present little work is offered, not as having any botanical pretensions, but simply as a Book of Flowers'.<sup>843</sup> Louisa Anne Meredith also deserves to be mentioned in this group of notable women even though she was not a botanical illustrator in the strict sense of the word. She painted flowers not for botanical but for aesthetic reasons. She published sentimental flower books in which she wrote sentimental poetry and prose and illustrated them with flower depictions.<sup>844</sup> She also exhibited her flower paintings in England, Australia and India, and won numerous medals.<sup>845</sup>

Caroline Ambrus notes that 'men were also equally involved in flora and fauna painting and their work equalled that of their female peers in every way'.<sup>846</sup> The main difference between male and female painters is the level of recognition they received from their peers and later scholars. Caroline Ambrus argues that women artists were often excluded from standard art histories.<sup>847</sup> They were usually seen as 'a subordinate amateur group in contradistinction to a male professional bloc' and were regarded as 'the genteel Victorian "lady painter[s]"'.<sup>848</sup> In the

<sup>839</sup> Sara Maroske, "The whole great continent as a present" - Nineteenth-century Australian women workers in science" in Farley Kelly, ed., *On the Edge of Discovery* (Melbourne: Text Publishing Company, 1993): 23.

<sup>840</sup> Stephen Martin, *A New Land* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1993): 96-97.

<sup>841</sup> Other women illustrators of natural history books written by men included Rosa Fiveash, Harriet Scott Morgan and Helena Scott Forde. Ambrus, *Australian Women Artists* 19. There is an even longer list of female botanical illustrators in Joan Kerr, ed., *Heritage - The national women's art book* (Roseville East: Craftsman House, 1995): 162-173.

<sup>842</sup> Fanny Elizabeth de Mole, *Wild Flowers of South Australia* (Carlton: Queensberry Hill Press, 1981). First published by Paul Jerrard, London in 1861.

<sup>843</sup> *Ibid.*, Preface.

<sup>844</sup> Ambrus, *Australian Women Artists* 15-16. Louisa published a collection of flower sketches in *Some of My Bush Friends in Tasmania*. Meredith, *Some of My Bush Friends in Tasmania*.

<sup>845</sup> Moyal, "Collectors and illustrators" 346-349.

<sup>846</sup> Ambrus, *Australian Women Artists* 14. Male painters abounded in the nineteenth century. Robert David Fitzgerald, for example, produced a great number of botanical sketches. Robert David Fitzgerald, Picture Collection, National Library of Australia, Canberra. See for example <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an6243211>

<sup>847</sup> Ambrus, *Australian Women Artists* 10.

<sup>848</sup> Caroline Jordan, "No-man's land?" *Art and Australia* Vol. 32, No. 3, (1995): 358-359.

1980s and 1990s Janine Burke and Caroline Ambrus sought to redress this balance and drew attention to the presence and achievement of colonial women artists.<sup>849</sup>

This section has emphasised that colonial gentlewomen were deeply interested in natural history and expressed their enjoyment and love of the native flora and fauna in a number of disciplines. There were a few female colonists whose writings and drawings of natural subjects demonstrated great talent. Louisa Ann Meredith, in particular, made a significant effort in popularising and educating her readers about the Australian environment both through her written and illustrated works. The collecting of botanical species, especially on the frontier, was an area where some women tried to compete with male collectors. Their lack of representation in the British scientific circles meant, however, that their contribution went unrecognised and was only later acknowledged in the names of a few species. British gentlewomen acquired their interest in natural history and developed their drawing skills as part of their genteel education. Settlement and travel in colonial Australia meant that they could make great use of these skills in a country whose landscape and vegetation were still being mapped out. Women's writings and drawings therefore recorded a natural environment that was still considered novel to the outside world.

### Flora and Fauna

The native flora seemed very peculiar to the European eye. Many women compared them to familiar English plants to make it easier for their English audience to imagine what Australian plants could look like. Judith Johnston argues that turning to 'homely and domestic' images was a useful but at the same time necessary device for the colonial writers.<sup>850</sup> Louisa Meredith, for example, turned to the artichoke as the plant that resembled most in size and shape the Australian waratah.<sup>851</sup>

Several observers commented on the peculiarities of the Australian trees. The aspect that received the greatest bulk of comments was their foliage. English visitors often complained of the monotony of its colouring and longed for the variety their eyes were used to back at home.<sup>852</sup>

<sup>849</sup> Burke, *Australian Women Artists* and Ambrus, *Australian Women Artists*.

<sup>850</sup> Judith Johnston, "Colonising botany: Louisa Anne Meredith and The Romance of Nature" *Journal of Victorian Culture* Vol. 3, (1998): 41.

<sup>851</sup> Meredith, *Notes and Sketches of New South Wales* 65. When the Hill sisters described the native lilac in their book of reminiscences they offered the image of its English namesake as its closest resemblance. Rosamond Hill, et al., *What We Saw in Australia* (London: Macmillan, 1875): 128.

<sup>852</sup> Fanny Rains noted in the Mount Lofty Range in 1873 that 'the foliage has a very pretty effect from a distance, being tipped with a golden brown, but soon grows wearisome to the eye, being almost entirely unrelieved by any

The eucalypt tree, in particular, often disappointed the settlers. Tim Bonyhady notes that the earliest observers in the 1790s delighted in the gum trees. This positive attitude changed thirty years later, though, when the general view became one of contempt.<sup>853</sup> Alice Mary Frere made a trip from Sydney to Camden Park in 1865 and noted that 'there are no striking features in the country around, which is principally covered with the dull, grey-green gum-trees giving but little variety to the colouring'.<sup>854</sup> Janet Millett explained that the reason why many colonists were unable to appreciate the Australian foliage was that they missed the four seasons. They were longing for that 'freshness of spring-time' that seasonal change brought about. Deciduous trees changed their appearance with the passing of seasons whereas the Australian evergreens remained the same all year round.<sup>855</sup> The early colonists may have enjoyed the sight of evergreen trees at first because they were happy to see green foliage all year round, a pleasant change after their English winters with bare trees. As the years went by, however, they grew more and more homesick and missed the effect the seasons had on the trees at home.

Louisa Atkinson, on the other hand, rejoiced in the Australian colours. She was an admirer of the bush and loved the native plants and animals. In her sketch entitled "Mount Tomah" she described the peculiar local vegetation and commented on the view that opened up from the top of Mount Tomah in the Blue Mountains. She wrote that 'everywhere are mountains and woods, the latter of tints so rich and varied that they who rate the perpetual dull greens of Australia would need to change their strain'.<sup>856</sup> Unlike many European observers, Louisa could fully appreciate the colours of the Australian forests. She was a native-born woman who never travelled overseas and had limited opportunities to compare the Australian gumtrees with European trees.<sup>857</sup>

The peculiar form and outlook of the eucalypt tree was another aspect of this species that the European colonists had to learn to appreciate. Lydia Leavitt, a Canadian traveller in the early 1880s, described the distinctive shape of the Australian gum tree. The

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other kind. One longs for the varied tints of an English landscape.' Fanny L. Rains, *By Land and Ocean* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1878): 18. Two male travellers, Samuel Mossman and Thomas Banister, also noted during their stay in Victoria in 1851 that 'it must not be supposed that the foliage of the trees in Australia has that luxuriant appearance presented by the elm, the beech, or the sycamore'. They disliked their 'few and scanty' foliage. Samuel Mossman, et al., *Australia Visited and Revisited - A narrative of recent travels and old experiences in Victoria and New South Wales* (London: Addey, 1853): 62.

<sup>853</sup> Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth* (Carlton South: Miegunyah Press, 2000): 69-73.

<sup>854</sup> Alice Mary Frere, *The Antipodes and Round the World* (London: Hatchards, 1870) Vol. 1: 53. See also Clara Aspinall, *Three Years in Melbourne* (London: L. Booth, 1862): 163-164.

<sup>855</sup> Millett, *An Australian Parsonage* 171.

<sup>856</sup> Louisa Atkinson, *A Voice from the Country* (Canberra: Mulini Press, 1978): 14.

<sup>857</sup> A.H. Chisholm, "Louisa Atkinson" *ADB* Vol. 3: 59-60.

eucalypt trees, with their gnarled and twisted branches [...] look as if nature had made an effort to see into what strange, contorted shapes she could form a tree. These trees always make a strange impression on my mind – as though I was looking at a human being, deformed, writhing in pain, with long arms, twisted and contorted in agony.<sup>858</sup>

Tim Bonyhady notes that many nineteenth-century commentators remarked on the 'grotesque' shape of the eucalypt trees. The proper representation of these trees was grounds for debate among painters.<sup>859</sup> John Glover is credited with being the first artist who was concerned with its shape, but it was Louis Buvelot who succeeded in popularising the gum tree for the first time. Bonyhady shows that by the late 1870s the gum tree enjoyed a favourable artistic appreciation.<sup>860</sup>

Victorian people had a special relationship with ferns. The period between the 1840s and 1860s was characterised by *Pteridomania*: this was the name given to the contemporary craze for ferns and fern-growing. This mid-Victorian fad was particularly prevalent among ladies as Lynn Barber notes. There was a huge market for collecting, buying and selling ferns, growing them in ferneries or in Wardian cases.<sup>861</sup> Louisa Atkinson acknowledged this trend in her 1863 article on ferns. She wrote that 'there are few who do not admire ferns – but when in addition to this Fashion lends her potent aid, we find the dried collection or the pretty living fernery almost a necessity to the drawing-room'.<sup>862</sup> Many colonial women expressed their admiration for ferns. Lady Brassey heard a lot about this natural phenomenon but on encountering it she found it more impressive than she thought it would be. She paid a visit to the forest at Fernshaw near Melbourne in June 1887. On the way to Black Spur the fern-gully made a great impression on her. She admitted in her travel book that 'I had always been told that these fern-gullies were charming, but I never thought anything could be half so lovely as this romantic ravine'.<sup>863</sup>

<sup>858</sup> Lydia Leavitt, *Around the World* (Toronto: James Murray, 1887): 43.

<sup>859</sup> Louisa Meredith occasionally attempted to draw gum trees in her Springvale home in the early 1840s and she found it a challenging task. 'Sometimes I [...] improved myself in sketching gum-trees, which I found demanded far greater care in their delineation, even in my slight pencil sketches, than I had at first been disposed to accord them; a gaunt straggling tree, that will persist in showing all its twisted elbows and bare Briarean arms, with only tufts of leaves at the fingers' ends, is quite a different affair from a round compact oak or elm, decently apparelled in a proper quantity of foliage.' Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania* Vol. 1: 169.

<sup>860</sup> Tim Bonyhady, *Images in Opposition – Australian landscape painting 1801-1890* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1985): 117-120.

<sup>861</sup> Barber, *The Heyday of Natural History* 112-115. Barber also notes that the reasons for this 'curious fashion' are 'still obscure'. She suggests that this Victorian passion could have been started by Nathaniel Bagshaw Ward in the early 1830s. Ward discovered by accident the 'principle that plants enclosed in almost airtight glass cases are virtually self-sustaining'. This Wardian case could have given rise to a fascination for ferns and fern-growing. *Ibid.*, 111-112.

<sup>862</sup> Louisa Atkinson, "Ferns and their haunts" *Sydney Morning Herald* Vol. XLVII, No. 7701, (12 February 1863): 2.

<sup>863</sup> Lady Brassey, *The Last Voyage, to India and Australia, in the 'Sunbeam'* (London: Longmans, Green, 1889): 302. Male colonists also liked the tree ferns. William J. Woods regarded the Victorian forests in the early 1880s as 'monotonous and melancholy' but looked at the tree ferns of Fernshaw as 'the very beau ideal of an earthly paradise'. Woods, *A Visit to Victoria* 35. Colonial landscape painters often depicted fern trees on their canvas which is another indicator of the popularity of this theme. See for example Eugene von Guérard "Fern-tree Gully in the Dandenong Ranges", Louis Buvelot "Near Fernshaw" in Bonyhady, *Images in Opposition* 66, 113. Nicholas

Elizabeth Gray's picture of "Fern tree Gully"<sup>864</sup> (1860?) (Picture 7) depicts a stream that is lined by towering fern trees on its banks. Even though it is a black and white drawing, Elizabeth Gray was presumably struck by the greenness of these fern tree gullies. It must have been a pleasant contrast to the overwhelmingly brownish and 'dull, grey-green' gumtrees about which Alice Mary Frere complained. Fern tree gullies had lush green vegetation that thrived on the plentiful supply of water. The presence of water, rich vegetation and cooler temperatures could have reminded the colonists of the English forests they left behind. Fern trees were seen as highly exotic and unusual in comparison with other trees, and provided shade and a hide-away from the blazing sun.

Apart from the gum trees and the ferns, there were other plants in the bush worthy of comment. Many colonial women agreed that the Australian wildflowers were exceptionally beautiful and unique. Clara Aspinall felt that many artists would be glad to record such beauty on the canvas. Her five-month-long visit to country Victoria in 1860 provided her with the opportunity of getting to know some bush flowers. She recalled that 'I was charmed with the wild flowers of the forest in Australia. I have gathered in the Bush the most exquisite of bouquets, such as many artists would revel in painting, and which would grace a royal epergne.'<sup>865</sup> Native flowers, just like the bush landscape, were also considered worthy painting subjects by British gentlewomen.

Not surprisingly, Western Australian flowers received the greatest number of compliments. In early October 1883 Lady Broome was on a visit to several towns north of Perth with her husband, the Governor of Western Australia. They passed by the sand plains near Dongarra and Lady Broome admired the wildflowers that were in full bloom at that time. She described these wonderful flowers in a letter to her son Guy in England:

And it was certainly the most wonderful sight you can imagine, nor do I expect that anything I can write can give you the least idea of their beauty. [...] I feel now that hitherto I have never seen any wild flowers at all! I wanted to stop the van every minute, get out the ladder, climb down, and pick (or pull up the whole bush, for that was the shortest way) some perfectly exquisite flower.<sup>866</sup>

But not only Western Australian flowers were adored for their beauty. The Hill sisters in South Australia also expressed great admiration for the native flowers when they visited the Botanic

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Chevalier "Fern trees, Victoria" Picture Collection, National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an2962187>, Louis Buvelot "At Fernshaw" <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an10828697>.

<sup>864</sup> Kerr, *Heritage* 191.

<sup>865</sup> Aspinall, *Three Years in Melbourne* 164.

<sup>866</sup> Alexandra Hasluck, ed., *Remembered with Affection - A new edition of Lady Broome's 'Letters to Guy'* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1963): 61. Even such an experienced botanist as Marianne North stood bewildered at such beauty. After she landed at King George's Sound in the early 1880s she was welcomed by Ellis



Elizabeth Gray: Ferntree gully

Picture 7

**This picture depicts a lush temperate rainforest. This cool, damp and wet fern tree gully could have been seen as a pleasant change to the dry, arid and hot bush landscape in the summer heat. The vastness of the eucalypt-dominated open forests is contrasted to the fast-flowing creek with smaller and greener fern trees on its bank. The fern trees form a closed canopy and do not let much sunshine in. They also stand rather close to each other and convey a sense of intimacy as opposed to distance. This picture emphasises a small but friendly scene that is green, cool and damp – a perfect getaway in summer.**

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Rowan who gave Marianne her first introduction to Western Australian flowers. She recorded in her journal that those flowers were 'such as I had never seen or even dreamed of before'. Vellacott, *Some Recollections* 65.

Gardens in Adelaide in 1873. They also believed that the Australian flowers were exceptional. They wrote that 'it is impossible to enumerate all the flowers we saw and admired in Australia. At times we felt as we gazed upon them, that had we seen nothing else, the trouble of our journey would have been well repaid.'<sup>867</sup> The two sisters seem to have considered the sight of these magnificent flowers the crowning glory of their Australian visit. There were a few flowers in particular that colonial women singled out for their beauty. The waratah<sup>868</sup> and the wattle<sup>869</sup> received plenty of comments. My brief survey of male narratives suggests that men did not revel in the sight of native flowers in the same way as women did. Or at least if they did they did not consider them worth mentioning in their accounts.

Louisa Anne Meredith's watercolour "Native wildflowers including Sturt's desert pea, Christmas bell"<sup>870</sup> (Picture 8) shows a beautiful bouquet of Australian wildflowers. The flowers were bound to form a linear composition and were arranged in a manner that showed their different colours in an aesthetically pleasing manner. Louisa did not paint these flowers in their original setting and did not even indicate whether these plants came into bloom at the same time. For her the look of these flowers seemed to be more important than their botanical details. This picture illustrates that many Australian wildflowers were beloved by colonial women who praised their beauty and sought to reflect their admiration on the canvas.

Australian plants were not only admired for their beauty but some were appreciated for more practical reasons. There were a few women who experimented with native plants in their kitchen.<sup>871</sup> Ethel Hassell was an enthusiastic observer of Aboriginal manners on her station at Jarramungup in Western Australia in the 1880s. She enjoyed the company of indigenous women and went with them to collect food. She learnt the name of many native plants that formed the Aboriginal diet. She tasted the sweet gum of the Black Wattle that reminded her of pure white sugar-candy. She made jam of several indigenous fruits such as the 'wo!go! nut' and the 'chuck'. She noted in her recollections that these 'experiments were a great source of amusement to my

<sup>867</sup> Hill, *What We Saw in Australia* 237.

<sup>868</sup> Louisa Meredith described it as a 'most stately and regal flower'. Meredith, *Notes and Sketches of New South Wales* 65. The Hill sisters believed it was a 'handsome flower' with 'a bright crimson blossom, or rather congeries of blossoms, resembling in shape and size the cone of a cedar, and having long crimson anthers'. Hill, *What We Saw in Australia* 321. Katherine Bates described it as 'a glorious mountain flower'. Katherine E. Bates, *Kaleidoscope - Shifting scenes from east to west* (London: Ward & Downey, 1889): 46.

<sup>869</sup> Emma Macpherson wrote that 'they are very beautiful, and make one think of the French name for the Laburnum, "pluie d'or"'. Macpherson, *My Experiences in Australia* 47-48.

<sup>870</sup> Picture Collection, National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an5487509>

<sup>871</sup> Jennifer Isaacs also notes that a great variety of wild fruits and green vegetables were experimented with in bush households. Jennifer Isaacs, *Pioneer Women of the Bush and Outback* (Willoughby, NSW: Lansdowne Press, 1990): 106-107.



NLA nla pic-an5487509-w

By permission of the National Library of Australia

Picture 8

Louisa Anne Meredith: Native wildflowers including Sturt's desert pea, Christmas bell.

**This picture illustrates the delight colonial women took in the aesthetic beauty of the Australian wildflowers. Even though the composition seems artificial it nevertheless aims at botanical illustration.**

brother and husband, for I argued what was good for the natives was good for us'. They did not always agree with her, though. While some of the native food proved easily digestible some were alien to the English stomach. There was a plant called quirting that had a hot taste. When Ethel once put it into a stew the result was disastrously inedible. This bad experience put Ethel off from making further experiments for a while.<sup>872</sup>

In addition to their aesthetic and practical values, plants and flowers were also powerful images through which colonial women could express their patriotism in a poetic way. Chapter Four argued that many settlers cherished the memory of English plants because they held sweet associations for them. Caroline Leakey's poem "English wild flowers" had a very telling title and revealed her homesick heart.<sup>873</sup> She wrote lovingly of the English flowers and admitted that Australian flowers 'of crimson hue' and of 'glorious tints of gold and blue' under the sunny sky were meaningless to her. She much preferred the 'meadows of England's green' and the daisies that grew on churchyards. In the first stanza she stated her dislike of Australian flowers and committed herself to England's natural treasures.

Ye may tell me of flowers bright and gay,  
 Blooming in Eastern lands away,  
 And of climes beyond the beautiful sea,  
 Where all fair things and glad may be;  
 Where the tropical sun shines ever light,  
 And flowers seem born to dazzle the sight.  
 Ye may boast of beauties across the main,  
 But give, oh! give me, from England again,  
 The wild red rose, as it used to bloom  
 Round my father's door, with its sweet perfume.

English flowers were closer to Caroline's heart because 'they have a voice, and they speak to me,  
 / With their eyes so full of Love's mystery!'<sup>874</sup>

It was an Australian-born woman in the early years of the twentieth century who made the most famous declaration of her love of Australia in verse. Dorothea Mackellar's<sup>875</sup> poem

<sup>872</sup> Ethel Hassell, *My Dusky Friends - Aboriginal life and legends and glimpses of station life at Jarramungup in the 1880's* (East Fremantle: C.W. Hassell, 1975): 19-23. Katharine Kirkland also made use of various plants in her cooking at her station in the Port Phillip District in the late 1830s. She liked the gum trees' manna that tasted like almond biscuits. She also made use of a white carrot-shaped root called 'maranong' as an ingredient in soups before she established a vegetable garden of her own. Katharine Kirkland, "Life in the bush" in Hugh Anderson, ed., *The Flowers of the Field - A history of Ripon Shire together with Mrs Kirkland's Life in the bush from Chambers's Miscellany, 1845* (Melbourne: Hill of Content, 1969): 198, 191.

<sup>873</sup> Caroline Leakey was born at Exeter in England in 1827 and sailed to Van Diemen's Land with a clergyman and his wife in 1847. She went there to help her sister's family who had come out three years earlier. Caroline contracted fever and remained an invalid for five years. Bishop Nixon encouraged her to publish her poems which were eventually printed under the title *Lyra Australis or Attempts to Sing in a Strange Land* in 1854. She returned home in 1853. J.C. Horner, "Caroline Leakey" *Australian Dictionary of Biography* Vol. 5: 71-72.

<sup>874</sup> Douglas B.W. Sladen, ed., *A Century of Australian Song* (London: Walter Scott, 1888): 294-295.

<sup>875</sup> Dorothea was born in Sydney in 1885. She was a city girl who also knew the country. In 1902 her family moved to their property Torryburn 160 km north of Sydney near Maitland. Jyoti Brunson notes that this was the place

"My Country"<sup>876</sup> reads like an answer to Caroline's poem and also addressed a fictitious English listener. In her verse Dorothea rejected the idea of England as home and noted that her 'love is otherwise'. She depicted Australia as the place her heart truly belonged to. It is interesting to note that both Caroline and Dorothea used the same pool of Australian and English images. They both highlighted England's green fields and contrasted the two countries' climate.

Dorothea claimed in her poem that pictures of green landscapes and 'soft, dim skies' were meaningless to her. She preferred 'a sunburnt country' with its 'wide brown land' and 'sweeping plains'. She depicted Australia as a country that was beautiful and terrifying at the same time. Dorothea highlighted the kind of images that migrant colonial women wrote about in their narratives in the nineteenth century. Chapters Four and Five have shown that settler and visitor women were fascinated by Australia's 'pitiless blue sky', admired its ferns and dreaded the bushfires, floods and droughts. They also detested the 'white ring-barked forests', a product of settlement, as a later section will argue. Dorothea's poem reads as if she was following the footsteps of the earlier colonists and speaking their language. She went one step further, however, and declared that she loved Australia for all these reasons.

The poet Caroline Carleton<sup>877</sup> also needs to be mentioned among noteworthy women writers in the nineteenth century. In the poem "The Song of Australia"<sup>878</sup> Caroline praised Australia for a number of reasons. The first stanza celebrated the glorious Australian sun while the second described the fertile Australian soil that produced high-quality corn and vine. It is interesting to note that Caroline admired the achievements of British Australia. She wrote about the settled country where people cultivated the land, took nature's hidden riches such as gold in mines and erected their homesteads. It was also a country where people could enjoy their freedom under the British flag. "The Song of Australia" is a highly celebratory poem that depicts Australia as a land of great riches and treasures and where people live in prosperity and peace as

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where Dorothea experienced the wonderful rebirth of nature after the breaking of the drought that she wrote about in the fourth stanza of her poem. She travelled widely in her youth and visited London, Japan, North America and Europe. Jyoti Brunsdon, ed., *I Love a Sunburnt Country* (North Ryde, NSW: Angus & Robertson, 1990): 20-25.

<sup>876</sup> Susan Lever, ed., *The Oxford Book of Australian Women's Verse* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1995): 59-60. This poem was probably written about 1904 and appeared under the title "Core of my Heart" in the *English Spectator* on 5 September 1908. Beverley Kingston, "Dorothea Mackellar" *ADB* Vol. 10: 198-199.

<sup>877</sup> Caroline Carleton was born near London in 1820. She married Charles at the age of sixteen and they arrived in Adelaide three years later. The couple first lived in Adelaide where Charles worked as a dispenser at Adelaide Hospital and later in Kapunda where he was the medical officer at the mines. He died in 1861 leaving five children behind. Caroline worked at primary schools both in Adelaide and later at Wallaroo to support her family. Patricia Clarke, *Pen Portraits: Women writers and journalists in nineteenth-century Australia* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1988): 98-100.

<sup>878</sup> Brian Elliott, et al., eds, *Bards in the Wilderness - Australian colonial poetry to 1920* (Melbourne: Nelson, 1970): 63.

subjects of the British Empire.

The poem remained silent on a number of issues, however. There was no mention made of the hardships of pioneering life, the cruelty towards the Aborigines or even the beauties of the native flora and fauna. This poem acknowledged the possibilities and rewards Australia offered to the settlers but did not question colonial loyalty to the British crown. Furthermore, unlike the above-mentioned poems, this was not a very personal piece. Caroline entered "The Song of Australia" into the Gawler Institute's competition for a national song in 1859 and was a prize winner.<sup>879</sup> Since it was written to become a national song it reads more like an official declaration of colonial patriotism rather than Caroline's testimony of her own feelings. It suggests a colonial mind that was appreciative of the Australian circumstances and at the same time not forgetful of the British values that underpinned the Australian settlement.

Women were not alone in using images of nature in their poetry.<sup>880</sup> George McHenry's poem, "The Australian emigrant's song" resembles Caroline Carleton's style of Australian patriotism. McHenry also included the images of the native flora and fauna in his verse, such as the wattle, the emu and the kangaroo, to symbolise Australia, but his emphasis was on the economic opportunities the colonies offered to the English migrants. The colonies were portrayed as the land of the free where labour and justice were valued highly and 'Where sleek herds crop the flesh of the fields, / And silken-wooled flocks graze the downs'.<sup>881</sup> As argued earlier, men tended to consider the economic potential of the Australian land. Caroline Carleton's poem shows that some women were not ignorant about this aspect of Australia, but on the whole they tended to disregard it. Women focused more on the natural attractions because of their beauty and not because of their economic potential.

The way women related to the wild inhabitants of the bush also indicated positive enjoyment of the country. Birds were of special interest to colonial women. It was shown in Chapter Four that women enjoyed their song. Women were charmed by the birds' colourful plumage, too. Elizabeth Ramsay-Laye expressed her admiration when she wrote that 'never did I behold such a display of beauty as was here exhibited by the feathered tribe!'<sup>882</sup> Louisa

<sup>879</sup> Clarke, *Pen Portraits* 98-100.

<sup>880</sup> James Cuthbertson was a Scottish migrant and he expressed his love of Australia in his verse 'The Bush'. He pointed out that he loved his chosen country because of the 'Blue of the Australian skies', the 'Fragrant breath of the gums' and the 'wattle's gold'. He explained that 'These are the haunts we love'. Elliott, *Bards in the Wilderness* 126.

<sup>881</sup> Sladen, *A Century of Australian Song* 325-326.

<sup>882</sup> Elizabeth P. Ramsay-Laye, *Social Life and Manners in Australia - Being the notes of eight years' experience by a resident* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1861): 48. See also Bates, *Kaleidoscope* 22. Men admired the plumage of the Australian birds, as well. John Hunter Kerr noted that 'the varieties of parrots and

Atkinson's drawing of colourful birds<sup>883</sup> (Picture 9) expresses her admiration for these beautiful creatures and also shows the care with which she painted them. She even referred to them by name which indicates that this drawing is the result of not only a passionate interest in the Australian birds, but also a proof of her botanical orientation. It seemed to be important for Louisa to make quasi-professional drawings of these birds, rather than just ordinary sketches. The drawings show much care in the depiction of these birds as regards their colourful plumage. They are also painted in different positions, which gives the picture a life-like quality.

Tame animals were great companions for the settlers. Cats, dogs and birds were of course the most popular pets in Europe,<sup>884</sup> but the Australian bush provided a great variety of pets, too. Mary Macleod Banks summed up the significance of pets in Australia: 'In country life all the world over pets play a leading part, they are perhaps most eagerly sought and trained where the native birds and animals are still strange to man and little known.' Mary suggested that by keeping native animals as pets they could learn about them and in this way they could widen their knowledge about the native fauna. Her family had a great variety of pets in their Queensland home in the second half of the nineteenth century. In her book of recollections *Memories of Pioneer Days in Queensland* she looked back on her animal companions with loving memory. Her family especially loved the kangaroo. She noted that 'as a domestic pet we knew the kangaroo intimately and found him eminently lovable'. They had a tame kangaroo called Jock who lived in close proximity to them. He hunted his own food but often helped himself to some milk on the breakfast table or took some pieces of bread at dinner. The family put a little bell on his collar to keep track of his indoor expeditions. Jock was also friendly with the other pets. The dogs would lie close to him but the cat was the bravest: she 'curled herself up between his paws'. Jock was also caring and took the place of a childminder. He regularly 'looked after' Mary's little brother and when he thought that the dogs went too near him he protected the little boy from them.<sup>885</sup>

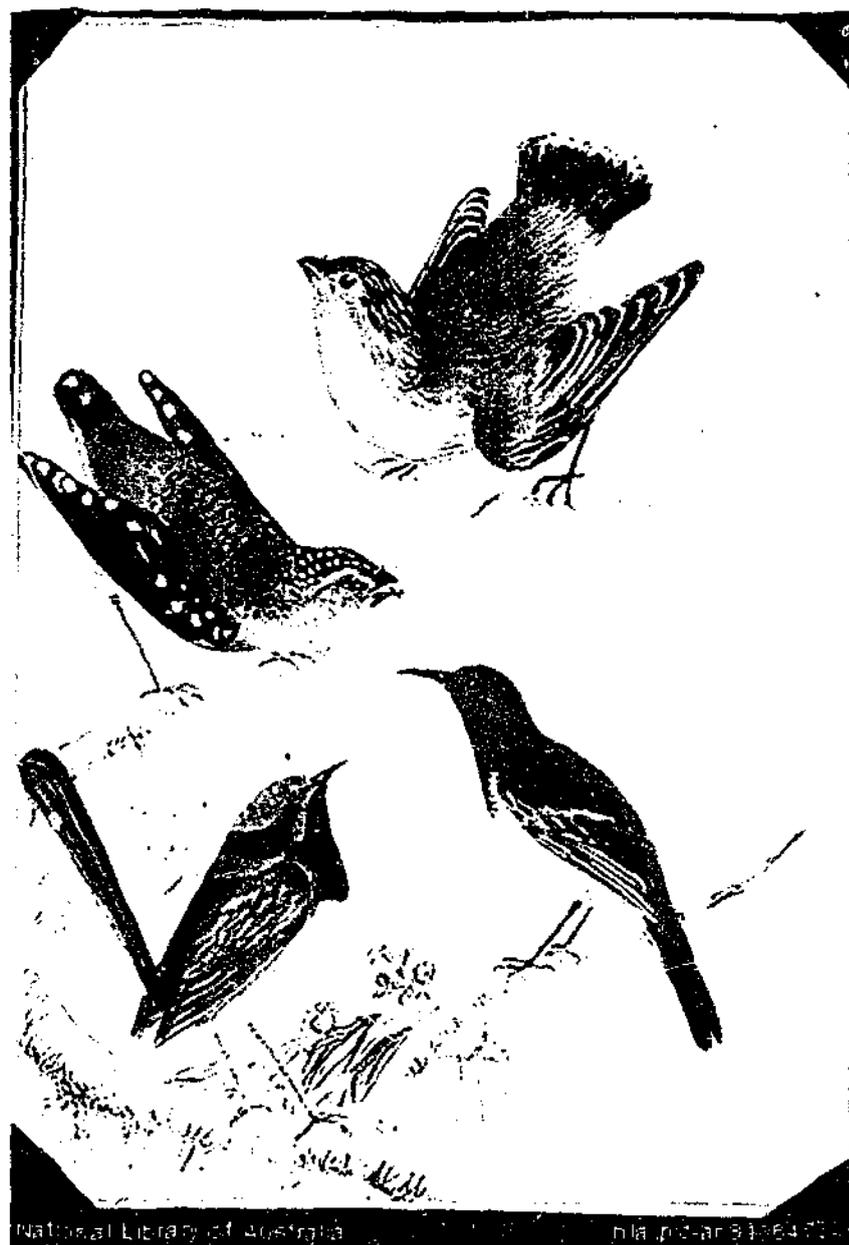
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cockatoos are numerous, vying with each other in the splendour of their plumage'. Kerr, *Glimpses of Life in Victoria* 179.

<sup>883</sup> Picture Collection, National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an8136473>

<sup>884</sup> Lady Broome enjoyed the Western Australian birds very much in the mid-1880s but her favourite animal remained a 'small, half-bred Japanese pug' she called Monsieur Puppy. Alexandra Hasluck, who edited Lady Broome's letters to her son Guy, even included a photograph of Sir Frederick and Lady Broome as she was holding Monsieur Puppy in her lap. Letter XVII details her fondness for her animal companions and describes some funny stories. Hasluck, *Remembered with Affection* 117-124. When Janet Millett arrived at Barladong there were already six cats around the parsonage. They grew particularly fond of one of them. Millett, *An Australian Parsonage* 179.

<sup>885</sup> There was another pet animal beloved by the McConnel family: Cockie the cockatoo. He was so talented that he could imitate the laughter of Mary's mother and so made the false impression she was in the house while in fact she was somewhere else. He could even talk a little and often asked the passers-by to give him 'a kiss or a lump of



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Louisa Atkinson: Spotted pardalote, Scarlet honeyeater, Superb blue wren and Striated pardalote

Picture 9

**Colonial women admired the colourful plumage of native birds.**

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sugar'. He was mischievous, though, and he learnt a few nasty remarks. He was also in the habit of hurting people with his beak and then demanding a kiss as if nothing had happened, saying 'Kiss pretty Cockie!' Mary Macleod Banks, *Memories of Pioneer Days in Queensland* (London: Heath Cranton, 1931): 48-51.

Several native animals made good pets. Rachel Henning had a soft spot for parrots. In her letter dated January 27 1863 at Exmoor Station, Rachel wrote that 'my writing is now assisted by a little tame parrot which insists on sitting on my pen and biting the nib. Tell Constance it is a pretty little thing with blue and yellow feathers. It walks about on my shoulder and sits on my head, and eats bits of sugar out of my mouth.' Rachel even kept a few lambs as pets that followed her wherever she went.<sup>886</sup> Some, like Janet Millett, kept very unusual native animals as pets. She listed a mountain devil, a 'noombat' and even a kangaroo rat as part of the family at certain periods of time.<sup>887</sup> Janet Millett<sup>888</sup> and Louisa Meredith<sup>889</sup> both had a pet possum. There seemed to be a general mistrust against keeping possums as pets. This was the attitude that Janet felt she had to challenge. She wrote fondly of the pet possum that turned her house into a big playground. This possum became one of the most memorable episodes of her short stay in Western Australia in the mid-1860s. Janet recorded her affectionate relationship with 'Possie':

Our friendship had been not only very close for above three years, but uninterrupted by a single disagreement, and in the recollections that rise up, as our thoughts look back to Western Australia, little Possie and her pretty ways have a very prominent place.<sup>890</sup>

Janet even managed to breed possums in captivity which was unheard-of before.<sup>891</sup>

Samuel Calvert's painting entitled "Australian pets"<sup>892</sup> (Picture 10) shows a woman and her child sitting on the verandah in the company of a yellow-crested cockatoo and another colourful bird. The two birds are rather close to the people which indicates that they are not afraid of the two humans who evidently show a great deal of interest in them. The birds may even be waiting for the woman to feed them even though she does not seem to have any seeds with her. Both the mother and the child appear to be enjoying the sight of Australian birds and their relaxed countenance suggests that they may have come to the verandah in order to rest and enjoy the wildlife. I argued in Chapter Three that the verandah was a special feminine site that extended women's private sphere and provided them with a view of the outside world. Calvert captured this female view of the environment very well in this picture and depicted not only the two colonists and two birds but also some gum trees in the background. While the verandah functioned as a secure place on the edge of the private sphere it also opened a woman's view to

<sup>886</sup> David Adams, ed., *The Letters of Rachel Henning* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1963): 124.

<sup>887</sup> Millett, *An Australian Parsonage* 184, 186, 194.

<sup>888</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>889</sup> Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania* Vol. 2: 4-13.

<sup>890</sup> Millett, *An Australian Parsonage* 215.

<sup>891</sup> *Ibid.*, 213. Some men also kept native animals as pets. John Hunter Kerr, for example, once had a tame kangaroo on his Victorian station. He noted that 'he followed me about on the premises, and came regularly to be fed at meal-times, when he would relish a piece of bread, a lump of sugar, or even a cup of tea'. John had a hard time teaching his dogs not to attack this particular kangaroo. Kerr, *Glimpses of Life in Victoria* 174.

the surrounding environment. Harmless birds could approach this female sanctuary while the wild bush remained only in the distance. In this picture Samuel Calvert illustrated that firstly, some women were fascinated by Australian fauna and secondly, they made pets of only those animals that were curious enough to come close to human settlements.



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Samuel Calvert: Australian pets

Picture 10

**The verandah provided a view of the surrounding environment and made contact with the native wildlife less threatening.**

Colonial women came into direct contact with the indigenous animals on another level, as well: the meat of native animals was sometimes served on their dinner table<sup>893</sup> even though it did not become an essential ingredient of their cuisine. Eating bush animals was another aspect of rural life, which settler women appreciated. Emma Macpherson, who resided in New South Wales only for fifteen months in the late 1850s, mentioned in her reminiscences that she prepared meals using the flesh of several bush animals. One day she had kangaroo rat that she 'roasted and stuffed in hare fashion'. She found it delicious and told her readers that its taste was 'by no means inferior to our European rabbit'. On another occasion Emma tried the meat of a ring-tailed possum because she was 'anxious to taste this Australian delicacy'. Once again it reminded her of rabbit. She had it prepared the following way: 'I had it stewed, after soaking it in salt and water all night, to take away the astringent flavour which its diet of gum leaves imparts to it, and really it made a very palatable dish.' Emma also remarked that even certain birds made delicious meals. 'Lories' and rosellas were excellent fillings of pies and cockatoos were great in soup.<sup>894</sup> Kangaroo tail soup was perhaps the most popular dish. Katharine Kirkland in the Port Phillip District particularly enjoyed cooking kangaroo tail soup. She thought it made an 'excellent' soup and was comparable to hare-soup. In 1841 she even served it on New Year's Day.<sup>895</sup>

Fish was also popular. Louisa Meredith gave a detailed description of the many types of fish that were on sale at Sydney Market in 1839. She listed the guardfish, the bream, mullet, whiting and also the shark that she tasted. She noted that the whiting was 'perhaps the best of all' but she also enjoyed eating shark. Louisa pointed out the snobbery that characterised Sydney society at that time, noticing that native fish were never served at dinner tables. Preserved or cured cod and salmon from England were more popular. They were also much more expensive than the local fish and this fact contributed to their becoming fashionable. Louisa, on the other hand, favoured the cheap and fresh local fish.<sup>896</sup>

Aboriginal people were often instrumental in showing European colonists like Ethel Hassel and Jane Bardsley their bush tucker. Jane lived in close proximity to the local Aborigines on Midlothian Station in far north Queensland. Whenever she was in the company of native women they insisted on her tasting their food. She noted that 'they were never satisfied unless I

<sup>893</sup> Jennifer Isaacs also notes that many settlers turned to native animals for substitutes for more usual types of meat. Isaacs, *Pioneer Women of the Bush and Outback* 105.

<sup>894</sup> Macpherson, *My Experiences in Australia* 249, 210-211, 123-124.

<sup>895</sup> Kirkland, "Life in the bush" 201-202.

<sup>896</sup> Meredith, *Notes and Sketches of New South Wales* 43-44.

tasted their native food'. Once Jane even tried to eat snake, finding it was similar to the breast of a young fowl.<sup>897</sup>

In some cases, however, it was necessity that made women turn to native food resources. Financial difficulties towards the turn of the century forced Jane's family to cut down on spending. It was during these harsh months that she made use of her knowledge of bush food, and included yams, duck eggs and kangaroo tail in their diet. In this way they could save some money. As soon as their financial troubles ended with the profitable sale of their cattle, however, they returned to European meals and ordered such delicacies as cases of dried apples, peaches, currants and plums.<sup>898</sup>

It is interesting to note that none of the native ingredients made their way into the staple diet of the colonists. This resistance shows that European settlers depended on their traditional food resources and were reluctant to make any adjustments to their new circumstances. Their refusal to make use of Australian sources is striking. Europeans have incorporated a great amount of foreign materials into their cuisine throughout the centuries. Rice and exotic spices from Asia and corn from America have become part of their diet.<sup>899</sup> The colonists seemed to be satisfied with century-old introductions, but were too afraid or cautious to make any new experiments. Or the relative abundance of lamb and mutton discouraged them from experimenting with other ingredients. Another possibility is that they considered native food part of Aboriginal culture. Since the colonists generally looked down on indigenous Australians it would have been unthinkable to take elements of indigenous culture into the imperial diet. Only

<sup>897</sup> John Atherton Young, ed., *Across the Years 1896-1936 - Jane Bardsley's outback letterbook* (North Ryde, NSW: Angus & Robertson, 1987): 109.

<sup>898</sup> *Ibid.*, 113, 118. Helen Mantegani was a pioneer settler of South Australia where she arrived with her family at the age of eleven in 1836. They had to shoot parrots for their meat because they had nothing else to eat. She felt sorry for the poor animals and wrote 'I am sorry to say we had to use them for food for a time, as we had no fresh provisions'. Mrs Helen Mantegani, "Recollections of the early days of South Australia from 1836" *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia - South Australian Branch* Vol. V, (1901-1902): 71. Male colonists also experimented with native ingredients when they ran out of their normal European supply. Aeneas Gunn was a pioneer settler on the Prince Regent River in the Kimberley, Western Australia, in the early 1890s. Salted beef and other canned food turned bad as a result of the excessive heat. To make matters worse, their garden of fresh vegetables also failed because they planted them in the wrong position. For all these reasons they were 'compelled to experiment with whatever herbs grew in our neighbourhood'. Unfortunately, some of these experiments failed and they often felt unwell after eating certain native fruits and plants. He wished his botanical knowledge had been more extensive. He wrote in his recollections that 'had our knowledge of botany been a little bit more profound, we would probably have saved ourselves some painful experiences'. They were always looking forward to the dry season when the game was plentiful and fish, fowls and other beasts provided them 'with plenty of food when the ordinary sources of supply failed us'. Even for Aeneas Gunn the staple diet was European food, never bush tucker. Tim Willing, et al., eds, *Under a Regent Moon* (Bentley: Department of Conservation and Land Management, 2002): 61.

<sup>899</sup> It will be shown in a later section that the Acclimatisation Societies were working hard to introduce this accumulated wealth of edible plants and animals to Australia.

a very few colonists appeared to appreciate Aboriginal customs. Time will tell when - if ever - bush tucker (as it is known now) becomes part and parcel of Australian cuisine.

### Women and Environmental Awareness

Colonial women were fascinated by the study of their natural environment and formed a positive opinion about the native flora and fauna. This section will analyse their response to the European destruction and transformation of the Australian landscape and vegetation that were rapidly changing as a result of colonial expansion and settlement. Colonists were busy cutting down trees to make way for sheep, cattle and wheat. They introduced animals and plants that were crucial to a European way of life but were alien to the Australian biodiversity. Some colonial women voiced their dissent against these changes on the pages of their life-writings. This section will firstly examine women's attitudes to environment protection while the second part will focus on their reaction to the acclimatisation of overseas plants and animals.

The act of cutting down the eucalypt trees in order to make way for sheep and human habitation gave rise to some expressions of concern. Tim Bonyhady notes that 'clearing became the subject of the first sustained critique of the settlers' impact on their environment'.<sup>900</sup> Several women regretted the loss of trees mainly for aesthetic reasons. Ellis Rowan journeyed to Geraldton in Queensland in the early 1890s. She boarded a steamboat on the Johnston River to the Goondi Sugar Plantation. There she found dense scrub at several places that was being cleared by Chinese labour. Red cedar was abundant and it was floated down the river. Ellis told her husband in her letter that 'it seems sacrilege to cut down the beautiful timber'.<sup>901</sup>

Clearing resulted in plain and empty environments that were not pleasing to the eye. Women complained that there remained no trees to provide some shade or aesthetic pleasure.<sup>902</sup> Katherine Parker regretted not only the aesthetic and practical consequences of tree felling but also pointed out the botanical losses. In her memoir *My Bush Book* she accused the early settlers

<sup>900</sup> Tim Bonyhady also lists several male settlers who raised their voice against excessive clearing in the 1820s. Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth* 84-88.

<sup>901</sup> Rowan, *A Flower-Hunter* 32-34.

<sup>902</sup> Sara Maroske points out that Louisa Meredith disliked the treeless environment around her. Maroske, "The whole great continent as a present" 31. Louisa noted the nature of the clearings around Parramatta where she stopped for a while on the way to Bathurst in 1839. She pointed out that whereas in England people planted trees to create a friendly environment around them, in Australia, in sharp contrast, the custom was to get rid of every single tree. She wrote that 'in England we plant groves and woods, and think our country residence unfinished and incomplete without them; but here the exact contrary is the case, and unless the settler can see an expanse of bare, naked, unvaried, shadeless, dry, dusty land spread all around him he fancies his dwelling wild and uncivilized'. Meredith, *Notes and Sketches of New South Wales* 56. Augustus Prinsep noted in his journal in Hobart in 1829 that 'the

of cutting down too many trees. She wrote that 'no doubt "old hands" suffered badly from the clearing mania, went mad with axes in their hands, destroying all shade and shelter, leaving their homesteads bleak and bare'. She commented on the foolishness of replacing the original vegetation with introduced species because in that way the area lost its botanical significance. She praised Mother Nature and her creations:

Nature is the gardener I like best, with her delightful prodigality. [...] Nature plants us shrubs by the thousand; idiots that we are, we too often clear them off to substitute something much less interesting, Nature's gifts being botanically new. Yet they are displaced for pepper trees, castor oil shrubs, white cedars, and so on.<sup>903</sup>

Janet Millett joined in this lamentation but learnt to regard it as a necessity under the circumstances. She came to believe that by clearing the land of gum trees colonists could greatly reduce the risk of bushfires.<sup>904</sup>

Ring-barking<sup>905</sup> was another phenomenon that often invited criticism. Wholesale ring-barking became common by the late 1850s because it was considered to be the quickest and easiest way of clearing the land. A few scientists like Ferdinand von Mueller deplored ring-barking but scientific debates had little influence whatsoever on political decision-making.<sup>906</sup> While many authors mentioned this process as a fact only a few of them were of the opinion that it might not have been the best way of felling trees. Lady Brassey suggested this when she saw some ring-barked trees in the forest near Fernshaw in Victoria. She declared in her travel book that 'I cannot but think they do harm to the country'.<sup>907</sup>

The above examples prove that women had great affection for the natural environment that surrounded them. Some of them looked at the bush not only as a property to be converted into a sheep-grazing ground but also as an area of exceptional beauty. They feared the loss of botanical diversity and did not regard the sight of barren landscape aesthetically pleasing, even though some of them understood that fuel reduction was an essential precaution against bushfires.

As well as enjoying the aesthetic and recreational aspects of the bush, as I argued in

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immediate vicinity of the town is cleared of all trees; for, with the usual hastiness of settlers, not even one, for beauty or shade, has been spared'. Prinsep, *The Journal of a Voyage from Calcutta to Van Diemen's Land* 62.

<sup>903</sup> Muir, *My Bush Book* 101.

<sup>904</sup> Millett, *An Australian Parsonage* 95-96.

<sup>905</sup> The Hill sisters described the process of ring-barking in their narrative: 'On our way to Mount Barker we passed new enclosures, whence the trees had been only partially cleared. To facilitate getting rid of the remainder they had been *ringed* – the bark all round the trunk, a foot or so above the ground, had been removed for a depth of two or three inches. The process of course gradually destroys vitality.' Hill, *What We Saw in Australia* 55.

<sup>906</sup> Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth* 178-182.

<sup>907</sup> Brassey, *The Last Voyage* 303. See also Hill, *What We Saw in Australia* 56. Many men were equally depressed by the sight of ring-barked trees. William James Woods noted of the ring-barked trees near Daylesford in Victoria in

Chapter Four, many colonial women were able to see its natural significance and raised their voices against its foolish destruction. It is doubtful to what extent women could influence the decision-makers. As shown in Chapter Two, these women usually addressed their narratives to a British female audience who were too far away and had too little voice in matters of colonial interest. Colonial women's texts are worthy of attention, however, because they document an early line of Victorian environmentalists. Louisa Anne Meredith was one of the few women who could make an actual impact with her environmentalist agenda. Vivienne Rae Ellis considers Louisa to be one of the first Australian conservationists.<sup>908</sup> Tim Bonyhady also holds Louisa in high esteem and notes that few other colonial people did as much in the way of environment protection as she did.<sup>909</sup>

Louisa was bewildered by the fact that no measures existed to put an end to cruelty to animals. She admitted that 'To me, the most mysterious part of the Almighty's scheme – so far as it becomes manifest in our daily life – is the absence of some universal, imperative prevention of cruelty to His dumb creatures'. Louisa's passion for protecting the environment included a desperate desire to protect the creatures who made that environment their home. She therefore tried to draw people's attention to man's brutality towards animals, in particular domestic ones. She foresaw the necessity of a 'stringent Animal-relief Bill'<sup>910</sup> that gave legislative power against those who caused harm to animals. Her husband was a Member of the Tasmanian Parliament at that time and Louisa encouraged him to introduce special legislation for the protection of animal species. One such bill was aimed at protecting the black swan and was eventually passed in 1860.<sup>911</sup> Louisa Meredith played a key role in the foundation of the Tasmanian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in the late 1870s.<sup>912</sup>

Louisa warned those people who harmed animals in any way of the Day of Judgement:

Men, women, and children may commit, or connive at, or leave unpunished, crimes and cruelties towards the animal creation; but it is my fixed belief, that so surely as there is a hereafter, even so surely will all such wickedness be visited upon our souls; and that not one in such sin of wanton cruelty against the smallest living thing will pass without its judgement, or be '*forgotten before God*'.<sup>913</sup>

It is evident from this passage that Louisa looked at maltreatment of and cruelty against animals

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the mid-1880s that these trees produce 'an effect as if we were surrounded by enormous white vegetable ghosts'. Woods, *A Visit to Victoria* 19.

<sup>908</sup> Vivienne Rae Ellis, *Louisa Anne Meredith – A tigress in exile* (Sandy Bay: Blubber Head Press, 1979): 182.

<sup>909</sup> Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth* 157.

<sup>910</sup> Louisa Anne Meredith, *Over the Straits: A visit to Victoria* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1861): 190, 194.

<sup>911</sup> Kordula Dunscombe, "In the service of infinite and glorious creation: The nature writing of Louisa Ann Meredith" *Papers: Exploration into children's literature* Vol. 8, No. 2, (1998): 17. Kordula Dunscombe also discusses traces of Louisa's conservationist comments in her poetical works. *Ibid.*, 27-28.

<sup>912</sup> Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth* 154-155.

as a very serious and punishable offence. Kordula Dunscombe draws attention to the spiritual dimension of Australian nature in Louisa's writings. Dunscombe argues that by reminding people that the animals were also God's creations and should therefore be dealt with appropriately, Louisa could reach out to a large number of people with her conservationist agenda:

by underpinning an understanding of nature with a spiritual sensibility, Meredith provides her readers with emotional and ethical foundations on which to build a respect for the environment. Linking nature with God (as His incarnation or as 'belonging' to Him), as well as putting reverential feeling into commonly understood terms, provides her with a weapon in her fight to have nature respected. In its crudest aspect, her recourse to God invokes Him as a guardian, sentinel, judge and punisher; nature is to be respected as His, and His omnipotence ensures that abuse of nature will not go unseen or unpunished.

Dunscombe sees Louisa Meredith's scholarship as an enormous effort to make people respect nature and be aware of their responsibility to preserve it in its natural state.<sup>914</sup> In a way Meredith's view conforms to contemporary ideas of nature. Lynn Merrill points out that in the nineteenth century the word 'nature' had several connotations and one of them was that 'nature was the given world, created by God in all its variety and, as such, a norm of truth.'<sup>915</sup>

Louisa used every possible means to get her conservationist message through to a large audience. In her *Waratah Rhymes for Young Australia* she focused on children. Some of her verses on the native flora and fauna also served educational purposes. "A walk with Miss Muffet" aimed to show a glimpse of the fascinating world of spiders and asked the readers to observe them rather than despise them. The poem "Poor Cockie" drew attention to the sufferings of caged animals who were denied their liberty, freedom of movement and even a mating companion.<sup>916</sup> Louisa continued this theme in her children's book *Tasmanian Friends and Foes*. It soon becomes obvious that Louisa depicted herself in the fictional character of Mrs Merton. Her daughter Lina Merton told her English cousin in one of her letters that 'Mamma never likes us to seek for things to keep as pets. She says we cannot make them as happy as they are in a natural state where God has placed them.'<sup>917</sup> As shown earlier, Louisa kept a pet possum in Tasmania, but strictly for the purpose of study.

The hunting of native animals was another touchy issue. Louisa Atkinson in her sketch entitled "The Wallaby Rocks" warned of the unfortunate pastime of many in possession of a gun who took pleasure in killing the inhabitants of the bush. She informed people that, as a result,

<sup>913</sup> Cited in *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>914</sup> Dunscombe, "In the service" 19, 25.

<sup>915</sup> Merrill, *The Romance of Victorian Natural History* 6.

<sup>916</sup> Meredith, *Waratah Rhymes for Young Australia* 32, 50-53.

<sup>917</sup> Meredith, *Tasmanian Friends and Foes* 19.

many vulnerable species had vanished from areas under white control.<sup>918</sup> Louisa was concerned with the threat hunters presented to the biological diversity. As shown in Chapter Four, hunting was a popular pastime among genteel ladies. Hunting may have been enjoyable but it involved the death of animals. Some women expressed their sorrow at the killing of innocent creatures. Fanny Barbour admitted in her diary after the killing of a wallaby near Rosedale in Queensland in 1887 that 'I was sorry after I had killed the little creature'.<sup>919</sup> Helen Mantegani felt uncomfortable about shooting parrots for food in South Australia in 1836, but recognised that they had no other choice. They had no fresh provisions left and therefore had to use local animals. Writing in 1901 in *Recollections of the early days of South Australia from 1836* Helen stated her dislike of the forceful destruction of birds in general.

I wish here to record my abhorrence of the reckless slaughter of beautiful and harmless birds both in past days and in the present, either for adornment or so-called sport. Too often when people go out for a holiday they want to kill something, forgetting that "Mischief's wrought for want of thought As well as want of heart."<sup>920</sup>

As we have seen so far the destruction of the native trees and the killing of native animals for the genteel pastime of hunting aroused considerable concern among colonial women. But with a few exceptions all women could do was to express their sorrow over the unnecessary destruction of native species on the pages of their narratives. Men, on the other hand, did not show so much sympathy towards the native animals and plants. They looked at them as competitors to their sheep and cattle for the precious grass and for this reason they felt it necessary to control their numbers by culling them. I pointed out in Chapter Four that men hunted kangaroos not only for sport but also to reduce their number. Men also cleared the land to make way for settlement and create more pasture for sheep and cattle. The prospect of land ownership and pastoralism were after all two crucial reasons why many colonists left Britain, as I showed in Chapter One. Settlers wanted to lead the same kind of life they had left behind in the Old World and for this reason they had to transform the landscape to their own liking. Some colonists recognised that the European way of life endangered the Australian flora and fauna but nevertheless they went ahead because their life depended on the successful outcome of their farming.

<sup>918</sup> Atkinson, *Excursions from Berrima* 12.

<sup>919</sup> Fanny H. Barbour, "Jottings", or Diary MS 8694 La Trobe Library, Melbourne, (12 July 1887 - 20 May 1888): 36. Some men also regretted the death of innocent animals. Henry Melville described the pleasures of kangaroo hunting in great detail in his life-writing but suspected that as a consequence their numbers might soon decrease. He therefore suggested that 'there ought to be, before too late, a local enactment passed, protecting the kangaroo from being destroyed when breeding, or during the summer months'. Henry Melville, *The Present State of Australia* (London: G. Willis, 1851): 306-309, 312.

Some like Edward Curr strongly believed that European farming and grazing practices improved the Australian land in a number of ways. He was of the opinion that the presence of hooved animals hardened the land and in this way drainage increased. He also noticed that the soil became more productive because there were no fires to create barren and empty tracts of land.<sup>921</sup> As a pioneer Victorian squatter he seemed to believe that he was doing good to the country by developing it in many ways. There were only a few male colonists who understood the environmental impact of European animals on the Australian land, acknowledging that sheep and cattle destroyed many types of native grass.<sup>922</sup>

Australia was also transformed in another way. In an attempt to make the country even more useful and familiar-looking, European colonists began to introduce and acclimatise new animals and plants. On the one hand they considered it an economic necessity, while on the other hand the presence of well-known species created a home-like atmosphere. The nineteenth century saw a rapid growth of human knowledge in the field of science. More and more species were discovered and people looked for ways to turn them to their advantage. Europeans had a long history of introducing foreign species. Agriculture made use of wheat, barley and oats that were native to the Middle East. Rice was originally from Asia while maize and beans were indigenous to America. Overseas species came to play a dominant role both in England and the European continent. People also got used to these plants to such an extent that they soon forgot their exotic nature. Exotic game animals were also introduced to England for the greater enjoyment of the upper-class hunters.<sup>923</sup>

Most of the settlers did not find the local plants of any use.<sup>924</sup> Janet Millett noted that the country was 'devoid of indigenous fruits or grains fit for man's use'.<sup>925</sup> As shown earlier, several colonial women experimented with local ingredients but it did not result in any sustained change in their diet. They therefore attempted to plant the familiar European crops in the new environment to satisfy their material needs. Another reason for wanting to have familiar plants

<sup>920</sup> Mantegani, "Recollections of the early days of South Australia": 71-72.

<sup>921</sup> Curr, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria Then Called the Port Phillip District* 184, 186.

<sup>922</sup> *Ibid.*, 182-183. Karl Kruszelnicki points out another consequence that the presence of cattle brought about on the Australian land. He notes that in the nineteenth century cattle droppings were not biodegradable because there were no insects to break them down. The cattle were very fussy and they disliked the grass that grew around these hard and dried cow pats. Until the introduction of dung beetles in 1967 by CSIRO cattle droppings covered huge sections of the grazing fields. Karl Kruszelnicki, *Forests, Fleece and Prickly Pears* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1997): 44-54.

<sup>923</sup> Linden Gillbank, "The origins of the Acclimatisation Society of Victoria" *Historical Records of Australian Science* Vol. 6, No. 3, (1986): 360.

<sup>924</sup> *Ibid.*, 364.

<sup>925</sup> Millett, *An Australian Parsonage* 71.

and animals in Australia was a strong dislike of the local flora and fauna still felt by some immigrants. Katherine McKell recalled that in her Victorian childhood in the 1850s and 1860s the emigrants disliked the indigenous vegetation. She wrote that 'it was the custom of many men in those days to disapprove of every plant and tree native to Australia, and much prejudice was established'.<sup>926</sup>

Botanical gardens were the centres of plant redistribution. They experimented with the introduction and acclimatisation of new crop plants with the aim of establishing profitable businesses. Kew Gardens in London was especially significant, but the Dutch, Portuguese and the French all had similar enterprises in their colonies. An organisation focusing mainly on the introduction and acclimatisation of animals was founded in Paris in 1854. The French Acclimatisation Society was the first of its kind in the world.<sup>927</sup> Six years later its English equivalent was born: the Society for the Acclimatisation of Animals, Birds, Fishes, Insects and Vegetables within the United Kingdom. Its antipodean version was formed in Melbourne in 1858 and was called the Zoological Society of Victoria. Its objects included the 'introduction and improvement of domestic birds and animals' as well as the 'importation, care, and domestication' of various mammals, fish, birds and reptiles. They also set out to introduce singing birds. This step shows how wide-spread the myth about Australian songless birds was, even in the late 1850s. It seems that commentators who praised the peculiar song of the native birds could not convince the masses.<sup>928</sup> Eric Rolls points out that this society was made up of 'zoo-keepers' whose main aim was to put animals on public display. They were not real acclimatisers yet.<sup>929</sup>

A new society was established by the members of the Zoological Society in 1861 on the basis of an English society, called the Acclimatisation Society of Victoria - it had even more ambitious plans. They intended to introduce, acclimatise and domesticate 'all innocuous animals, birds, fishes, insects, and vegetables, whether useful or ornamental'. They also wished to release animals into the wild and relocate native animals to other parts of the colonies.<sup>930</sup> Peter Jarman and Jeremy Smith note that every Australian colony formed its own Acclimatisation Society

<sup>926</sup> Katherine McKell, *Old Days and Gold Days in Victoria (1852-1873). Being the memories of a pioneer family* (Melbourne: Edward A. Vidler, 1924): 37. Cf. other women's appreciation of flora and fauna (see above).

<sup>927</sup> Eric Rolls, *They All Ran Wild* (Melbourne: Angus & Robertson, 1977): 213.

<sup>928</sup> Gillbank, "The origins of the Acclimatisation Society of Victoria" 361-371.

<sup>929</sup> Rolls, *They All Ran Wild* 212.

<sup>930</sup> Gillbank, "The origins of the Acclimatisation Society of Victoria" 371.

between 1860 and 1880 but the Victorian one was the most active of all.<sup>931</sup>

European plants and animals were introduced well before the establishment of a specialist organization, however.<sup>932</sup> Settlers brought with them European seeds to plant and animals to herd. Several women recalled this pioneering spirit among the early colonists. Jane Sanders recalled in her journal that her mother packed in England some seeds of rhubarb, caraway, melon, cabbage and turnip. She believed that theirs were the first rhubarb plants in South Australia.<sup>933</sup>

The Acclimatisation Society of Victoria introduced a great variety of plants and animals. In doing so, they tried to please a wide circle of people: they offered the camel and the alpaca for the pastoralists, deer, hare and duck for the sportsmen, and salmon and trout for the angler.<sup>934</sup> For some time, however, it remained obvious which animal was introduced and which animal was indigenous. Elizabeth Ramsay-Laye was on an excursion in the Victorian bush in the 1850s when she saw a herd of deer and a mob of kangaroos grazing on the same hill. She found it a 'strange sight' and referred to the deer as the 'intruders' while she called the kangaroos the 'true proprietors of the soil'.<sup>935</sup>

Various animals and plants were introduced to the colonies for economic reasons or for the pleasure of English men and women who missed their home country and wished to see, hear and smell the same flora and fauna as in Britain. This is what Paul de Serville notes when he defines the attempts of the Acclimatisation Societies as one form of domesticating the landscape.<sup>936</sup> Tom Griffiths looks at these societies as agents of a 'biological imperialism that accompanied and strengthened the expansion of Europe across the globe'.<sup>937</sup> The colonists brought with them to Australia not only their economic and political system but also their plants and animals. These introduced plants also soothed the nostalgic settlers. The introduced briar reminded Kathleen Lambert of home scenery. She wrote in her recollections that 'I never passed

<sup>931</sup> Peter Jarman, et al., "The invaders" in Jeremy Smith, ed., *The Unique Continent* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1992): 175.

<sup>932</sup> Gillbank, "The origins of the Acclimatisation Society of Victoria" 364.

<sup>933</sup> C.S. Sanders, ed., *The Settlement of George Sanders and His Family at Echunga Creek, 1839-40 from the Journal of Jane Sanders* (Adelaide: Pioneers' Association of South Australia, 1955): 14. The Price family settled down in Hindmarsh Island in 1853. They brought out some cattle and sheep and Sarah recalled that it was her father who had introduced Hereford cattle and Shropshire sheep to South Australia. Mrs J. Fairfax Conigrave, *My Reminiscences of the Early Days - Personal incidents on a sheep and cattle run in South Australia* (Perth: Brokensha & Shaw, 1938): 15.

<sup>934</sup> Gillbank, "The origins of the Acclimatisation Society of Victoria" 372.

<sup>935</sup> Ramsay-Laye, *Social Life and Manners in Australia* 151.

<sup>936</sup> Paul de Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees - The upper class in Victoria 1850-1880* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1991): 231.

<sup>937</sup> Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 16.

a hedge of it in Parramatta without in imagination seeing a village near St. Osyth Priory in Essex, where we passed many a summer's day gathering the crimson berries for necklaces'.<sup>938</sup>

Some people were quick to realise the disadvantages of the introduction of foreign species. Katherine Bates stated her disagreement in her travel narrative.

It seems to be a very dangerous experiment either to introduce a new species of animal into a colony or to exterminate an old one. In either case, it is impossible to discount beforehand all the dangers and drawbacks that may follow such a course until it has been taken and the mischief is irremediable.<sup>939</sup>

The disastrous effects of the increasingly growing rabbit population were just one example.<sup>940</sup>

The thistle was another unfortunate introduction. Rachel Henning noted in 1861 that the thistle, which was introduced to Australia by 'a patriotic Scotch lady' was 'another unlucky importation'.<sup>941</sup> Emily Skinner also pointed out the detrimental effects of this plant in her Victorian gold field recollections. She wrote that 'great has been the trouble and expense it has brought upon the people'.<sup>942</sup> When it was first planted, however, nobody thought that it would spread so quickly and that it would eventually become a weed.<sup>943</sup> Lydia Leavitt, a Canadian traveller in the early 1880s noted that the colonists introduced certain species because they were nostalgic. She noted that 'one can not [sic] help thinking that sentiment has been the foe of the colonist'. She added that at that time it was difficult to foresee that such 'humble' animals as the rabbits or plants such as the Scotch thistle would do so much harm.<sup>944</sup>

The majority of the colonial population supported the introduction of European stock and crops. It is illustrated by the fact that most settlers, especially the early ones, brought out seeds,

<sup>938</sup> Kathleen Lambert, *The Golden South - Memories of Australian home life from 1843 to 1888 by 'Lyth'* (London: Ward and Downey, 1890): 156.

<sup>939</sup> Bates, *Kaleidoscope* 21.

<sup>940</sup> Rabbits were first brought to Australia with the First Fleet in 1788 but early settlement did not suit the spread of wider populations. The rabbit likes open grasslands and woodlands, and parts of New South Wales were densely forested during the first few decades of the colony. Wild rabbits were brought to Tasmania by the 1830s. They adapted so quickly to the local environment that Tasmanians warned the other colonies not to introduce them - the mainlanders, however, did not take heed of their advice. The real trouble started when Thomas Austin of Barwon Park, Winchelsea, near Geelong, released twenty-four rabbits in 1859. Eric Rolls suspects that others, as well, were breeding rabbits at this time but Austin's enterprise was the most publicised of all. Austin was an English tenant farmer. After he made a fortune in Australia he wanted to live as a 'sporty squire'. He enjoyed his hunts and was very proud of the number of rabbits he could shoot on his property. The rabbits were in the meantime conquering more and more areas and brought about incredible devastation wherever they appeared. Rolls, *They All Ran Wild* 6-25; and Jarman, "The invaders" 176.

<sup>941</sup> Adams, *The Letters of Rachel Henning* 70.

<sup>942</sup> Edward Duyker, ed., *A Woman on the Goldfields - Recollections of Emily Skinner 1854-1878* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1995): 85.

<sup>943</sup> McKell, *Old Days and Gold Days in Victoria* 16. Tim Low suggests that artichoke thistles were grown as heraldic symbols in colonial Australia. Their heads were sold to people of Scottish background in Melbourne as New Year decorations. This might have been one of the many reasons why this plant was introduced. The earliest record of its presence dates back to 1839. It spread so quickly that by 1856 Scotch thistle was declared noxious. Tim Low, *Feral Future* (Ringwood: Penguin, 2001): 42.

<sup>944</sup> Leavitt, *Around the World* 64.

cattle and sheep. It was understandable that they wanted to secure their food supply for the first few months and years but as the pattern of colonial settlement suggests they kept up their European mode of living even later on. It is interesting to note that with the possible exception of Katherine Bates, none of these women highlighted the environmental consequences of sheep and cattle grazing. Pastoralism was, after all, the main source of income for many. The rapid spread of rabbits and thistles, on the other hand, which were introduced partly to please the sportsmen and the Scots, was criticised by many. As this section has shown there were quite a few female colonists who doubted the validity and suitability of introducing and acclimatising European plants and animals in Australia.

The issue of white man's relationship with the Australian fauna is dealt with in Ethel Pedley's<sup>945</sup> classic children's book *Dot and the Kangaroo*.<sup>946</sup> It is a fictional story that discusses white settlers' attitudes to the native animals in the nineteenth century. It imagines what native animals think about the colonists and their treatment of the animals. On first sight this book seems to be just another fictional version of the 'lost in the bush' theme. It is about a little girl called Dot who loses her way in the bush. A female kangaroo comes to her rescue and leads her back to her mother. The five days Dot spends with this kangaroo in the bush turn out to be a rewarding experience for the little girl. After eating the 'berries of understanding' she gains the ability to comprehend what the bush creatures are saying around her. But wherever she goes she hears complaints about the settlers. The birds are scared of being shot near the life-saving waterhole, the emus no longer dare to eat bushmen's leftover food scraps for fear of being poisoned and the kangaroos dislike colonists' custom of making kangaroo-tail soup. The animals even set up a court against the wrongdoings of the white men and place Dot as a representative of the white race.

The most serious accusations come from the female kangaroo. Her finding Dot in the bush without any protection proves to her that white men are not suited to bush life. She tells Dot 'Well, [...] that is just like you, Humans; you are not fit for this country at all! If you made your home everywhere and anywhere, it would never be lost. Humans are no good in our bush'.<sup>947</sup> The kangaroo brings berries and roots to feed Dot and notes that the colonists should make use of these edible plants instead of murdering bush animals for their meat or for the simple pleasure

<sup>945</sup> Ethel Pedley was born at Acton near London in 1859 and came out to Australia in 1873 when her father's health deteriorated. She was highly musical and taught the violin and conducted choirs in Sydney. Her brother Arthur owned Morundah, a station near Walgett in New South Wales, and M. Norst suggests that Ethel grew fond of the bush during her occasional visits there. M. Norst, "Ethel Pedley" *ADB* Vol. 11: 193-4.

<sup>946</sup> Ethel Pedley, *Dot and the Kangaroo* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1980).

of hunting. She regrets that white men took over the control of the bush. Even though the Aborigines were hunters, as well, they took only what they needed for their own survival. The kangaroo explains to Dot:

See [...] how easily one can live in the bush without hurting anyone; and yet Humans live by murdering creatures and devouring them. If they are lost in the scrub they die, because they know no other way to live than that cruel one of destroying us all. Humans have become so cruel, that they kill, and kill, not even for food, but for the love of murdering. I often wonder [...] why they and the dingoes are allowed to live on this beautiful kind earth. The Black Humans kill and devour us; but they, even, are not so terrible as the Whites, who delight in taking our lives, and torturing us just as an amusement. Every creature in the bush weeps that they should have come to take the beautiful bush away from us.<sup>948</sup>

These are strong words indeed! Ethel Pedley not only questioned the viability of European settlement but she also accused colonial hunters of a bloody and cruel sport. She respected the Aborigines for not exploiting the bush the same way as colonists did, but openly declared that humans were the enemies of animals as long as they hunted them for their flesh. Pedley also condemned the practice of killing animals for their fur. Both the Aborigines and the colonists were guilty in this matter. A koala told Dot that 'an animal's skin and fur is his own, and it's his life's business to keep it whole. Everyone in the bush is trying to keep his skin whole, all day long, and all night, too.'<sup>949</sup>

Ethel Pedley finished her story on a positive note, though. Dot finally arrived back at her home and the kangaroo, too, got back her lost joey. Dot's parents did their best to create a safe living environment for the animals at the Gabblebabble district and Dot kept up her friendship with her bush friends.<sup>950</sup> Everybody was happy in the end. Ethel suggested in this book that it was possible for the settler society to live in harmony with the native environment. One might wonder if Ethel seriously thought that humans would ever manage to achieve this goal. But in my opinion the strength of this story lies not in its ending. It is Ethel's presentation and discussion of the tension between the human and animal world that is worth noting. She drew attention to the settlers' exploitative and cruel treatment of the Australian fauna and compared colonial society to Aboriginal society in their use and abuse of the natural resources. It is in some ways unfortunate that *Dot and the Kangaroo* came to be classified just as a children's book because in this way it lost a lot of its original message. The idea that animals could have a voice of their own and that they could help and feed a human being seems rather unreal and fairytale-like. Ethel was right, however, in the sense that humans should be taught to respect the

<sup>947</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>948</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>949</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>950</sup> *Ibid.*, 100-109.

environment from a very early age. Ethel chose the form of children's book to illustrate her educational agenda.

This section has shown that environmental changes did not go unnoticed in the nineteenth century. While settlers were obsessed with the idea of progress and civilisation in colonial Australia there were a few colonists who raised their voice against the systematic destruction of the native flora and the impact of introduced and acclimatised plants and animals on the Australian ecosystem. I argued that few of these women had the power to implement actual changes but they could at least make their voice heard and tried to influence other women - and children - through their writing. Women cried for help on the pages of their narratives and pleaded for more aesthetic appreciation and understanding of botanical diversity. They wished to protect native species and asked for more compassion in the interest of the preservation of what we call natural biodiversity.

### The Garden

Wherever colonists settled they tried to humanise the surrounding landscape. In addition to clearing the bush, establishing sheep and cattle runs and building houses for themselves, they also carved out a garden both for practical and aesthetic reasons. The garden was a special part of the landscape where women spent a great deal of their time.

The garden was an important aspect of the genteel home. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall argue that 'in both image and practice the garden setting [...] proclaimed the values of privacy, order, taste, and appreciation of nature in a controlled environment. The garden was seen as an extension of the home.'<sup>951</sup> Besides botany and sketching, gardening was another activity that was regarded as appropriate for nineteenth-century middle-class women. In the wilds of Australia gardening was seen as 'a proof and affirmation of gentility in a new place'.<sup>952</sup>

The Australian garden<sup>953</sup> was also a sign of development and improvement and showed a certain level of mastery over the untamed environment. John Rennie Short puts forward the

<sup>951</sup> Leonore Davidoff, et al., *Family Fortunes - Men and women of the English middle class 1780-1850* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991): 370.

<sup>952</sup> Susan K. Martin, " 'there garden is much more forward than ours': Place and class in colonial Australian women's gardening" *SPAN* Vol. 46, (1998): 47.

<sup>953</sup> The Australian gardens had to be fenced around in order to keep the domestic and wild animals out of it. This is what Katherine McKell emphasised in her description of the Lyon Banks Estate lying eight kilometres from Daylesford in the late 1850s: 'A garden was [...] fenced with high picket palings to keep the fowls from flying over

argument that the 'garden became the image of human achievement'.<sup>954</sup> Susan Martin goes further and argues that gardeners, whether they were male or female, were 'engaged in empire building in their garden building'.<sup>955</sup> This may have been the case with male colonists, but women generally reacted differently. For them the garden was rather a source of flowers, fruits and vegetables, or a place where they could spend some leisurely hours. For Mary Spencer, for example, the garden served the purpose of recreation. She recorded in one of her diary entries during her stay in Bontharambo, north of present-day Wangaratta, Victoria, in 1854, that 'I have just been in the garden to gather roses and see the beautiful sunset'.<sup>956</sup> Mrs Cowl longed for a garden in her tropical home in Normanton in the early 1870s. She created her garden on one side of the verandah. She filled some wine and spirit cases with black soil and planted some seeds that she received by mail. She soon had a flourishing garden and she looked at it as her 'little Eden'.<sup>957</sup>

While flower gardening was seen as a proper female accomplishment, vegetable gardening was not considered to be so. For a long time herb and vegetable gardening had been seen as appropriate lady-like occupations, but the situation gradually changed in the eighteenth century due to the elaborate dress code of the time which was not suited to manual labour.<sup>958</sup> Vegetable gardening was associated with productive work and as such stood in sharp contrast to the notion of genteel idleness. Flower gardening was mainly done to please the eye and did not involve productive work. The division between productive and unproductive activities was also based on gender. The Randall family established two kinds of gardens at Mount Crawford in South Australia in the early 1840s. Mrs Randall took charge of the flower garden, laid it out and recalled in her reminiscences that 'this employment in the open air was a real pleasure'. Her husband, on the other hand, set up the orchard and looked after the fruit trees.<sup>959</sup>

In the early colonial circumstances, however, home-grown fruits and vegetables were often essential components of station life. Certain genteel ideals had to be disregarded, especially on the frontier and many women were actively involved in the production of fruits and

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and cows from munching precious fruit trees'. McKell, *Old Days and Gold Days in Victoria* 32. Rachel Henning's garden at Exmoor was also fenced. Adams, *The Letters of Rachel Henning* 137.

<sup>954</sup> John Rennie Short, *Imagined Country: Environment, culture and society* (London: Routledge, 1991): 13.

<sup>955</sup> Martin, " 'there garden is much more forward than ours' " 45.

<sup>956</sup> A. Cooper, ed., *Aunt Spencer's Diary (1854)* (Newtown: Neptune Press, 1981): 46.

<sup>957</sup> Mrs T. Holder Cowl, *Some of my Experiences During a Voyage to the Gulf of Carpentaria and Three Years' Residence at Normanton in the Early Seventies* (Brisbane: Besley & Pike, 1907): 31.

<sup>958</sup> Martin, " 'there garden is much more forward than ours' " 49.

<sup>959</sup> Geo C. Morphett, ed., *Mrs David Randall's Reminiscences* (Adelaide: Pioneers' Association of South Australia, 1939): 9.

vegetables. In 1841 Mary Thomas proudly wrote about her garden in Adelaide after five years of colonial life: 'we have little to boast of at present besides vegetables and melons, both of which we have had in abundance for our own use'.<sup>960</sup>

Davidoff and Hall argue that flowers came to represent the main female department in the field of gardening.<sup>961</sup> Flowers acquired a new meaning in the nineteenth century. As a result of large-scale industrialisation, people in Britain turned to nature with nostalgia and found comfort in their urban gardens that eventually became a source of pride and delight. While flowers were still revered as long-held symbols of purity and the brevity of life, their main attraction now was their ability to provide aesthetic enjoyment. Flowers came to be seen as proofs of 'refinement and sensibility'.<sup>962</sup> As was shown in Chapter Four, English flowers were dear to the English settlers because they reminded them of their home in Britain. It took colonial women some time to develop new associations and to appreciate the native plants. Their gardens were essential tools in this process. The cultivation of English - and later Australian - flowers reflected the extent by which gentlewomen came to feel at home in their new environment.

Female settlers took English seeds with them and attempted to cultivate English flowers in their gardens. They wished to recreate their former home in the new colony. W.K. Hancock suggests that they wanted to 'fence from the wilderness a little corner of England'.<sup>963</sup> Flowers were important elements of that home atmosphere - they were 'remedies against [...] homesickness'.<sup>964</sup> Eliza Brown asked her father in England to send some flower seeds to her garden in the Swan River Colony. Unfortunately, they arrived after the seed time was over at the end of 1843. Eliza was hopeful that after sowing them the following year they would flower. She told her father on 14 December 1843 from Gras Dale that 'I shall most carefully sow them and shall be exceedingly delighted should they flower, and the more familiar the flowers may be or in other words common or rather such as are most common to England the better I shall like

<sup>960</sup> Evan Kyffin Thomas, ed., *The Diary and Letters of Mary Thomas 1836-1866: Being the early days of South Australia* (Adelaide: W.K. Thomas, 1915): 157-158.

<sup>961</sup> In the eighteenth century women were associated with the cultivation of medicinal and vegetable plants. With the growing importance of market gardening, however, women's role was relegated to amateur gardening and flower gardening in particular. It became the responsibility of women to decorate the tables with flowers. This custom first spread from the 1820s, suppressing and eliminating earlier superstitions about the bad fortune that was associated with the presence of living and wild things in the house. Davidoff, *Family Fortunes* 374.

<sup>962</sup> William J. Lines, *An All Consuming Passion: Origins, modernity, and the Australian life of Georgiana Molloy* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1994): 136.

<sup>963</sup> W.K. Hancock, *Australia* (Brisbane: Jacaranda Press, 1966): 40.

<sup>964</sup> Bennett, *Lilies of the Hearth* 85.

them'.<sup>965</sup>

Having a garden and being able to look after plants provided Rachel Henning continuity between her old life in England and her new one in New South Wales and Queensland. Paula Hamilton and Dorothy Jones argue that for Rachel the garden was 'a reference point for her sense of belonging'.<sup>966</sup> Gardening mirrored the process by which Rachel learnt to find her new place in Australia. She sought to grow English flowers in her garden with varying degrees of success. After she came back to Australia for the second time in 1861 she resolved to try planting some English seeds at Exmoor run in Queensland where her brother Biddulph had bought land in 1858. She wrote in a letter to her sister Etta from Bathurst on 20 July that 'I am looking forward to [...] some gardening; they say English flowers do not grow very well there, but flowers of some sort must; at all events I shall try them'.<sup>967</sup> In a way she was trying to keep familiar English objects around her.

But like many English values, not every English flower could survive the Australian conditions. In this sense her attempts to grow English flowers equalled her efforts to continue with her old life in a new environment. Paula Hamilton and Dorothy Jones summarise this intention on Rachel's part: 'She actually transplants some cuttings from her English garden to the Queensland one, just as in another sense she transplants herself'.<sup>968</sup> Her garden was therefore a true reflection of her own life. On the one hand, it signalled her ties with her background, but it was also a way of creating the familiar English scenery in a strange Australian setting. Both Rachel and her flowers were exiles in a distant land. Mary Thomas noticed the same thing. She tried to cultivate fruits and vegetables in her early South Australian garden. She was sad to see that the vegetables were struggling in the alien soil and they did not taste the same as in England. She compared the settlers' efforts in the new land to the vegetables' struggle with the strange soil and noted that 'the plants being, like ourselves, not yet acclimatized'.<sup>969</sup>

Native plants in colonial gentlewomen's gardens had a symbolic meaning. They indicated that the migrants were now willing to accept the presence of native flowers among the old-world ones and that they had developed new associations. Jennifer Bennett points out that 'the adoption of native plants in the gardens of immigrant women signified, as much as anything else, their

<sup>965</sup> Peter Cowan, ed., *A Faithful Picture: The letters of Eliza and Thomas Brown at York in the Swan River Colony 1841-1852* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1991): 61-62.

<sup>966</sup> Paula Hamilton, et al., "'Watering geraniums and feeding dogs': The letters of Rachel Henning" *Journal of Australian Studies* Vol. 19, (1986): 91.

<sup>967</sup> Adams, *The Letters of Rachel Henning* 69.

<sup>968</sup> Hamilton, "'Watering geraniums and feeding dogs'" 92.

<sup>969</sup> Cited in Bennett, *Lilies of the Hearth* 85.

recognition that the new land was home'.<sup>970</sup> Georgiana Molloy disliked the native flowers at first, but by 1832 she had a great variety of flowers in her garden at Augusta. She wrote in a letter to her sister Elizabeth that British, Cape and Australian flowers were flourishing in her little flower garden by the verandah.<sup>971</sup> Elizabeth Fenton noted in her Tasmanian diary entry for 2 December 1830 that she filled her vase with Australian and English flowers alternately.<sup>972</sup> These women rejoiced in the beauties of well-known and novel flowers at the same time.

Colonial gardening differed from home gardening in the sense that gentlewomen in rural Australia often had to establish their flower gardens from scratch. They may have had someone to help them make the flowerbeds and sow the seeds, but all these activities involved physical work to some extent. Those women on the frontier who were required to maintain vegetable gardens for daily survival were even more associated with work that was not only physical but also productive. In addition to the necessity of housework and station work, many respectable women in rural Australia thus worked in their gardens, as well.

### Conclusion

In England there was a growing interest in the natural environment of the colonial landscape and for this reason many colonial writers included descriptions of the native flora and fauna in their narratives. An important aspect of these texts was their educational agenda: they informed the home audience of the peculiarities of the Australian plants and animals. Colonial women came in contact with the Australian environment not only to learn and later to write about it but they also sought to enjoy it. They collected and cultivated flowers, tamed wild animals and kept them in their homes as pets. Their narratives are testimony to the many happy hours women spent among the wildflowers, native birds and their pet kangaroos and possums. Women's enjoyment of the native flora and fauna seemed to counterbalance the burden of housework and the sense of isolation they had to endure in rural areas. In addition, women's positive enjoyment of the surrounding environment also helped them feel at home in their new country.

Lynn Merrill claims that 'natural history was not a subject that, like science, could alter the course of history and change the world, but it was a subject that could deeply affect the individual, both mind and spirit'.<sup>973</sup> Natural history enriched the life of many women. Rose Scott

<sup>970</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>971</sup> Alexandra Hasluck, *Portrait with Background - A life of Georgiana Molloy* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1960): 98.

<sup>972</sup> Mrs Fenton, *Mrs Fenton's Tasmanian Journal 1829-1830* (Adelaide: Sullivan's Cove, 1986): 77.

<sup>973</sup> Merrill, *The Romance of Victorian Natural History* 14.

Cowen was born in Queensland in 1879 and grew up on a sheep station in the dry west of Queensland 200 kilometres away from Charleville. She corresponded with the famous botanist Baron von Mueller in Melbourne and collected plants for him. She recorded in her memoir that her contact with the native flora meant a great deal to her. She noted that 'certainly that task implanted in my mind an interest in grasses and weeds and flora generally that has added zest to my many years in the bush'.<sup>974</sup> The collection of native plants in Western Australia was a task that gave 'a sense of personal achievement' to Georgiana Molloy.<sup>975</sup> She noted that 'when I sally forth on foot or Horseback [sic] I feel quite elastic in mind and step. I feel I am quite at my own work, the real cause that has enticed me out to Swan River.'<sup>976</sup>

Louisa Ann Meredith also profited from her move to Tasmania. When her uncle George Meredith offered her the position of governess to his large family in Van Diemen's Land in 1833 she rejected it because she wished to pursue a literary and artistic career. She asked him 'Where would my literature be in Van Diemen's Land? Writing sonnets to whales and porpoises, canzonets to kangaroos, madrigals to "prime merinos" and dirges to black swans, illustrated by portraits of the engaging and lovely natives?'<sup>977</sup> A few years later, however, Louisa fell in love with her cousin Charles and married him in 1839. The couple left for Australia the same year. Luckily for her she became passionate about the Australian flora and fauna. Despite the fact that Louisa did not regard the kangaroos and black swans an appropriate audience for her writings, the native plants and animals came to provide her with a unique subject matter for her art. Tim Bonyhady notes that 'Louisa's new environment improved her writing by giving her more to say'.<sup>978</sup>

<sup>974</sup> Rose Scott Cowen, *Crossing Dry Creeks 1879 to 1919* (Sydney: Wentworth Press, 1961): 59.

<sup>975</sup> Jessica White, "Efflorescence: The letters of Georgiana Molloy" *Hecate* Vol. 28, No. 2, (2002): 179.

<sup>976</sup> Cited in *Ibid.*

<sup>977</sup> Cited in Ellis, *Louisa Anne Meredith* 37.

<sup>978</sup> Tim Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth* 128.

# Chapter Six

## The Aborigines

## Introduction

Almost every colonial gentlewoman in rural Australia came into contact with the Aboriginal population during her residence in the colonies. This chapter will examine women's perception and treatment of the indigenous people. I will seek to answer to what extent women's view of the Aborigines was influenced by contemporary stereotypes and whether or not women made any personal effort to widen their knowledge. Another question this chapter will raise is whether or not contact with the Aborigines influenced and changed the lives of these colonial gentlewomen.

## Writing about the Aborigines

Chapter Two showed that the experience of colonial life gave British gentlewomen a voice and a worthy topic to write about. The compilation of personal narratives enabled women to step out of the boundaries of the private sphere and contribute to knowledge in a modest feminine way. Gentlewomen's accounts of their life in colonial Australia also reveal an interest in the indigenous people. Descriptions of various lengths can be found in their personal narratives. This section will examine why gentlewomen wrote about the indigenous Australians in their narratives.

Writing about the Aborigines gave many colonial authors a historical consciousness. British settlers predicted that the Aboriginal people would soon die out. For this reason many European writers recorded Aboriginal customs and manners for future generations who would no longer be able to encounter this race and learn about them through direct contact. In a way writing about the Aborigines was like writing about the pioneering years – both topics described a unique phase of colonial settlement. Christina Smith wished to preserve the memory of the Booandik tribe in the south-eastern part of South Australia. She arrived with her family in Greytown, Rivoli Bay South, in 1845 and spent the following thirty-five years there. She made friends with the natives of this area and made a successful effort to convert them to the Christian faith. Christina described her experiences in her book *The Booandik Tribe of South Australia*. She noted that some of the more intelligent members of the tribe, who were aware of the gradual disappearance of the community,<sup>979</sup> requested her to do something for their sake. Christina was

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<sup>979</sup> Christina Smith gave the following explanation for the decreasing numbers of this tribe: they 'will, in a few years, with the other aboriginal peoples of Southern Australia, have withered away before the new mode of life forced upon them by the advent of European colonists in their midst, assisted too often by the cruelties practiced upon them by the early settlers'. Mrs James 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 christianize and civilise them* (Mount Gambier: South East Book Promotions, 2001): iii.

afraid that no one else would write this 'memorial' of the Booandik tribe. She emphasised that she felt that 'if she did not do so it would be for ever unwritten, and the very name of the tribe with whom she has been so well acquainted, for whom she has done all in her power to benefit, and who have always treated her as a friend and benefactor, would be for ever lost'.<sup>980</sup>

I pointed out in Chapter Two that many women wrote with the intention of informing their home audience of the peculiarities of colonial life. Such books were educational and instructed the readers about the Aboriginal way of life. Jeannie Gunn's autobiographical account of her time with the Aboriginal girl Bett-Bett at Elsey Station in the Northern Territory in *The Little Black Princess of the Never-Never* reads like a novel but contains plenty of information concerning Aboriginal customs. Among other things, she wrote about Aboriginal peoples' fear of the Debbil-Debbil, the teaching aspect of corroborees, and killing by magic.<sup>981</sup> Jeannie even learnt a great deal from her protégé. When she took Bett-Bett to her homestead she noticed that before going to bed the little girl covered herself all over with mud. Jeannie asked her why she did that and learnt that in this way the mosquitoes could not bother her at night. Jeannie was pleased with this explanation and called Bett-Bett a 'very wise little person'.<sup>982</sup>

Most women wrote about the Aborigines in a very informal way which reflected their own observations of and personal experience with them. A few of them, however, described the indigenous people in a quasi-scientific manner. Ethnography was an emerging field of study in the late nineteenth century and involved the 'descriptive study of a particular human society'.<sup>983</sup> Male pastoralists frequently collected Aboriginal artefacts as objects of curiosity in the nineteenth century. Initially they used them as decorations in their homesteads, but later they also sent their collections to museums. Patricia Grimshaw and Julie Evans see Mary Bundock and Katherine Langloh Parker as two early female ethnographers in the context of an already-existing male tradition of amateur ethnographers.<sup>984</sup>

Mary Bundock spent a considerable time with the Aborigines on her family's station

<sup>980</sup> Ibid., iii-iv. Some men also recorded their impressions of the Aborigines with this historical consciousness in mind. Nathaniel Hailes wrote that 'my purpose in this and the following episode of Recollections is to present a faithful portraiture, however incomplete it may be, of tribes of natives in their primitive condition which have now wholly passed away, or are represented by inconsiderable remnants whose original features have been obliterated or disturbed'. Allan L. Peters, ed., *Recollections - Nathaniel Hailes' adventurous life in colonial South Australia* (Kent Town: Wakefield Press, 1998): 146-147.

<sup>981</sup> Mrs Aeneas Gunn, *The Little Black Princess of the Never-Never* (Melbourne: Robertson & Mullens, 1957): 7, 24, 97.

<sup>982</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>983</sup> *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* (London: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2002): Vol. 4: 583.

<sup>984</sup> Patricia Grimshaw, et al., "Colonial women on intercultural frontiers: Rosa Campbell Praed, Mary Bundock and Katie Langloh Parker" *Australian Historical Studies* Vol. 27, No. 106, (1996): 87.

Wyangarie on the Richmond River in New South Wales in the second half of the nineteenth century. She was born in 1845 in Merton in the Upper Hunter District but grew up at Wyangarie. She recorded her observations about the Aborigines in *Notes on the Richmond Blacks*<sup>985</sup> probably in the late 1890s. This document, though unpublished in her lifetime, was the result of a long-term contact with that tribe and her being a fluent speaker of the Bandjalang dialect.<sup>986</sup> What made Mary noteworthy, however, was the two collections of Aboriginal artefacts that she donated to the Rijkmuseum voor Volkenkunde at Leiden between 1885 and 1892, and to the Australian Museum in Sydney in 1895. These two collections account for about half the known Aboriginal materials from the Richmond River District. Unlike contemporary male collectors who were mainly interested in the hunting specimens and weapons, Mary's approach to collecting was more balanced and included the gathering of women's artefacts, as well.<sup>987</sup>

Katherine L. Parker was another pioneer in the field of ethnography. She lived in close proximity to Aborigines most of her life. She spent several years of her childhood at Marra Station on the Murray River in Victoria. When she was six years old she was rescued from drowning by an Aboriginal woman while two of her younger sisters perished. With her husband, Katherine settled down at Bangate, an isolated and remote station on the Narran River in northern New South Wales, 800 km away from Sydney. This was their home for the following twenty years. Katie was a childless and lonely woman and therefore cherished the company of the local Aboriginal women<sup>988</sup> who belonged to the Noongahburrah tribe, a branch of the Euahlayi. They were very friendly to her and confided their legends and tribal customs to her. Katherine scrupulously recorded their stories and published them under the title *Australian Legendary Tales*.<sup>989</sup> A further collection called *More Australian Legendary Tales*<sup>990</sup> came out a little later. Another book entitled *The Euahlayi Tribe – A study of Aboriginal life in Australia* is a comprehensive study of the customs, manners and beliefs of this tribe and was published in 1905. Katherine described several aspects of their culture including their initiation ceremonies, their costumes and weapons, the role of the medicine man and witch woman as well as their

<sup>985</sup> Mary Bundock, "Notes on the Richmond Blacks" in Isabel McBryde, ed., *Records of Times Past* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1978): 261-266.

<sup>986</sup> Isabel McBryde, "Miss Mary, ethnography and the inheritance of concern: Mary Ellen Murray-Prior" in Julie Marcus, ed., *First in their Field: Women and Australian anthropology* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1993): 27-29.

<sup>987</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-16, 32-33.

<sup>988</sup> Marcie Muir, "Catherine Stow" *ADB* Vol. 12: 113-114.

<sup>989</sup> Mrs K. Langloh Parker, *Australian Legendary Tales – Folk-lore of the Noongahburrahs as told to the piccaninnies* (London: David Nutt, 1897).

<sup>990</sup> Mrs K. Langloh Parker, *More Australian Legendary Tales* (London: David Nutt, 1898).

corroborees and diet.<sup>991</sup> Patricia Grimshaw also esteems Katherine Parker's work and regards her as 'one of the earliest observers of Aboriginal life, whose perception approximated the stance and detail of scholars in the emerging science of anthropology'.<sup>992</sup>

Katherine revealed in her preface to *Australian Legendary Tales* that she was the first person to describe the folklore of the Noongahburrahs. Like many other women of her time she, too, saw the Aboriginal people as a dying race. She also looked at her tales as the result of an amateurish investigation into the beliefs and legends of this tribe. Like the great majority of female memoir writers she seemed to underestimate the value of her work. She wrote:

we should try, while there is yet time, to gather all the information possible of a race fast dying out, and the origin of which is so obscure. I cannot affect to think that these little legends will do much to remove that obscurity [...]. I, alas, am but an amateur, moved to my work by interest in the subject, and in the blacks, of whom I have had some experience.<sup>993</sup>

Knowing the academic weakness of her writing and fearing that it would not arouse much scientific interest, Katherine targeted mainly children as her intended audience: 'Though I have written my little book in the interests of folk-lore, I hope it will gain the attention of, and have some interest for, children'.<sup>994</sup> When women focused on children in their narratives about the Aboriginal tribes they suspected that young people would be interested in the strange beliefs, customs and legends of the indigenous people. The stories sounded unreal and were like fairy-tales from another land.<sup>995</sup> Furthermore, as a woman, Katherine may not have felt comfortable addressing any other audience. Marcie Muir praises Katherine's works for the insight she gave into Aboriginal life and culture, but regrets that she was not given the kind of acclaim she deserved. Her Aboriginal tales were treated as children's texts and it was her anthropological book about the Euahlayi tribe that gave her professional recognition. From the early 1950s onwards her legendary tales were reprinted several times and were included in various anthologies.<sup>996</sup>

Ethel Hassell also made an important contribution to ethnography with the writing of *My Dusky Friends - Aboriginal life, customs and legends and glimpses of station life at Jarramungup in the 1880's*. This is the only available description of the Aborigines of the

<sup>991</sup> Mrs K. Langloh Parker, *The Euahlayi Tribe - A study of Aboriginal life in Australia* (London: Archibald Constable, 1905).

<sup>992</sup> Patricia Grimshaw, "Female lives and the tradition of nation-making" *Voices* Vol. 5, No. 3, (1995): 38.

<sup>993</sup> Parker, *Australian Legendary Tales* ix-x.

<sup>994</sup> *Ibid.*, x-xi.

<sup>995</sup> Clara Aspinall also incorporated some information about the indigenous Australians in her memoir in the hope that her 'youthful friends' would 'be able to glean some interesting information from it'. Clara Aspinall, *Three Years in Melbourne* (London: L. Booth, 1862): 140.

<sup>996</sup> Marcie Muir, ed., *My Bush Book - K. Langloh Parker's 1890s story of outback station life* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1982): 14-43, 144-177.

Jarramungup area. In her memoir Ethel gave testimony to the extensive pool of knowledge she acquired about the Jarramungup people. In addition to recording some of their legends she also described their customs and various aspects of their everyday life.<sup>997</sup>

I would argue that colonial gentlewomen's pioneering work in the field of ethnography and anthropology should be appreciated in the same way as their natural history writings. These women made remarkable observations about the local flora and the native people in their narratives, but they failed to make a significant impression on contemporary science for various reasons. Firstly, they lacked proper scientific and academic training. After all, women were only admitted to Sydney and Melbourne universities in the 1880s. Secondly, they were women and as such they were not encouraged to be seriously engaged in scientific observations, let alone in the writing of scholarly papers for publication. Women's prefaces reveal that they were aware of these social constraints but they nevertheless tried their very best to learn and write about public and scientific issues. Travel books and memoirs of colonial life provided them with a valuable opportunity to write about their exotic experiences.

Those women who lived on the frontier had an advantage because they were the first Europeans to describe the native fauna or the indigenous people of that area. As pointed out earlier, Ethel Hassell was the first European to write about the Jarramungup people, Katherine Parker was the first to collect the stories and legends of the Noongahburrahs, and Georgiana Molloy was a pioneer botanical collector in the Augusta area of Western Australia. These women were amateurs who immersed themselves in the native flora and the Aboriginal tribes out of sheer curiosity. Their pastimes later evolved into serious passions that enabled them to acquire a great deal of information. Their narratives are testimony to their expertise and show that these women clearly knew a lot more about these subjects than the average colonial authors.

Another reason why women were unable to influence the course of scientific research was that the scientific elite did not take women seriously. The scientific community appreciated Georgiana Molloy's carefully arranged collection of new botanical species but did not really accept her into their circles and did not name the plants after her as was otherwise the custom. Something similar happened to Katherine Parker's collection of stories: rather than appreciating her efforts in the field of folklore to carefully transcribe and recount the legends of one particular tribe, the book was marketed chiefly for children. Ethel Hassell's text about the Jarramungup people remained a manuscript until one of her descendants brought it into print. She may have

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<sup>997</sup> Ethel Hassell, *My Dusky Friends – Aboriginal life and legends and glimpses of station life at Jarramungup in the 1890's* (East Fremantle: C.W. Hassell, 1975): ix-xi, 229-230.

been the first to write about the Jarramungup but nobody seems to have read her pioneer account at that time. A number of colonial gentlewomen produced original and quasi-professional work, but were unable to make a significant contribution to scientific knowledge in an age in which women were not considered men's intellectual equals. Nonetheless, these books demonstrate what some gentlewomen could achieve in their free time and for their own pleasure.

### Ways of Seeing the Aborigines

#### Perceptions of Aboriginal Peoples

This section will explore the language colonial gentlewomen used in their depiction of the indigenous peoples. It will also aim to identify the kind of imagery women employed and to what extent their ways of seeing the Aborigines differed from the contemporary male view.

Europeans constructed several racial concepts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the eighteenth century Europeans saw the world in terms of a great chain of beings. According to this view of the universe, plants, animals and people each had their own slot in a hierarchical system. It was believed that this chain of being was fixed at creation, and Europeans were trying to place each new discovery of plants, animals and people in this structure. In their arrogance they assumed that European civilisation represented the highest stage of human achievement. They looked down on the Aborigines and regarded them as the link between monkey and man. Their contempt arose from their perception of Aboriginal culture as not being a civilised form of life.<sup>998</sup>

The idea that the Australian Aborigines constituted 'the lowest type of humanity'<sup>999</sup> still held true in the nineteenth century. Janet Millett noted that on her return from Western Australia in 1869 people in England took it for granted that the Aborigines were the 'lowest member of the human family'.

I have been often asked, since returning to England, whether the Australian native is not the lowest member of the human family – its shabbiest and least creditable relation; and my questioners generally seemed to have made up their minds beforehand that such was certainly the case, let my answer be what it might.<sup>1000</sup>

<sup>998</sup> Richard White, *Inventing Australia* (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1981): 8.

<sup>999</sup> Kathleen Lambert, *The Golden South – Memories of Australian home life from 1843 to 1888 by 'Lyth'* (London: Ward and Downey, 1890): 41.

<sup>1000</sup> Mrs Edward Millett, *An Australian Parsonage or, The settler and the savage in Western Australia* (London: Edward Stanford, 1872): 70. See also Emma Macpherson, *My Experiences in Australia – Being recollections of a visit to the Australian colonies in 1856-7. By a Lady* (London: J.F. Hope, 1860): 205. Men also looked at the Aborigines this way. Robert Harrison remarked in 1862 that 'the Aborigines of South Australia have generally been classed in the lowest scale of humanity'. Robert Harrison, *Colonial Sketches: or, Five years in South Australia, with*

Some women attempted to give an explanation for Aboriginal people's supposedly low condition. Ellen Clacy and Janet Millett argued that the peculiarities of the Australian continent influenced the development of the Aboriginal race in this direction. The country did not provide its inhabitants with any indigenous plants suitable for cultivation and this accounted for the natives' dependence on hunting and collecting. This nomadic mode of existence did not contribute to the development of their 'mental organs'<sup>1001</sup> but of their 'five senses'.<sup>1002</sup> This is why the indigenous people became such skilled hunters. Russell McGregor notes that the importance of environment in shaping a people's mode of existence was originally an Enlightenment notion.<sup>1003</sup>

The publication of a ground-breaking book by Charles Darwin in 1859 put the notion of permanently fixed world order in another light. In *The Origin of Species* Darwin put forward his theory of evolution. He argued that the place of every species was not constant but was changing as a result of natural selection. Plants and animals were involved in a struggle for life and only the strongest ones survived and won the right to life. This principle was known as the 'survival of the fittest'. The book's subtitle reflected this argument: *The preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life*. Darwin applied his theory to flora and fauna but his ideas were taken to refer to human society, as well. The advocates of Social Darwinism argued that the theory of evolution also explained why one human race should dominate and eventually replace another. They believed that weaker races had no chance of survival in their fight against the stronger ones. These lower races would therefore disappear and give way to the higher ones. The followers of Social Darwinism believed that this process was a law of nature and everybody must therefore submit to it.<sup>1004</sup>

Many people saw racial conflict in colonial Australia in the second half of the nineteenth century in terms of Darwinian principles. Interracial relations were relegated to being a matter of the 'survival of the fittest'. The colonists were confident that they were the absolute winners of this fight and that the Aborigines stood no chance at all. They expected the indigenous people to

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*hints to capitalists and emigrants* (Hampstead Gardens, SA: Austaprint, 1978): 139. Samuel Mossman and Thomas Banister described the Aborigines in the northern districts of New South Wales in the early 1850s as 'among the lowest beings in the social scale of the human family'. Samuel Mossman, et al., *Australia Visited and Revisited - A narrative of recent travels and old experiences in Victoria and New South Wales* (London: Addey, 1853): 297.

<sup>1001</sup> Mrs Charles Clacy, *Lights and Shadows of Australian Life* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1854): 25.

<sup>1002</sup> Millett, *An Australian Parsonage* 71.

<sup>1003</sup> Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the doomed race theory, 1880-1939* (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 1997): 1.

<sup>1004</sup> White, *Inventing Australia* 68-69.

die out to make way for the advance of white people.<sup>1005</sup> 'Silverleaf' argued in 1881 that 'it has been a necessity, this clearing of the weaker, inferior race before the more cultivated and stronger one, and has been the law of custom the great world wide'.<sup>1006</sup> Many people saw the disappearance of the Aborigines as inevitable and therefore did not seem to regret it. Annabella Boswell noted that 'I do not want to lament over their extinction'. All she wanted to do was to leave records of individual Aborigines who were pleasant and friendly to her. Her *Recollections of Some Australian Blacks* were written with this purpose in mind in 1890.<sup>1007</sup>

The dying out of the indigenous people roused concern among some women. 'Silverleaf' noted that 'it is melancholy to see how they are dying out'.<sup>1008</sup> Jane Sanders, a South Australian settler in the 1840s, noted in her journal that 'it is sad that the natives should die out in the presence of the white man'.<sup>1009</sup> The Aboriginal people's gradual disappearance was foreseen to take place in a few generations' time. This is what 'Silverleaf' emphasised in her article entitled "Natives" in 1881 in which she commented on the indigenous population of Australia as a whole: 'It is but a question of time, and not a very long time either, when the dusky native [...] will be one of the "has beens"'.<sup>1010</sup> Katherine McKell made an interesting remark when she noted that on the Lyon Banks Estate in Victoria 'as late as 1872 the bark huts of their last camp were still standing, but all the blacks had died out'.<sup>1011</sup> She recorded a situation where there was only scarce evidence left to suggest their former presence.

Some women suggested that the declining numbers of Aborigines might not have entirely been the consequence of the Darwinian 'survival of the fittest' principle. One theory was that the

<sup>1005</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1006</sup> 'Silverleaf', "Natives" *Illustrated Sydney News* Vol. XVIII, No. 9, (3 September 1881): 3. Men also used this argument. William James Woods noted in the mid-1880s that 'undoubtedly the race as a whole is doomed by its own vices to disappear before the advancing footsteps of a more vigorous people'. William James Woods, *A visit to Victoria* (London: Wyman, 1886): 45. John Hunter Kerr noted of the Aboriginal tribe near Heidelberg, Victoria, in 1839 that 'it was evident, even then, that the doom of their race was fixed; and that, in obedience to the mysterious decree of Providence, they were passing away to give place to a superior race'. John Hunter Kerr, *Glimpses of Life in Victoria by 'A Resident'* (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 1996): 11.

<sup>1007</sup> Annabella Boswell, *Recollections of Some Australian Blacks: Bathurst district, 1835-40, Port Macquarie, 1844, Hunter's River, 1850* (Australia, 1890): 14.

<sup>1008</sup> 'Silverleaf', "The Aborigines of New South Wales - their habits, laws and customs. Part IV" *Illustrated Sydney News* Vol. XX. (12 May 1883): 15.

<sup>1009</sup> C.S. Sanders, ed., *The Settlement of George Sanders and his Family at Echunga Creek, 1839-40 from the Journal of Jane Sanders* (Adelaide: Pioneers' Association of South Australia, 1955): 16.

<sup>1010</sup> 'Silverleaf', "Natives" 3. Men also saw the Aborigines as a dying-out race. Edward Curr, for example, noted somewhat poetically of the Bangerang tribe of Victoria that 'our civilization has rolled over thee, my Eubena, somewhat rudely [...]; ending alike, for the most part, thy merry ways and thy rascalities. Of thy tribe scarce one is left. Forest and swamp know thee no more. Adieu!' Edward M. Curr, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria Then Called the Port Phillip District (from 1841 to 1851)* (Echuca: Rich River Printers, 2001): 422.

<sup>1011</sup> Katherine McKell, *Old Days and Gold Days in Victoria (1852-1873). Being the memories of a pioneer family* (Melbourne: Edward A. Vidler, 1924): 79.

decreasing numbers of the Aborigines were the direct result of small families. Through the practice of infanticide the tribes sought to control their numbers.<sup>1012</sup> Constance Gordon Cumming, on the other hand, feared that the settlers were to answer for a lot of killings. She was staying in New South Wales for a few months in 1875 while her Colonial Service husband was preparing his new position at Government House and their home in Fiji,<sup>1013</sup> and while there she noted that

Perhaps, however, if all tales be true concerning the ruthless policy of extermination practised by too many of the settlers on the frontier, and the manner in which tribes have been shot down wholesale for daring to trespass on the lands taken from them without any sort of right, the extinction of the Australian black may be found to be less a law of nature than an illustration of the might that makes right.<sup>1014</sup>

Constance suspected that the Aborigines were dying out not because they were doomed for extinction by the natural law of selection but because they were cruelly slaughtered by the white settlers. Bain Attwood points out that white men's belief in their own superiority was also needed to justify the violence of Aboriginal dispossession.<sup>1015</sup> Russell McGregor, however, argues that Aborigines were expected to die out only after colonists had given up the hope of civilising them. They were considered to be a doomed race. He notes that 'more than anything else, it was a manifestation of ultimate pessimism in Aboriginal abilities'.<sup>1016</sup>

Despite these seemingly scientific arguments concerning the low stage of the Aboriginal race, Christian ideology maintained that the indigenous people of Australia were also human beings and as such were God's creations. Their humanity should therefore be respected. Lillie Matthews remarked in a letter to her bridegroom Alick Crawford in 1883 that the Aborigines 'are our fellow creatures and have precious and immortal souls'.<sup>1017</sup> It is this human aspect of the Aborigines that Mrs Praed emphasised: 'Oh yes, in the Blacks' camp, as in the squatters' humpey, there are the human affections and the common emotions which men and women, and even beasts, share. There, too, the gins mourn their mates, and the mothers love their babies.'<sup>1018</sup>

<sup>1012</sup> Emma Macpherson wrote of the Aboriginal tribe near Keera in New South Wales in the late 1850s that 'the number of children in a tribe is generally very small and disproportionate to its numbers, so that there really is every probability, in the course of a few more generations, of the race becoming extinct. This decrease in the native population may partly be accounted for by the fact of the practice of infanticide being still common among them.' Macpherson, *My Experiences in Australia* 230.

<sup>1013</sup> Douglas R.G. Sellick, ed., *Venus in Transit - Australia's women travellers 1788-1930* (North Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2003): 117.

<sup>1014</sup> Constance F. Gordon Cumming, *At Home in Fiji* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1881): 30.

<sup>1015</sup> Bain Attwood, *The Making of the Aborigines* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1989): 105.

<sup>1016</sup> McGregor, *Imagined Destinies* 13-18.

<sup>1017</sup> Patrick O'Farrell, *Letters from Irish Australia* (Sydney: New South Wales University Press, 1984): 76.

<sup>1018</sup> Mrs Campbell Praed, *My Australian Girlhood: Sketches and impressions of bush life* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1902): 71. Edward Curr also came to realise that there was indeed 'little real difference [...] in the feelings of men, civilized or savage'. Curr, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria* 143.

These examples show that despite the existence and influence of Social Darwinism there were a few colonists who considered the Aboriginal people as human beings and therefore their equals.

In many cases women simply adopted men's view of the Aborigines. I pointed out in Chapter Two that colonial women often relied on male expertise in their narratives to make their writing look more authoritative. They also incorporated colonial men's knowledge in their texts on Aborigines. When Lucy Edgar wrote about the system of polygamy and the use of weapons in Aboriginal society she acknowledged the 'Black Protector' as her source of information. She wrote that 'much of this information was elicited in the constant visits made to our house by the Black Protector'.<sup>1019</sup> Some women used their husbands as a medium of interracial communication. Emma Macpherson recalled in her reminiscences that 'in the evenings [...] my husband would get into conversation with some of the more sociable individuals, and try to extract from them all the information likely to interest me'.<sup>1020</sup> Sometimes women even identified themselves with their husband's views. Louisa Meredith's description of the Aborigines was almost wholly dependent on her husband's experience and opinion. Only occasionally did she rely on her own observations. Chapters X and XI in *Notes and Sketches of New South Wales* were filled with Charles Meredith's views of the Aborigines.<sup>1021</sup> In her later book *My Home in Tasmania* she even pointed out that her account of the relationship between blacks and whites in Tasmania made use of the notes Charles had made for her.<sup>1022</sup>

Female European settlers often viewed Aboriginal men as threats to their personal safety. Many women were afraid of the Aborigines on the frontier and in isolated areas where the indigenous people were not yet under the controlling influence of the colonial authorities. Katharine Kirkland pointed out that she 'did not much like being alone with' them.<sup>1023</sup> Women in isolated bush stations often had to endure loneliness while their husbands were away. Looking after the station often involved days and weeks of separation and during that time women were alone and solely in charge of the house. As was shown in Chapter Four, bushrangers, swagmen, male labourers and snakes were always unwelcome visitors. Aborigines were also seen as a

<sup>1019</sup> Lucy Ann Edgar, *Among the Black Boys: Being the history of an attempt at civilizing some young Aborigines of Australia* (London: Emily Faithfull, 1865): 34.

<sup>1020</sup> Cited in Margaret E. McGuire, "The legend of the good fella missus" *Aboriginal History* Vol. 14, No. 2, (1990): 130.

<sup>1021</sup> Mrs Charles Meredith, *Notes and Sketches of New South Wales During a Residence in that Colony from 1839 to 1844* (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1973): 90-113.

<sup>1022</sup> Mrs Charles Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania, During a Residence of Nine Years* (London: John Murray, 1852) Vol. 1: 190.

<sup>1023</sup> Katharine Kirkland, "Life in the bush" in Hugh Anderson, ed., *The Flowers of the Field - A history of Ripon Shire together with Mrs Kirkland's Life in the bush from Chambers's Miscellany, 1845* (Melbourne: Hill of Content, 1969): 198.

threat in such circumstances.<sup>1024</sup>

But of course not every Aboriginal man approached the house of solitary female women with bad intentions. Ada Cambridge recalled that in most cases the indigenous men who came close to her second home in Yackandandah in the early 1870s did not want to hurt her. All they wanted was either tobacco or a few rags. Nevertheless, the sight of Aboriginal men approaching always made her think of dreadful tales she had read in missionary magazines in her childhood and caused her to wonder where the revolver was.<sup>1025</sup>

Rather than being the aggressors, however, some Aboriginal tribes offered protection to lonely women. Matilda Wallace is one example. She arrived in South Australia in 1859 at the age of twenty-one. She married Abraham Wallace two years later and went with him to the bush. Matilda and her husband lived a wandering lifestyle, moving from one camp to another between 1861 and 1871. Matilda was often left alone while Abraham was on the road delivering goods to people or taking flocks of sheep from one place to another. When they were in Mount Murcheson they tried to settle down and applied to the Government of New South Wales for land to purchase. In the meantime they built a house and waited for the surveyor's permission to open a store. He never made it to their place and Mr Abraham, having got tired of waiting for him and doing nothing, went hawking to sell his goods. Two hours after his departure a group of blacks appeared and camped in the close vicinity of the house. Matilda was dreadfully afraid of them and had several nightmares about being attacked by them. She soon found out, however, that her fears were groundless. The natives acted as her protectors and supplied her with food for about two weeks. She preserved the memory of these friendly Aborigines in her recollections:

Fear, I may say, was quite uncalled for, as it proved, for they were very friendly to me, and the old King seemed to think it quite his right to protect me, making me understand it was very wrong of 'big one white fellow no good leave you along y'rself, black fellow no leave min lubra'. He and his lubra used to go out in their canoe and catch wild duck and bring me more eggs than I could possibly make use of; but I was very thankful they were so peaceable.<sup>1026</sup>

This was, however, an isolated incident during her ten-year-long life in the bush as a married woman. She mentioned other periods of solitary life but the Aborigines she later came across during her husband's absence all frightened her.

<sup>1024</sup> Delys Bird also notes this aspect of bush life. Delys Bird, " 'Born for the Bush': An Australian women's frontier" *Australian and New Zealand Studies in Canada* Vol. 2, (1989 Fall): 12. Elizabeth Hampsten points out that when Midwestern women were on their own, they were also afraid of the Indians. Elizabeth Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself - The private writings of Midwestern women, 1880-1910* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982): 42.

<sup>1025</sup> Ada Cambridge, *Thirty Years in Australia* (London: Methuen, 1903): 69.

<sup>1026</sup> Matilda Wallace, *Twelve Years' Life in Australia. From 1859 to 1871* (Adelaide: The Author, 187?): 7.

Men, also sometimes fearful of the Aborigines,<sup>1027</sup> were better equipped and prepared to protect and defend themselves. Pamela Sharp contrasts the way colonial men and women behaved towards the Aborigines in times of conflict. She argues that while men organised several group attacks, women, on the other hand, did not.<sup>1028</sup> James Hamilton recalled in his narrative that when a pastoralist was murdered by the 'blacks' in 1845 a 'call to arms was made'. In his opinion 'it was necessary to teach the blacks a lesson, and the station people met and decided to take the law into their own hands'.<sup>1029</sup>

Ann McGrath notes that colonial women hardly ever killed Aborigines themselves.<sup>1030</sup> It partly arose from the fact that British women were neither encouraged nor trained in the use of firearms. Fighting was exclusively men's business.<sup>1031</sup> Women tried to avoid the use of guns or only used them as a means of intimidation.<sup>1032</sup> Sarah Musgrave recalled the importance of firearms in keeping away the Aborigines. She wrote in her reminiscences that 'it was the knowledge that firearms were kept at Burrangong that deterred many a murderous raid'.<sup>1033</sup> Katharine Kirkland also found herself reliant on pistol as a form of protection. In 1839 she was living in the bush in the Port Phillip District. One day when her husband was away, seven wild natives appeared. They were naked 'which gave us a great fright'. So she took her pistol which was loaded and was hanging in the room. Her servant Mary also had her own pistol and they kept walking up and down with their pistols in their hand in front of the hut for about an hour. She recalled that this was a frequent occurrence.<sup>1034</sup> John Hunter Kerr suspected that most women did not know how to use firearms. He noted that 'more than once, ladies, who on some emergency had been left alone in a Bush cottage, were able to protect themselves against one or

<sup>1027</sup> When Edward Curr was left alone at his hut at Wolfscrag in 1839 he was frightened by the prospect of an Aboriginal attack. He noted in his narrative that 'at all events I was not without anxiety, knowing, as I did, that not many months since the owner of a station not ten miles away had been wounded, and some of his men killed, by the Blacks, and that four or six soldiers had been sent from Melbourne for his protection, whilst I, a lad just out of my teens, was here without a comrade, indifferently armed, and quite inexperienced'. Curr, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria* 53.

<sup>1028</sup> Pamela Agnes Sharp, "A Study of Relationships between Colonial Women and Black Australians" (MA thesis, Deakin University, 1991): 67-68.

<sup>1029</sup> James C. Hamilton, *Pioneering Days in Western Victoria - A narrative of early station life* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1923): 30.

<sup>1030</sup> Ann McGrath, "Sex, violence and theft: 1830-1910" in Patricia Grimshaw et al., eds, *Creating a Nation* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1996): 145.

<sup>1031</sup> Pamela Agnes Sharp takes the case of a Mrs Lister as an exception who killed and wounded several Aborigines when they were trying to set her house on fire. At the time of the attack in the early 1850s at Coochin Coochin Station she was together with another woman and without male protection. When the intention of the natives became clear Mrs Lister took a gun into her hands and shot as many Aborigines as she could. Her case was a very rare one, though. Sharp, "A Study of Relationships" 58.

<sup>1032</sup> *Ibid.*, 67-68.

<sup>1033</sup> Cited in *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>1034</sup> Kirkland, "Life in the bush" 196.

more wild blacks, by preserving an undaunted aspect, and by judiciously displaying firearms, of whose use possibly they were profoundly ignorant'.<sup>1035</sup>

When the Aborigines were not close to the house they were often seen as little more than landscape features.<sup>1036</sup> Margaret E. McGuire points out that the rendering of the savage as part of the landscape was a professional painting technique dating back to the seventeenth century. This tradition was practised in the nineteenth century in the Australian context.<sup>1037</sup> Ellis Rowan's landscape description reflected this painting technique. She paid a visit to Myola in the vicinity of Cairns in the early 1890s. One day she decided to walk to the Aboriginal camp to make some sketches. In a letter to her husband she described the encampment:

It was a very picturesque scene; the rich, dark brown of the natives and their huts, the reds of the dying fires and films of blue smoke as they curled upwards against the dark background of forest jungle, and in the foreground the sheen of sunlight on the river, where the little figure of a native boy was dexterously paddling a little canoe to the opposite side, all combined to form a picture. Wild beautiful nature shut me in on every side.<sup>1038</sup>

It is evident from this short passage that the Aboriginal tribe – just like the forest and the river – was an element of a picturesque composition. I argued in Chapter Four that colonial gentlewomen often emphasised the picturesque characteristics of the Australian landscape. The Aborigines provided another interesting component of these imaginary pictures through which women often saw the landscape.

Sophia Campbell's watercolour painting "Australian Landscape, Natives and Kangaroo in Foreground"<sup>1039</sup> (Picture 11) looks at the Aborigines as landscape features. Two native men are depicted in this picture with spears in their hands as they are preparing to kill a kangaroo. Sophia places the Aborigines in the foreground to help frame the picture and they are seen as decorative elements of the composition. The title of the picture reveals that Sophia regards these two natives as part of the Australian landscape. Sophia does not consider it worthy to name and locate the actual scene. For her the sight of a kangaroo and two Aboriginal men characterise the

<sup>1035</sup> Kerr, *Glimpses of Life in Victoria* 139.

<sup>1036</sup> Elizabeth Hampsten also notes in her discussion of Midwestern women's private writings in the second half of the nineteenth century that even for the American women the Indians were just a part of the landscape. Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself* 42.

<sup>1037</sup> McGuire, "The legend of the good fella missus" 127-128.

<sup>1038</sup> Mrs Rowan, *A Flower-Hunter in Queensland and New Zealand* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1898): 48-49. Emma Macpherson began her two chapters on the Aborigines near Keera in New South Wales this way: 'One of the most interesting features of the landscape in the vicinity of our station was an encampment of aborigines, about a quarter of a mile from our cottage.' Macpherson, *My Experiences in Australia* 202. Mrs Praed also commented on the group of Aborigines who lived in the vicinity of her childhood home in Bungroopim on the Ubi in Queensland. She wrote that 'there were Blacks and there were Bunya feasts, for the tree flourished in these parts, [...] and were, like the Bunya, a picturesque feature, in keeping with the scenery'. Mrs Campbell Praed, *Australian Life: Black and white* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1885): 94-96.

<sup>1039</sup> Picture Collection, National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an4563857>

typical Australian landscape.<sup>1040</sup>



By permission of the National Library of Australia

Sophia Campbell: Australian landscape, natives and kangaroo in foreground

Picture 11

**Aboriginal people were often depicted in landscape paintings as decorative elements. Just like trees, waterfalls, rocks and animals they were often seen and depicted as landscape features.**

<sup>1040</sup> Men also described the Aborigines this way. See for example Curr, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria* 412. Samuel Thomas Gill's painting "Early Australian landscape" depicts a group of Aborigines who are camping by the creek. Even though the painting is dated from the 1840s Samuel Gill refers to the sight of camping Aborigines as an early Australian landscape. His title suggests that even as early as the 1840s he no longer considered the Aborigines significant features of the Australian landscape. He probably had in mind the sight of grazing cattle and sheep as the dominant features of the Australian landscape. S.T. Gill, "Early Australian landscape" Picture Collection, National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an469666>

When the colonists described the Aborigines as landscape features they seemed to treat them as if they were just another piece of Australian exótica that was worth writing about in their narratives. Like the colourful native birds and magnificent flowers, the Aborigines were another aspect of the environment that these British women regarded as a curiosity and a novelty that deserved to be mentioned and described to their home audience. Their depictions aimed to be precise<sup>1041</sup> and illustrative. Some of them even included sketches of Aboriginal life in their narratives.<sup>1042</sup> The indigenous people's depiction as landscape features also put the Aborigines into another category; Margaret McGuire argues that 'in rendering Aborigines as part of the landscape the gentlewoman makes it plain that she is culture, they nature'.<sup>1043</sup>

Another common way of dealing with the Aborigines was to treat them like children. Even though Ethel Hassell was a great friend of the Aboriginal tribe of the Jarramungup area she declared that indigenous people had to be treated like children. She stated that 'the only way to deal with the natives is to treat them like children whatever you promise, do, whether it is gift or a punishment'.<sup>1044</sup> Their representation as children of nature was also widespread.<sup>1045</sup> The child-like image of the Aborigines<sup>1046</sup> seemed to imply that they were no longer seen as threats to white people. The indigenous people were now regarded as harmless and hence their frequent child-like depiction in colonial narratives. Children did not pose a threat to adults because they were weak and not fully developed physically and intellectually. They were not able to compete

<sup>1041</sup> Their descriptions seem rather careful and structured. Where necessary they even supplied the Aboriginal term for each concept. These passages reveal women's familiarity with some Aboriginal cultural concepts. Mrs Hughes described the hut where the Aborigines stayed near their station on the River Murray a few kilometres away from Wellington in the 1840s. She noted that the whirlie was 'made out of long sticks stuck in the ground in a semi-circle, filled with rushes and reeds. There is no covering on the top, but the sticks bend inwards, so as to screen off the sun and the rain.' Mrs F. Hughes, *My Childhood in Australia* (London: Digby, Long, 1892): 19.

<sup>1042</sup> See for example Smith, *The Booandik Tribe* "Queen Caroline" 35., Hassell, *My Dusky Friends* "A drawing of native mias" facing p. 147, Macpherson, *My Experiences in Australia* "The Blacks' camp" facing p. 202, "A native burial place" facing p. 223.

<sup>1043</sup> McGuire, "The legend of the good fella missus" 130. Men also described the Aborigines in this way. See for example Curr, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria* 412.

<sup>1044</sup> Hassell, *My Dusky Friends* 84. See also Alexandra Hasluck, ed., *Remembered with Affection - A new edition of Lady Broome's 'Letters to Guy'* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1963): 111.

<sup>1045</sup> 'Silverleaf' called the Aborigines in her article "Natives" in the *Illustrated Sydney News* in 1881 'sable children of the wilderness' and 'poor, simple children of Nature'. 'Silverleaf', "Natives" 3. Russell McGregor notes that 'the assumptions that Aborigines were in, or close to, a state of nature was to enjoy a very long vogue'. He traces its very first mention to Captain Tench's *Description of the Natives of New South Wales*. McGregor, *Imagined Destinies* 1. Men also referred to the Aborigines in this manner. Edward M. Curr called the Aboriginal tribe at Tongala Station near the River Murray in Victoria in 1841 'children of the woods'. He also added that 'they constantly reminded me of children, whose anxieties were about matters to which the average white man is not called on to pay much attention'. Curr, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria* 87, 92.

<sup>1046</sup> Sara Mills, in her analysis of women's travel writing, places the childlike image of the native inhabitants of a country in the context of imperialism. She argues that by regarding the indigenous inhabitants of a place as children the traveller distanced herself 'temporally'. This 'denial of coevalness' meant that the indigenous people were

with adults in any way but were expected to submit themselves to adult rule. When the Aborigines ceased to be seen as competitors for the land the colonists treated them as an inferior group of people who needed instruction and guidance.

Aborigines were also seen as savages.<sup>1047</sup> Janet Millett looked at the Aborigines near York in Western Australia in this manner and expressed this attitude in the subtitle of her reminiscences: *An Australian Parsonage, or, The settler and the savage in Western Australia*.<sup>1048</sup> The image of the Aborigines as noble savages was also common. Ethel Hassell described the Jarramungup tribe of Aborigines as 'noble savages'<sup>1049</sup> and Janet Millett portrayed an Aboriginal man who was wearing his 'native kangaroo mantle' as a 'gentleman savage'.<sup>1050</sup> When the Aborigine was seen as a noble savage his observers admired his primitive conditions of life and strongly believed that he was much happier without civilisation.<sup>1051</sup> Lucy Gray suggested that the Aborigines were a happy people despite their miserable conditions. She made a short stopover in Townsville in 1868 on her way to Hughenden Station. On seeing the local Aborigines Lucy pointed out that even though the indigenous people may seem a pitiable race to outsiders, they were in fact a happy people.

The blacks seem miserable enough to people who cannot imagine happiness without comfort, but really in their free open air life, they are far happier than the poor in crowded alleys and close rooms of large towns. We think they must be wretched having to eat rats and snakes: they consider them delicacies, and there is no very great difference between rats and rabbits, snakes and eels, except taste and customs. They rarely suffer from hunger and disease until they come in contact with civilization, learn to wear clothes, to drink, smoke, etc, etc. Never having been accustomed to clothes they know nothing of the danger of damp or chills they are out in the rain, their clothes are wet, they have no idea of changing or drying them any more than they would of drying their skins after a shower or bathing.<sup>1052</sup>

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'considered distant from the time of adult Europeans'. Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference* (London: Routledge, 1991): 89.

<sup>1047</sup> The concept of the savage was the creation of the Enlightenment and was used to refer to the earliest stage in the development of mankind. By the late eighteenth century there was a strong belief in progress. It was widely held that mankind underwent three stages of development. Russell McGregor refers to it as the 'stage theory'. Savages represented the first stage and their major mode of subsistence was hunting. Barbarism characterised the intermediate stage and nomadic pastoralism was its main attribute. Civilisation was considered to be the final stage with agriculture and commerce as the foundation of the society. Europeans believed that civilisation made people superior and they therefore looked down on savages. McGregor, *Imagined Destinies* 1-3.

<sup>1048</sup> Millett, *An Australian Parsonage*.

<sup>1049</sup> Hassell, *My Dusky Friends* 93.

<sup>1050</sup> Millett, *An Australian Parsonage* 73.

<sup>1051</sup> White, *Inventing Australia* 11.

<sup>1052</sup> Lucy Gray, "Journey to Hughenden" *Queensland Heritage* Vol. 1, No. 1, (1964): 14-15. Men also applied this term to the Aborigines. Edward Curt referred to the Bangerang Aborigines of Victoria as savages throughout his narrative but admitted that 'the blackfellow has decidedly something of the gentleman about him'. Furthermore, he also believed that 'on the whole, the blackfellow in his wild state suffered less and enjoyed life more than the majority of civilized men'. Curt, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria* 86, 291. John Hunter Kerr also referred to the Yarra and Loddon River Aborigines as savages throughout his narrative. The concept of the gentleman savage affected John, as well. He noted of their appearance that 'their sable forms, wrapped in loose opossum-skins, when

The above examples suggest that colonial women looked at the Aborigines as inferior people and employed such images that reflected this attitude. Janet Millett was greatly surprised when an indigenous man treated her and her husband as his equal on his first visit to their parsonage at York. After he told them his name he added that he was a 'gentleman fellow' and he came to say hello to the Millett couple. He referred to Janet's husband as another 'gentleman fellow'. Janet was taken aback by this daring attitude. She noted that 'perhaps what struck us most in his manner was the complete taking for granted that he and ourselves were upon precisely the same social level; an idea which we were fain to accept in a complimentary sense, such being evidently the intention of our visitor'.<sup>1053</sup>

Gentlewomen relied on a contemporary pool of images in their descriptions of the indigenous population of Australia. The images were numerous and reflected different phases of settlement. There existed an official and scientific ideology behind such ways of seeing them as savages, the dying-out race, or the lowest type of humanity. Many gentlewomen conformed to mainstream contemporary opinion when they described the Aborigines in such manner and accepted the view of themselves as socially superior in relation to the Aborigines.

### Perceptions of Aboriginal Women

British women often reflected on Aboriginal women in their narratives. This section will seek to answer the question whether or not colonial women's contact with Aboriginal women resulted in a uniquely feminine view of Aboriginal women.

British women established relationships mainly with Aboriginal women and children. It was very unusual for them to spend much time with Aboriginal men.<sup>1054</sup> I have shown in Chapter Three that gentlewomen lived in a feminine world and they had contact with those men who were either their father, brother, husband, or a male relative or acquaintance of their family. They did not consider it proper to associate with other men whether they be European or Aboriginal. Another factor that discouraged colonial women from the company of Aboriginal men was that they were seen as threats to their personal safety especially on the frontier and in isolated stations as discussed earlier. The 'tamed' and 'domesticated' indigenous men were usually employed on

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seen stalking through their native forests, are not without a certain air of savage dignity'. Kerr, *Glimpses of Life in Victoria* 150, 12.

<sup>1053</sup> Millett, *An Australian Parsonage* 73.

<sup>1054</sup> Jeannie Gunn was unusual in the sense that she acknowledged an old man as her instructor. Jeannie noted that she enjoyed learning about the Aborigines. An indigenous man called Goggle Eye noticed that Jeannie was a European woman who did not laugh at and make jokes of Aboriginal laws and customs and he was therefore not

the station rather than in the house and in this way the female colonists did not have the chance to associate with them.

English settlers and visitors frequently noted the imbalance that existed between Aboriginal men and women's share of work in the household. Women seemed to bear the burden of work while Aboriginal men appeared to be interested only in their weapons. This was how Mary Thomas saw the situation in Adelaide in February 1839: The men 'are naturally indolent and averse to labour of every kind. [...] They leave what little work there is to do, such as carrying burden, their young children and such like, entirely to their women, and will encumber themselves with nothing but their warlike weapons.'<sup>1055</sup> Harriett Daly acknowledged that the women of the Larrakiah tribe near Palmerston in the early 1870s were in a pitiable situation. She noted that 'the poor lubras are [...] a most wretched, down-trodden set of women. They are cruelly and selfishly treated by their lords and masters, who make them do all the hard work of everyday life.'<sup>1056</sup> Clara Aspinall was not afraid to generalise in her Victorian reminiscences in 1862 and wrote that the 'men treat the poor women as slaves'.<sup>1057</sup> Emma Macpherson was inclined to believe that the treatment of women mirrored the maturity of that society. She pointed out that 'if the consideration in which women are held among a nation is, as some gallant writer has suggested, a fair test of the civilization of that people, then I think the Australian aboriginal would sink very low indeed in the scale of civilized humanity'.<sup>1058</sup>

The way Aboriginal families travelled also drew criticism on the part of the colonial observers. Many remarked that once the natives set off on their journey the women carried all their earthly possessions while their husbands led the way. In contrast, men took only their spears with them. Emma Macpherson noted that in addition to being her master's slave the poor

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afraid to inform her of the native customs. He regularly satisfied Jeannie's curiosity and told her everything that she was interested in. Gunn, *The little Black Princess* 14.

<sup>1055</sup> Evan Kyffin Thomas, ed., *The Diary and Letters of Mary Thomas 1836-1866: Being the early days of South Australia* (Adelaide: W.K. Thomas, 1915): 104. Pamela Sharp notes in her thesis that this was a common way of seeing the relationship between black men and women. Even the earliest commentators such as Elizabeth Macarthur shared this view. Sharp, "A Study of Relationships" 36.

<sup>1056</sup> Mrs Dominic D. Daly, *Digging, Squatting and Pioneering in the Northern Territory of South Australia* (Victoria Park, WA: Hesperian Press, 1984): 69.

<sup>1057</sup> Aspinall, *Three Years in Melbourne* 144. Julie Jeffrey notes in her book on female American migrants' experience in the West that they also commented on Indian women's slave-like subjection. Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women - The Trans-Mississippi West 1840-1880* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1979): 76.

<sup>1058</sup> Macpherson, *My Experiences in Australia* 228. Interestingly enough, some colonial men also noted the unfortunate situation of Aboriginal women. William James Woods came to the same conclusion while he was visiting the Coranderk Blacks' Reserve in Victoria in the mid-1880s. He argued that the Aborigines 'are a very degraded race, and in nothing is this more conspicuous than in their treatment of women. An aboriginal never spoils his wives in any other way than with a grumble-breaker.' Woods, *A Visit to Victoria* 44.

woman was also 'beast of burden of her lord'.<sup>1059</sup> Sharp draws attention to the explanation Ethel Hassell gave in her work on the Aborigines.<sup>1060</sup> Ethel Hassell showed much interest in Aboriginal culture while she lived at Jarramungup Station north of Albany from 1878 to 1886. The Aboriginal women explained to her many of their cultural practices. Among other things Ethel learnt the reason why Aboriginal men kept ahead of women on journeys and let them carry their belongings. Ethel was probably aware that this was a phenomenon that puzzled many people. She wrote that 'I learned a reason for the "noble savage to stalk on in front with only his weapons, while his patient spouse loaded with the household goods followed behind" '. Ethel was taking a long walk one summer day when she noticed an Aboriginal couple coming towards her. She had known them from before and she scolded the man for letting his spouse carry such a heavy load while he only had his weapons with him. The Aboriginal man replied that should he be attacked and killed she would have time to escape and go back to the tribe. Ethel considered this to be a 'good sound reason'.<sup>1061</sup> Mary Macleod Banks gave another explanation in her Queensland recollections. She claimed that the local Aborigines applied this mode of travelling because it allowed the men to hunt for animals on the way.<sup>1062</sup>

European observers also frowned on Aboriginal eating habits. The custom of men eating first greatly shocked outsiders – both women and men<sup>1063</sup> alike. Aboriginal women, after a hard time of collecting and digging up roots and other edible plants, received only the leftovers. Katharine Kirkland noted that 'sometimes a very affectionate cooley may now and then while he is eating, throw a bite to his leubra [sic], as we should a dog, for which kindness she is very grateful'.<sup>1064</sup>

Aboriginal courtship was another aspect of Aboriginal culture that European women tended to criticise. Ellen Clacy claimed that 'the aboriginal method of courtship would not be admired by white ladies'.<sup>1065</sup> The way Aboriginal men forcefully took women from their family and tribe roused much concern even among men.<sup>1066</sup> The stealing of wives seemed cruel and possessive but this was not the end of women's miseries. They were also speared and beaten 'for

<sup>1059</sup> Macpherson, *My Experiences in Australia* 228.

<sup>1060</sup> Sharp, "A Study of Relationships" 88-89.

<sup>1061</sup> Hassell, *My Dusky Friends* 93-94.

<sup>1062</sup> Mary Macleod Banks, *Memories of Pioneer Days in Queensland* (London: Heath Cranton, 1931): 46.

<sup>1063</sup> See for example Hamilton, *Pioneering Days in Western Victoria* 99.

<sup>1064</sup> Kirkland, "Life in the bush" 191.

<sup>1065</sup> Clacy, *Lights and Shadows of Australian Life* 28.

<sup>1066</sup> William Thomas also noted in his narrative about the Victorian Aborigines that 'there is seldom a marriage without much fighting'. He also pointed out that women did not have much say in choosing their husband and at first they were reluctant to accept the man who won the fight for her. But in the end women were usually reconciled to their fate. Thomas Francis Bride, ed., *Letters from Victorian Pioneers* (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1969): 400-401.

the slightest fault' as Janet Millett put it.<sup>1067</sup> Despite Aboriginal men's seemingly cruel treatment of their womenfolk, female colonists were happy to stress that Aboriginal children were spared such bad treatment.<sup>1068</sup>

Infanticide was an Aboriginal custom that horrified the European settlers because of their Christian background. The Hill sisters considered it a 'deplorable practice'.<sup>1069</sup> Katharine Kirkland noted in her memoir that Aboriginal women often killed their young babies when the previous baby was still very young.<sup>1070</sup> Unlike Katherine, Christina Smith wrote from experience rather than hearsay. She witnessed many of the customs of the Booandik tribe and devoted a whole section to the description of the indigenous customs concerning the delivery of children. She informed her readers that delivery was a female-dominated ritual. The pregnant woman gave birth to her child in a secluded but pleasant part of the country far away from the tribe. Aboriginal women often killed their offspring when they did not want to rear them. In other cases they simply let the baby die. It was seen as a kind of revenge for the pain and suffering their bearing caused. Christina also noted that many of them ate their babies in the belief that their flesh would make them strong.<sup>1071</sup>

Only very few colonists saw Aboriginal infanticide as a means of population control. Mrs Mary Mudge was one of them. She noted that the tribe that lived in the vicinity of Cornalla Station at the junction of the Murray and Edward Rivers in the 1850s disliked large families and were never allowed to raise more than three offspring. They were afraid the food supply would not cater for such large communities. There was a native woman in the tribe called No-name who was expecting a baby. She told Mary that she would kill the infant soon after its birth. Mary and her aunt tried to convince her not to kill the little one and promised to provide her with food and clothes all her life but No-name did not take heed of their request. She was much more influenced by Aboriginal laws and therefore did not heed the pleas of the two colonial

<sup>1067</sup> Millett, *An Australian Parsonage* 78.

<sup>1068</sup> Colonial women were glad to note that indigenous people were 'very kind and good to their children'. Bundock, "Notes on the Richmond Blacks" 266; and that they possessed 'gentle, affectionate dispositions' towards them. McKell, *Old Days and Gold Days in Victoria* 12. Men shared this view. See for example Curr, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria* 247.

<sup>1069</sup> Rosamond Hill, et al., *What We Saw in Australia* (London: Macmillan, 1875): 117.

<sup>1070</sup> Kirkland, "Life in the bush" 191.

<sup>1071</sup> Smith, *The Booandik Tribe of South Australian Aborigines* 5-8. Many men also suspected that Aborigines committed infanticide. See for example Hamilton, *Pioneering Days in Western Victoria* 98. William Thomas worked as an assistant in Port Phillip to the Chief Protector of the Aborigines in Victoria. In his narrative about the Aborigines he stated that boys were preferred to girls and for this reason they often killed the infants until the mother delivered her first baby boy. Bride, *Letters from Victorian Pioneers* 402. Edward Curr also mentioned the practice of infanticide. Curr, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria* 246.

women.<sup>1072</sup> 'Silverleaf' argued in 1881 that most of the babies that were put to death by Aboriginal people were half-castes whose murder was permitted by Aboriginal moral code. When black infants were destroyed it was usually done out of 'necessity'. The tribe felt that they would not be able to look after the infants properly when they were threatened by war or fleeing from an enemy.<sup>1073</sup>

Colonial women's remarks on the position of women in Aboriginal society suggest that they possessed a sympathetic view of native women. They emphasised Aboriginal women's inferior position in relation to their husbands. They disliked the way indigenous men treated their women: firstly, they disapproved of the heavy workload women were expected to carry out while their men were laying idle; secondly, they looked down on the men who beat their wife or gave only the leftovers from their meal. The Christian colonists abhorred the Aborigines also because they paid no attention to the fifth commandment that said "Thou shalt not kill" and regularly put their unwanted infants to death. A possible explanation for these seemingly odd customs was difficult to find and only a few women were informed that certain cultural practices were in fact carried out to ensure the long-term survival of the Aboriginal people.

It is interesting to note that colonial women avoided drawing parallels or comparisons between themselves and the indigenous women. One could argue that their ability to point out and notice these seemingly imbalanced and unfair elements of Aboriginal society suggests two things. Firstly, these gentlewomen were sensitive to the injustices their fellow women had to endure, and secondly, they had certain expectations of how men should behave towards their womenfolk. They took it for granted that women were the weaker sex and for this reason they should not be allowed to carry heavy objects. After all, these colonial women were gentlewomen who cherished certain ideals of genteel customs such as male courtesy and female fragility. European chivalry and the notion of the separate spheres demanded that gentlemen worked for their ladies and invited them to their tables to share their meals together. So when the British settlers attempted to depict Aboriginal society, they described them in a way that reflected western social attitudes and cultural values. These gentlewomen were aware that the female sex deserved special treatment because of their perceived physical weakness and presumed status within the domestic sphere. Colonial women were, however, either unwilling or too afraid to

<sup>1072</sup> Mary Mudge, *Memoirs of the late Mrs Mary Mudge* MSB 426 MS 8504, La Trobe Library, Melbourne (1927): 2. Mrs Mary Mudge did not write her own reminiscences. She only told them to somebody in 1927 (the actual author is unknown). This material was nevertheless included in this research.

<sup>1073</sup> 'Silverleaf', "The Aborigines of New South Wales – their habits, laws, and customs – Part II" *Illustrated Sydney News* Vol. XX, No. 3, (17 February 1883): 18. See also Macpherson, *My Experiences in Australia* 230.

draw any comparison between their own situation and that of the Aboriginal women because they took their assumed superiority for granted. The perceived low status of Aboriginal women was another proof that the colonists had nothing to learn from the natives because they represented a lower form of social structure.

There was a difference in the way European men and women witnessed the sufferings of Aboriginal women. The radical Louisa Lawson called for help on the pages of her journal *Dawn* in 1897 and devoted one editorial to this cause. She wondered why so many charitable female missionaries travelled overseas to assist the poor women of India and China while there was plenty of opportunity for work among the 'poor and neglected women of Australia – the aborigines at our doors, who are dying every day from outrage and cruelty'. The *Dawn* therefore appealed to 'white women everywhere to show consideration and kindness to these poor remnants of a dying race, sympathising with their troubles, alleviating, as far as possible, their hardships, and honouring their womanhood'. Louisa drew her readers' attention to the fact that Aboriginal women were also 'wives and mothers like ourselves'.<sup>1074</sup>

Eliza Hamilton Dunlop<sup>1075</sup> expressed her sympathy with the plight of the Aborigines in her best-known poem "The Aboriginal Mother"<sup>1076</sup> which appeared in the *Australian* on 13 December 1838. In this poem she highlighted the sufferings of the Aborigines through the figure of a mourning mother who had lost her partner in a battle with the 'pale-faced men'. This woman wanted to fight the enemy and was ready to defy them but her womanly instinct for survival proved stronger and she decided to flee. The poem describes her on the run with her baby. The verse was written in the first person singular and reads like a monologue of the Aboriginal woman who is devastated by the death of her lover who was her 'friend' and 'guide' at the same time. She never believed that he could ever die. Now she misses him and wonders who will teach her young one the necessary skills of life.

Now who will teach thee, dearest,

<sup>1074</sup> Louisa Lawson, "A word for the blacks" *Dawn* Vol. 11, No. 7, (1 November 1897): 9.

<sup>1075</sup> Eliza Hamilton Dunlop was born in County Armagh, Ireland, in 1796 and came out to Sydney with her second husband David Dunlop and their four children in 1838. She published poetry in Ireland and also in several Australian papers and magazines such as the *Sydney Gazette*, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Sydney Standard*, to mention a few. David Dunlop was appointed police magistrate and protector of Aborigines at Wollombi in the area of the Hunter Valley in NSW in 1839. Eliza was on friendly terms with the local Wollombi tribe. She is also credited for being the 'first Australian poet to attempt transliterations of Aboriginal songs'. Eliza Hamilton Dunlop, *The Aboriginal Mother and Other Poems* (Canberra: Mulini Press, 1981): Biographical Note by Elizabeth Webby, unpaginated.

<sup>1076</sup> *Ibid.*, unpaginated. Elizabeth Webby suggests that Eliza based her poem on the events of the Myall Creek massacre of 1838. Newspapers reported about the beheading of men, the human fires and the escape of one woman. The child figure could have been an extra addition to raise the pathos of the whole situation. *Ibid.*, Biographical Note by Elizabeth Webby, unpaginated.

To poise the shield, and spear,  
 To wield the *koopin*, or to throw  
 The *boommerring*, void of fear;  
 To breast the river in its might;  
 The mountain tracks to tread?  
 The echoes of my homeless heart  
 Reply – the dead, the dead!

It is interesting to note Eliza's use of italicised words and phrases in the poem. On the one hand Eliza Dunlop highlighted Aboriginal terms such as 'koopin' and 'boommerring'. In this way she could stress the importance of these tools in the Aboriginal way of life: her baby will be ignorant about their use and will therefore not become a truly Aboriginal person. His death had only one good outcome. She hoped that he would go to God and let him know of Christian people's cruelty towards the Aborigines.

...he's gone!  
 Gone o'er the golden fields that lie  
 Beyond the rolling clouds,  
 To bring thy people's murder cry  
 Before the Christian's God.

Yes! o'er the start that guide us,  
 He brings my slaughter'd boy:  
 To shew their God how treacherously  
 The stranger men destroy;  
 To tell how hands in friendship pledged  
 Piled high the fatal pire;  
 To tell, to tell of the gloomy ridge!  
 and the *stockmen's human fire*.

Eliza also emphasised references to white men's cruelty towards the natives. Her final image of the stockmen's fire of human bones and remains is especially dreadful.

This poem has universal values: it reflects a woman's grief at losing her partner and the educator of her child and shows her determination not to break down but to carry on and bring up her child alone. The woman is also hopeful that justice will be done one day. She is not interested in the politics of this warfare but is devastated by the human loss that it brought about.

Eliza's poem was not received well, however, and she felt it necessary to write a Letter to the Editor of the *Sydney Herald* on 29 November 1841 to defend her point of view. She regretted that most people were blind to the sufferings of the Aboriginal people and that they were unable to accept that a wife and mother's feelings were universally true regardless of the colour of their skin.

The erudite reviewer decides, as an anomalism, the idea of attributing the sweetest emotions of the heart – the feelings of mother and wife to an untutored savage – or moral courage to a wild denizen of nature's solitudes! [...] 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.<sup>1077</sup>

There were, however, some compassionate men, as well. Charles Harpur wrote a similar poem called "An Aboriginal mother's lament". This verse also expresses an Aboriginal mother's sorrow over the death of her partner and whose first instinct is also to flee the scene of her lover's murder. Harpur also emphasises white men's cruelty towards the indigenous people: 'the unsparing white man, / With his dread hand murder-wet!' The poem highlights the difficulties the Aboriginal mother and her child will have to face after his death. Harpur, in sharp contrast to Dunlop, however, mainly focuses on the loss of this Aboriginal man as the protector and food provider for his family:

No more shall his loud tomahawk  
Be plied to win our cheer,  
Or the shining fish pools darken  
Beneath his shadowing spear;  
The fading tracks of his fleet foot  
Shall guide not as before,  
And the mountain-spirits mimic  
His hunting call no more!<sup>1078</sup>

This poem lacks the kind of empathy for a fatherless family that Eliza Dunlop wrote about. As women, Eliza Dunlop and Louisa Lawson could better understand the difficulties women encountered in the role of wives and mothers. But it is also possible that Charles Harpur wanted to stress only the cruelty of the white settlers through the image of this Aboriginal mother. His emphasis was therefore on the foolish bloodshed rather than on the fate of that fatherless Aboriginal child. Nevertheless, the two poems show that a male and a female poet wished to emphasise different aspects of the frontier warfare in their verse.

## Relationships

### Everyday Contact

I have shown in the earlier sections of this chapter that colonial gentlewomen usually associated Aborigines with negative images as a result of a lack of understanding. This section will explore the often kindly attitudes female colonists had towards Aboriginal women. The way colonial women interacted with Aboriginal people was often influenced by necessity or special reasons that occasioned communication. For many others the need for companionship was the main driving force.

Colonial women in the bush usually had contact of some kind with the Aborigines.<sup>1079</sup>

<sup>1077</sup> Eliza Hamilton Dunlop, "The Aboriginal mother - Letter to the Editor" *Sydney Herald* (29 November 1841): 2.

While women like Ethel Hassell and Katherine Langloh Parker revealed a deeper than average interest in the indigenous way of life there were other women, too, who appeared curious about the indigenous people. For Janet Millett the sheer sight of this race was considered to be the 'crowning point of a much-enjoyed voyage'.<sup>1080</sup> The study of Aboriginal customs and habits at Yackandandah in country Victoria in the early 1870s provided Ada Cambridge with 'a valuable and picturesque experience',<sup>1081</sup> while it was a 'source of great interest' to Emma Macpherson who was 'naturally very anxious to learn' all she could about them.<sup>1082</sup> Katharine Kirkland was not so enthusiastic about the Aborigines. She was frightened of encountering them because she had heard bad accounts of them in Van Diemen's Land. When her family landed at Point Henry in the Port Phillip District in January 1839 she 'kept looking round, expecting every moment to see some of the dreaded savages rushing upon' them.<sup>1083</sup>

Women employed various strategies to learn about the Aborigines - some of them even tried to learn their language. Janet Millett admitted that 'I took some pains to learn the vocabulary' of the Aboriginal people near York in Western Australia. She added that 'I did not, however, attain so much proficiency in the study'.<sup>1084</sup> Proficiency in a native language helped women like Katherine L. Parker and Mary Bundock gain substantial knowledge about the indigenous people. Katherine learnt the dialect spoken by the Noongahburrahs who lived along the Narran River,<sup>1085</sup> while Mary was fluent in the local dialect of Bandjalang in the Richmond District of New South Wales.<sup>1086</sup>

<sup>1078</sup> Douglas B.W. Sladen, ed., *A Century of Australian Song* (London: Walter Scott, 1888): 205-206.

<sup>1079</sup> The case of Sarah Benson Walker is indeed exceptional in that she never saw any Aborigines during her residence at Lauderdale in Muddy Plains near Hobart Town in the late 1820s and early 1830s. She arrived there with her family in 1822 when she was ten years old. They first rented a house in Brisbane Street but later moved to Muddy Plains where her father bought land. It was at that time a small settlement. Sarah recalled in her memoir in 1884 that 'there were Aborigines in the neighbourhood, but I never saw any'. Sarah Benson Walker, "My memories of life in Hobart Town as recorded, in 1844, by Sarah Benson Walker, the wife of George Washington Walker of Hobart Town, banker" in Peter Benson, ed., *All That We Inherit* (Hobart: J. Walch, 1968): 147. Ronald Gibbs notes that by 1850 a few Tasmanian Aborigines survived. Ronald Malcolm Gibbs, *The Aborigines* (South Melbourne: Longman, 2000): 92. Richard Waterhouse notes that city people did not have much contact with the indigenous population from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Richard Waterhouse, "Australian legends - Representations of the bush, 1813-1913" *Australian Historical Studies* Vol. 31, No. 115, (2000): 209.

<sup>1080</sup> Millett, *An Australian Parsonage* 72.

<sup>1081</sup> Cambridge, *Thirty Years in Australia* 69.

<sup>1082</sup> Macpherson, *My Experiences in Australia* 203.

<sup>1083</sup> Kirkland, "Life in the bush" 176.

<sup>1084</sup> Millett, *An Australian Parsonage* 83.

<sup>1085</sup> Muir, *My Bush Book* 146-147.

<sup>1086</sup> McBryde, "Miss Mary" 22. Some men were also curious about the Aborigines and they, too, sought to learn their language. Edward Curr recalled that 'from the first I had' a good deal of curiosity about the aborigines, constantly observing their ways, talked a good deal with them, and rapidly picked up a smattering of their language'. Curr, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria* 92. John Hunter Kerr was also fascinated by the Aborigines near Heidelberg, Victoria in 1839. He noted that 'I was far more interested with our aboriginal neighbours, [...] and the

The relationship between colonial women and Aboriginal women has already been examined by many scholars.<sup>1087</sup> They all emphasise the generally friendly attitude female colonists had towards indigenous women. Women's good intentions are often revealed in their addressing the Aborigines as their friends. Mary Macleod Banks began the sixth chapter of her Queensland memoir that dealt with the Aborigines: 'The coloured folk living about us were our friends.'<sup>1088</sup> Annabella Boswell also referred to the Aborigines of the Capita Tribe as 'our old friends' in her *Recollections of Some Australian Blacks*.<sup>1089</sup> Ethel Hassell called the Aborigines of the Jarramungup area her 'native friends' and even entitled her memoir *My Dusky Friends*.<sup>1090</sup>

Some women, especially childless women, entered into a very special relationship with the indigenous Australians. Neither Jeannie Gunn nor Katherine L. Parker had any children. They brought Aboriginal children into their home and tried to educate them. Jeannie Gunn even recorded the time she spent with Bett-Bett in a book that she entitled *The Little Black Princess of the Never-Never*.<sup>1091</sup> Mickey Dewar claims that Jeannie Gunn's book was the first record in the literature of the Northern Territory to describe friendship between Europeans and the Aborigines.<sup>1092</sup> Both Jeannie and Katherine described the playfulness of the indigenous children, wrote about their mischief and explained the way they interpreted western culture. Katherine's account is especially illuminating because it sheds light on the difficulty of understanding European culture from the point of view of Aboriginal children. Parker recounted a Christmas when her Aboriginal protégées put a dead mouse under the tree because they wished to give something to Snowey, their pet cat, too. On another occasion they encountered a group of visiting children and when they saw them pray they asked the Missus what that 'corroboree' was for.<sup>1093</sup>

Aboriginal women often introduced European women to their culture and way of life.<sup>1094</sup>

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novelty of whose appearance and habits were a source of continual amusement to me'. Kerr, *Glimpses of Life in Victoria* 11.

<sup>1087</sup> See for example McGuire, "The legend of the good fella missus"; Sharp, "A Study of Relationships between Colonial Women and Black Australians"; Myrna Tonkinson, "Sisterhood or Aboriginal servitude? Black women and white women on the Australian frontier" *Aboriginal History* Vol. 12, (1988): 27-39; McGrath, "Sex, violence and theft: 1830-1910".

<sup>1088</sup> Banks, *Memories of Pioneer Days in Queensland* 41.

<sup>1089</sup> Boswell, *Recollections of Some Australian Blacks* 3.

<sup>1090</sup> Hassell, *My Dusky Friends* 9.

<sup>1091</sup> Gunn, *The Little Black Princess*.

<sup>1092</sup> Mickey Dewar, *In Search of the 'Never-Never'* (Darwin: Northern Territory University Press, 1997): 25.

<sup>1093</sup> Muir, *My Bush Book* 88-90.

<sup>1094</sup> Colonial children also benefited from their friendships with Aboriginal children. Just like lonely adults, European children often found playmates among the Aborigines. Alice Hughes grew up on a station near Wellington in South Australia in the 1840s. As a child she spent a great deal of time with the local Aborigines. She recalled in her childhood memoir that the Aboriginal people were their 'chief interest and amusement'. They taught her

Ethel Hassell noted of the local tribe near her station Jarramungup that 'I made many friends amongst them, the natives, and gained to a great extent their confidence, and always went fearlessly about among them'. Their 'customs and strange ways [...] were an unfailing source of interest to me'. Ethel claimed that she learnt how to track and developed the 'sixth sense of a native' so she could not get lost. She also learnt bush craft.<sup>1095</sup> Chapter Five showed that the Aborigines often instructed colonial women about the native plants.

Jane Bardsley presents a very interesting case. She was living with her husband on Midlothian Station in the late 1890s. It was an isolated cattle station north-east of Normanton, Queensland. She spent so much time with the local Aborigines that she began to identify with them in some ways. Her involvement in the Aboriginal community went so far that in one of her letters she declared that 'at times I feel black and I'm sure the natives think that I am some dead relative who has jumped up as a white fellow'. The indigenous people wanted to tattoo her arms and legs and suggested her to have one of her front teeth knocked out as a sign of being a married woman, but she strongly resisted these Aboriginal customs. Corroborees were different, though. She admitted that 'I can certainly corroboree as well as any gin already'.<sup>1096</sup> In an age when it was believed to be more advantageous to be 'white' than 'black' Jane's identification with Aboriginal culture must have seemed extraordinarily absurd. Why would anyone associate with them and appreciate their cultural practices? Jane clearly respected these people and was interested in their corroborees. It was, however, one thing to appreciate and practise Aboriginal customs that might have seemed like a bit of a game but it was another thing to dress like an Aboriginal person. Outward appearances had to be preserved to maintain social standing in the colonial society. Notions of gentility, after all, were uppermost.

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canoeing and showed her the edible fruits and plants of the bush. She admitted that the time she spent with them gave her 'quite a taste for out-door life, and added many interests to our childish discoveries and bush wanderings'. Hughes, *My Childhood in Australia* 28, 44, 51-57. Ellen Campbell grew up on a New South Wales station that was located five kilometres from the township of Carcoar in the 1850s. One day her father brought home a three-year-old Aboriginal boy. Ellen Campbell and her sister first treated him as a 'toy' but he later became their 'pupil and pet'. He was given the name Tommy and made friends with Ellen's brother Ted. Ted was about fifteen years old when he went down with the measles. The children were forbidden to enter his room. One day Ellen's mother asked Tommy to go and pick some wild raspberries for Ted. He immediately left for the bush to collect some for his sick friend. Tommy was so eager to give his friend his favourite fruit that he disregarded all warnings about entering the sick room. Ted's mother fell asleep and when she woke up she found Tommy feeding Ted with the raspberries. As a consequence Tommy also got the measles which killed him a week later. Ellen noted that they cherished Tommy's memory as long as they stayed on that station. She wrote that 'Mary and I lamented sorely for our pupil and pet. He lies under a shady willow in the corner of the old garden at home, and as long as we remained there we kept the small grave bright with flowers. I wonder if any one tends it now?' She entitled the chapter in which she wrote about Tommy 'A faithful little blackfellow'. Ellen Campbell, *An Australian Childhood* (London: Blackie, 1892): 83-96.

<sup>1095</sup> Hassell, *My Dusky Friends* 9-10.

<sup>1096</sup> John Atherton Young, ed., *Across the Years 1896-1936 - Jane Bardsley's outback letterbook* (North Ryde, NSW: Angus & Robertson, 1987): 109-110.

As we have seen so far some lonely colonial women sought friendship with Aboriginal women. In their personal narratives women wrote enthusiastically about the happy hours they spent in their company. The question arises, however, what kind of friendships these gentlewomen established with the indigenous women. How was it possible to treat them as friends when the popular scientific ideology of the time treated the Aborigines as an inferior race in relation to the British race that was perceived to be the mightiest and grandest in the world? Were these friendships of an egalitarian kind between two equals? Did colonial gentlewomen differentiate between how they treated their 'white' friends and their 'black' friends?

These are difficult questions to answer also because colonial women did not really elaborate on the meaning of these friendships, nor did they compare them with other relationships. Myrna Tonkinson suggests that 'while friendly relations between White and Black women were not uncommon, there were seldom friendships of an egalitarian kind'.<sup>1097</sup> I would suggest that colonial gentlewomen must have been aware of the racial and class differences that existed between themselves and their Aboriginal companions. It probably took them some time to get used to the idea of mingling with seemingly inferior people, but once they overcame these prejudices they realised the value and significance of interracial communication. They learnt to enjoy the companionship of indigenous women who enriched their colonial experience. In this way colonial women could overcome their sense of isolation from the human world.

Colonial life liberated many gentlewomen in the sense that they could do things which were thought improper in Britain. Their friendship with seemingly primitive people might have been unthinkable in Britain. I would argue that colonial gentlewomen's friendships with Aboriginal women were most likely not comparable to their friendships with other British women, but this did not deter many colonists from entering into friendly relationships with them. These gentlewomen seemed to appreciate their friendships with seemingly inferior women the same way they valued their rough pioneering conditions or their physical work in the house and the station. All these things and experiences were interesting because they were novel, extraordinary and well beyond the reach of the average gentlewoman in England.

Nevertheless, Jane Bardsley probably looked at the Aboriginal women as her true friends. She got along very well with the local Aboriginal women but deep in her heart she still missed 'the companionship of other white women'. When she left Midlothian in 1901 she realised how much the Aborigines had come to mean to her. She called them her 'luba friends'. The

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<sup>1097</sup> Tonkinson, "Sisterhood or Aboriginal servitude?" 38.

indigenous women seemed attached to Jane, too. They asked her not to go, but she felt it was in the interest of her children to 'move into civilisation'. When Jane said good-bye to them, the sight of all these sad women made her eyes fill with tears. She eventually broke down and started weeping, too;<sup>1098</sup> friends were friends regardless of colour.

The Aboriginal tribe's love and respect for Jeannie Gunn at Elsey Station in 1902 was shown when they presented her with a 'goodfellow stick'. Jeannie later learnt that the giving of such sticks represented the 'highest compliment a blackfellow can pay a "white missus", for no ordinary woman is allowed even to look at these sticks'.<sup>1099</sup> There seemed to have developed mutual love and respect between Jeannie and the Aboriginal tribe during the one year she spent in the Northern Territory. Such friendships across the racial line were probably seen as highly unconventional, but nevertheless they made an impact both on the colonial and the indigenous women.

Male friendships with Aborigines tended to have a different character. James Hamilton recalled that he was on friendly terms with an Aboriginal man called Jacky who was king of the Apsley and Tatiara tribe. He worked as a shepherd for James's father and James noted that 'we were much together'. He added that this 'friendship [...] lasted as long as he lived' and that Jacky always asked for some money.<sup>1100</sup> Edward Curr was another man who called some Aborigines his friends. Just like some of the colonial women, he also found company among the Aborigines and was happy to learn about their ways. He described his relationship:

In truth, many a time when weary of books, with nothing to fill the vacant hour, right glad I was to see thee coming over the little plain at Thathumnèra, with lubra, picaninny, and all thy belongings; to count with thee thy hunting spoil and listen to thy budget of small news, even though thou heldest an empty pipe somewhat prominently before me, or pressed on my thy [sic] longing for a share of the contents of my flour-bags. Many a time, too, was I glad to have thee as a companion in hunting and shooting, for a merry fellow thou wert.<sup>1101</sup>

These two examples suggest that colonial men's friendships with Aboriginal men seemed to differ from women's friendships in the sense that men emphasised their Aboriginal friends' inferiority more openly than women did. Both Hamilton and Curr mention in their short description of these friendships that the Aborigines depended on them financially. They either worked for them or relied on their handouts. I suggested earlier that social and class boundaries between settler and indigenous women were not emphasised so clearly in female friendships.<sup>1102</sup>

<sup>1098</sup> Young, *Across the Years* 128, 135.

<sup>1099</sup> Gunn, *The Little Black Princess* 42.

<sup>1100</sup> Hamilton, *Pioneering Days in Western Victoria* 94.

<sup>1101</sup> Curr, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria* 422.

<sup>1102</sup> However, as I argued in Chapter Three, colonial women constantly pointed out the big social gap that existed between themselves and their servants.

Rather, women focused on the emotional side of their friendships with native women and pointed out how much their presence and conversation meant to them.

Another difference between colonial women and men's perception of the indigenous people was that while colonial women had less contact with Aboriginal men, colonial men, on the other hand, did have a significant experience of Aboriginal women, sometimes entering into sexual relationships with them. Colonial women may have been aware of this problem among the male station hands but it was definitely a much more serious matter when their own husbands committed adultery. Sexuality was a taboo subject among respectable women in the nineteenth century.<sup>1103</sup> In 1840 Annie Baxter discovered that her husband Andrew was having an affair with an Aboriginal woman. As a consequence Annie forbade him enter her bed forever.<sup>1104</sup> Annie was one of a handful of gentlewomen who declared in their life-writings that some white men made sexual advances to Aboriginal women. This incident made a lasting impact on Annie who was never able to forgive her husband for betraying her. Even after eight years Annie noted his infidelity in her diary.<sup>1105</sup>

Colonial children were often looked after by indigenous women.<sup>1106</sup> Emma Macpherson noted that she heard satisfactory accounts of native women who acted as nurses to white children. She admitted, though, that she never had enough confidence in them to trust her child in their care while she resided in New South Wales for a year. She occasionally got the assistance of one young girl who kept an eye on her baby while she went out for a walk or got some work done. She insisted, however, that the girl should take a bath before she was allowed to touch the child. Emma wrote that she was very 'glad' about her service and that she 'really made a useful elfin-like little nurse'.<sup>1107</sup>

Ann McGrath notes that colonial women often provided medical help for the Aborigines.<sup>1108</sup> Ada Cambridge offered assistance to the Aboriginal women in her home 'Como' in the early 1870s. She had their wounds plastered and also gave milk and other necessary things

<sup>1103</sup> Joseph Ambrose Banks and Olive Banks note that 'the Victorians banished sexual topics from their drawing-rooms'. J.A. Banks and Olive Banks, *Feminism and Family Planning in Victorian England* (New York: Schocken, 1977): 108.

<sup>1104</sup> Lucy Frost, ed., *No Place for a Nervous Lady* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1984): 100.

<sup>1105</sup> Lucy Frost, *A Face in the Glass - The journal and life of Annie Baxter Dawbin* (Melbourne: William Heinemann, 1992): 101, 114.

<sup>1106</sup> Amie Sterling recalled in her *Memories of an Australian Childhood* that when her little brother was accidentally left behind at Lakes Entrance by his father the local Aboriginal tribe took care of him and they returned him after the harsh winter. Cited in Sharp, "A Study of Relationships" 92.

<sup>1107</sup> Macpherson, *My Experiences in Australia* 230-231.

<sup>1108</sup> McGrath, "Sex, violence and theft" 144.

that young mothers needed.<sup>1109</sup> The lack of appropriate medical services was a pressing concern for many colonists living in isolated areas. Most colonial women had to acquire some medical knowledge.<sup>1110</sup> It was a crucial skill of survival, as Charlotte May Wright acknowledged in her recollections *Memories of Far Off Days* in 1927. She was born in Richmond Vale, New South Wales, in 1854 and after her marriage in 1872 Charlotte went to live at Nulalbin on the Dawson River in Queensland, which was about 130 kilometres away from the nearest town Rockhampton. It was a very isolated property and she often had to act in the capacity of doctor and nurse. She recalled that

in those days of no doctors, nurses, or any available medical help, the 'missus' was supposed to undertake the care of the sick. It was rather an ordeal for a girl who had never had any experience of illness, but it was wonderful what you could do if you had to, and I found that an instinct seemed to develop, or a light was shown to lead in anxious cases.<sup>1111</sup>

Another occasion that resulted in interracial contact between women was native women's fear of their husband's punishment. Several colonial women wrote about indigenous women who sought shelter and protection in their house. Emma Macpherson recalled such an occasion when an indigenous woman rushed into her room. She was 'trembling with fear, bleeding from a wound on the head and [was] hardly able to speak'. She took refuge under Emma's bed. Emma's husband happened to be in the room at that time and he asked her what the matter was. They learnt that her 'owner' was jealous and threatened to kill her. Mr Macpherson succeeded in terminating the fight but the woman was still afraid of going back to her tribe so she spent the night in the house.<sup>1112</sup>

<sup>1109</sup> Cambridge, *Thirty Years in Australia* 69. Jane Bardsley was not allowed, however, to provide medical assistance to the local Aborigines on Midlothian Station in the second half of the 1890s. It is not really clear from her letter who exactly forbade her to give medication to the sick Aborigines. The text suggests that her husband, who was eleven years older, might have asked her not to do so. The argument went that should any of her protégés die she would be blamed for their death and would most probably be killed by the tribe in revenge. This inability to help affected Jane deeply. One day a seventeen-year-old native girl brought her little baby. Both of them were feverish. When the mother lay down for a while Jane thought about giving a hot bath and a dose of oil to the poor baby but she was prevented from doing so. She spent the following afternoon 'crying about the dying piccaninny'. The baby eventually died the day after. Young, *Across the Years* 65-66. Some men also recalled giving medical help to the Aborigines. Robert Dawson established friendly relations with the Port Stephens tribe of Aborigines in New South Wales in the late 1820s. He recalled that 'the natives at Port Stephens were perfectly alive to the effects of medicine upon them, when administered by white people; and when they were unwell, generally sent some one of their family to inform me. [...] I always gave them, when they came to me, a dose of aperient medicine.' Robert Dawson, *The Present State of Australia* (London: Smith, Elder, 1831): 323.

<sup>1110</sup> Alison Alexander notes the same in her book on Australian women's lives. Alison Alexander, et al., *A Wealth of Women - Australian women's lives from 1788 to the present* (Sydney: Duffy and Snellgrove, 2001): 33-34.

<sup>1111</sup> Peter A. Wright, ed., *Memories of Far Off Days - The memoirs of Charlotte May Wright 1855-1929* (Armidale: P. Wright, 1988): 35. See also Mrs T. Holder Cowl, *Some of my Experiences During a Voyage to the Gulf of Carpentaria and Three Years' Residence at Normanton in the Early Seventies* (Brisbane: Besley & Pike, 1907): 21-26; and Rose Scott Cowen, *Crossing Dry Creeks 1879 to 1919* (Sydney: Wentworth Press, 1961): 38.

<sup>1112</sup> Macpherson, *My Experiences in Australia* 228-229. The most common relationship between a 'white' woman and a 'black' woman was, however, that of a mistress to a servant. This theme will be discussed later in this chapter.



Louisa Atkinson: The Aboriginals

Picture 12

Colonial women often made contact with Aboriginal people. This picture depicts two respectable women in the act of benevolence to a group of elderly and young Aboriginal people. The drawing makes the impression as if the indigenous Australians could not live their lives without the help of European women: they are represented in the context of dependency. Some colonial women sought to look after the Aborigines who were seen as a dying race. The presence of that frail elderly Aboriginal man on the left suggests the inevitable fate of the Aborigines. The youngest generation is also represented in this picture: a young indigenous woman is depicted with her baby but Louisa Atkinson suggests that the youngster's future depended on the benevolence of colonial women.

Louisa Atkinson's drawing "The Aboriginals"<sup>1113</sup> (Picture 12) depicts two colonial women in the company of some indigenous Australians. The two women are clothed decently

<sup>1113</sup> Louisa Atkinson, *Gertrude, the Emigrant; A tale of colonial life* (Canberra: School of English and Australian Scholarly Editions Centre, University College, ADFA, in association with Mulini Press, 1998): 273.

while the Aborigines only wear a few rags. The dress code, as well as the bush background, indicate that the colonists represent civilisation whereas the Aborigines are still in an untamed state. The drawing shows an elderly Aboriginal man and a woman who seems to be looking after him, a young mother with her child, another Aboriginal youth who is most probably a female, and a dog (or dingo). Louisa depicted the settler women in a benevolent act:<sup>1114</sup> they seem to be giving advice or even medical help to the frail and sick Aboriginal man and the young Aboriginal mother. To emphasise the colonists' goodwill, Louisa drew their figure in a standing position while most of the indigenous people are sitting on the ground and looking up to the European women. The two gentlewomen arrived in the native camp with the purpose of helping the tribe who seem to appreciate the way female colonists look after them. This drawing seeks to demonstrate the inferiority of the Aborigines who came to depend on the benevolence of colonial women.

As we have seen so far, many colonial gentlewomen sought to form a relationship of some kind with the local Aboriginal women and their children. Women's longings for human company were somewhat eased by the presence of indigenous women. The time they spent among the Aborigines enriched these gentlewomen in a number of ways. Firstly, they did not feel themselves alone, secondly, they gained an invaluable insight into Aboriginal cultural beliefs and practices and thirdly, the natives helped them understand and appreciate the resources and beauties of the land. But interracial relationships benefited the Aboriginal women, as well, who often sought medical help and shelter in the colonists' houses in the context of dependency.

### Can They Ever Be Civilised?

There were aspects of Aboriginal life that the colonists found deplorable and they set about transforming Aboriginal society. This section will examine how colonists attempted to change the indigenous people and whether or not they achieved any success.

Aboriginal nudity was a cause of public embarrassment. Margaret Maynard points out that dress was considered to be one of the basic elements of European culture and indicated a civilised way of life. Aborigines, on the other hand, were mostly naked and their lack of clothing was seen as just another proof of their low status.<sup>1115</sup> Aboriginal nakedness not only offended colonial sensibilities but it also represented their low culture. Margaret McGuire explains that

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<sup>1114</sup> Benevolence was another characteristic of the Victorian gentlewoman. Joan Perkin, *Victorian Women* (London: John Murray, 1993): 205-206.

'nakedness, the symbol in impurity in social life, was associated not only with sexual invitation and transgression, but also with the pollution of dirt, the tyranny of poverty, and the absence of religion – each an affront to British notions of propriety and progress'.<sup>1116</sup> These arguments were used to force Aborigines into wearing European clothes.

Women, in particular, were offended by the bare bodies of the Aborigines. In an age when gentlewomen referred to the human body and sexuality in euphemistic terms, the sheer sight of naked figures 'registered emotions of a [...] moralistic nature'. The presence of naked Aborigines was seen as damaging colonial respectability in the new settlements.<sup>1117</sup> Victorian women were ignorant about their bodies and always hid themselves behind voluminous clothes. One respectable woman remarked that 'Nice ladies no more thought of showing their legs than did nice chairs'.<sup>1118</sup> It comes as no surprise therefore that colonial women were greatly shocked by the sight of naked Aboriginal bodies. Christiana Brooks commented on this aspect of the Aborigines. Her diary entry for July 1825 recorded that it was 'disgraceful to a town such as Sydney to meet the Natives of both sexes intirely [sic] naked... [putting] modesty to the blush'.<sup>1119</sup>

Men, on the other hand, did not react to Aboriginal nudity with the same kind of embarrassment. They did not feel ashamed of observing the Aboriginal body, whether male or female. Edward Curr, for example, noted the well-proportioned and muscular figures of the Aboriginal men at Tongala Station near the River Murray in 1841. Edward concluded that the Aboriginal men looked much healthier than their fellow Europeans. He wrote in his narrative:

As they stood before us in ebony, tomahawk in hand, their well-proportioned busts, strong shoulders, and light but sinewy arms at once attracted the attention of the party. I also noticed their well-curved spines, a formation on which, I fancy, grace of carriage and elasticity of motion chiefly depend, and which seems more common to the savage than the civilized man. It occurred to me, also, how much less unpleasantly the nude strikes one in the blackfellow than in his white

<sup>1115</sup> Margaret Maynard, *Fashioned from Penury – Dress as cultural practice in colonial Australia* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 62.

<sup>1116</sup> McGuire, "The legend of the good fella missus" 125.

<sup>1117</sup> Maynard, *Fashioned from Penury* 62-64.

<sup>1118</sup> Cited in Joan Perkin, *Victorian Women* (London: John Murray, 1993): 51. Rose Scott Cowen pointed out the same in her narrative. She noted that her mother came from 'a sheltered house' where 'she and her Mother were not even allowed by their Father to say anything about their legs, being told with stern primness – "Women have no legs, they have ankles".' Cowen, *Crossing Dry Creeks* 3.

<sup>1119</sup> Cited in Maynard, *Fashioned from Penury* 64; and Judith Godden, "A new look at pioneer women" *Hecate – A Women's Interdisciplinary Journal* Vol. V, No. 2, (1979) 17. Aboriginal nudity continued to embarrass well-bred women even in the late nineteenth century. Jane Bardsley was a pupil in a convent school in Brisbane in the early 1890s. In a letter to her correspondent Althea she complained that native children under the age of eight or nine were permitted to walk along the streets naked. Her first reaction was embarrassment but then she got used to this sight to an extent that she would pay no attention to them. She noted that 'at first I would feel my cheeks burn with shame and quickly look the other way, but now I am sophisticated and do not even shut an eye'. Young, *Across the Years* 24.

brother, leading one to contrast the perfect aplomb, solid tread, and disregard of the wind or sun of the first, with the hooped back, colourless skin, and ill-assured step with which the latter painfully shambles.<sup>1120</sup>

Edward Snell also observed the nude Aboriginal body at Yorke Peninsula, South Australia in July 1850. He particularly admired one Aboriginal girl and after praising her 'beautiful hair' and skin that was 'as soft as silk and shone like a bit of brown satin' he drew a sketch of her naked figure in his diary.<sup>1121</sup>

When the Aborigines were in the bush and far away from the influence of the colonists they formed part of the landscape, as I argued earlier in this chapter. Within that context the colonists were not concerned about Aboriginal nudity, and perhaps women had much less contact with Aborigines in these circumstances. The naked image of the noble savage looked respectable on the canvas and on the pages of early explorers' journals, but the actual presence of nude bodies offended the sensibilities of Victorian gentlewomen.

Whenever Aboriginal people entered the settlements - and therefore the zones of European civilisation - they were expected to put on some kind of clothing. When Rosalie Hare stayed in the two-year-old settlement of Circular Head in Van Diemen's Land for two months in 1828, she noted in her journal that the agent to the Van Diemen's Land Company did not allow any of the local natives to enter the settlement naked.<sup>1122</sup> But the indigenous people were rather reluctant to put on any items of clothing. Eliza Mahony recalled in her memoir that on their South Australian property at Gawler in the early 1840s there were about 250 members of the Para tribe. The settlers tried to make them wear clothes and even supplied them with the necessary materials but they simply refused to put them on.<sup>1123</sup>

Individual settlers also sought to clothe the Aborigines, but with little success. When Ellen Campbell's father took home a three-year-old Aboriginal boy, the first reaction of the female members of the family was to 'try and clothe him decently'. They decided to give some old clothes that Ellen's brother Ted used to wear. Dressing the boy, however,

was more easily said than done. No skin-clad Celt of the middle ages ever displayed more horror and aversion at the sight of a pair of breeches, than did this small blackfellow, and force had to be used before we could array him in an old pair of my brother's.<sup>1124</sup>

It is interesting to note that Ellen compared the Aboriginal boy's resistance to that of a Celt. This

<sup>1120</sup> Curr, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria* 87-88.

<sup>1121</sup> Tom Griffiths, ed., *The Life and Adventures of Edward Snell* (North Ryde: Angus & Robertson, 1988): 131.

<sup>1122</sup> Rosalie Hare, *The Voyage of the Caroline from England to Van Diemen's Land and Batavia in 1827-28* (London: Longmans, Green, 1927): 36.

<sup>1123</sup> Eliza Sarah Mahony, "The first settlers at Gawler" *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australia - South Australian Branch* Vol. XXVIII, (1926-27): 70. Men also noted Aboriginal people's avoidance of clothes especially outside the settlements. See for example Woods, *A Visit to Victoria* 43.

<sup>1124</sup> Campbell, *An Australian Childhood* 88.

passage suggests that her first impression of the little boy was even worse than the picture she held of the Celts. I argued in Chapter Three that many English colonists were prejudiced against the Irish and this short excerpt from Ellen's memoir supports this argument. Later Ellen and her sister Mary started sewing various clothes for the Aboriginal boy but he resisted all attempts to be dressed in the European way. He would hide away all his clothes and would wear only his possum skin.<sup>1125</sup>

Often the Aborigines did not wear the European clothes the 'proper' way. Their unconventional mode of dressing made them the butt of cruel jokes and contemptuous comments. Emma Macpherson described some odd Aboriginal outfits in her reminiscences.

A less becoming mode of dress is that of adopting some of the cast-off garments of the settler, and most queer-looking figures many of the natives present when thus arrayed, for they rarely don the whole costume. The possessor of a great coat, for instance, would think his toilette perfect, or the still more fortunate owner of a pair of inexpressibles and a bright coloured waistcoat would present himself before you with a smile of the proudest satisfaction. Nor are light muslin or borege dresses made in the last European fashion more becoming to the women, who are nevertheless much delighted with any article of old finery that they can procure.<sup>1126</sup>

The above examples show that the indigenous people – whether young or old – were not comfortable with clothes.

Several commentators observed that when the indigenous Australians left the European settlements and returned to their bush life they left their clothes behind.<sup>1127</sup> This was something that puzzled settlers and visitors alike. Louisa Meredith noted in 1844 that many Aborigines 'after a sojourn of many months with Europeans, and in a comparatively civilized state [...] invariably return to their old habits, and relinquish their smart and comfortable clothes for the corrobory costume of nudity and pipe-clay'.<sup>1128</sup> British women could not understand why Aboriginal people resisted wearing clothes. Alice Hughes was one of the few women who suggested that the natives might not have felt comfortable and that pieces of clothing might have hindered them in their usual activities. Alice recalled that in the station where she grew up in the 1840s in South Australia there was a native man called Tom Ugly who often worked for them. He put on a pair of trousers during work hours but as soon as he was finished he refused to wear them any more. Alice could sympathise with him. She believed that as he lived all his life without clothes he obviously found it difficult to get used to them as an adult.<sup>1129</sup>

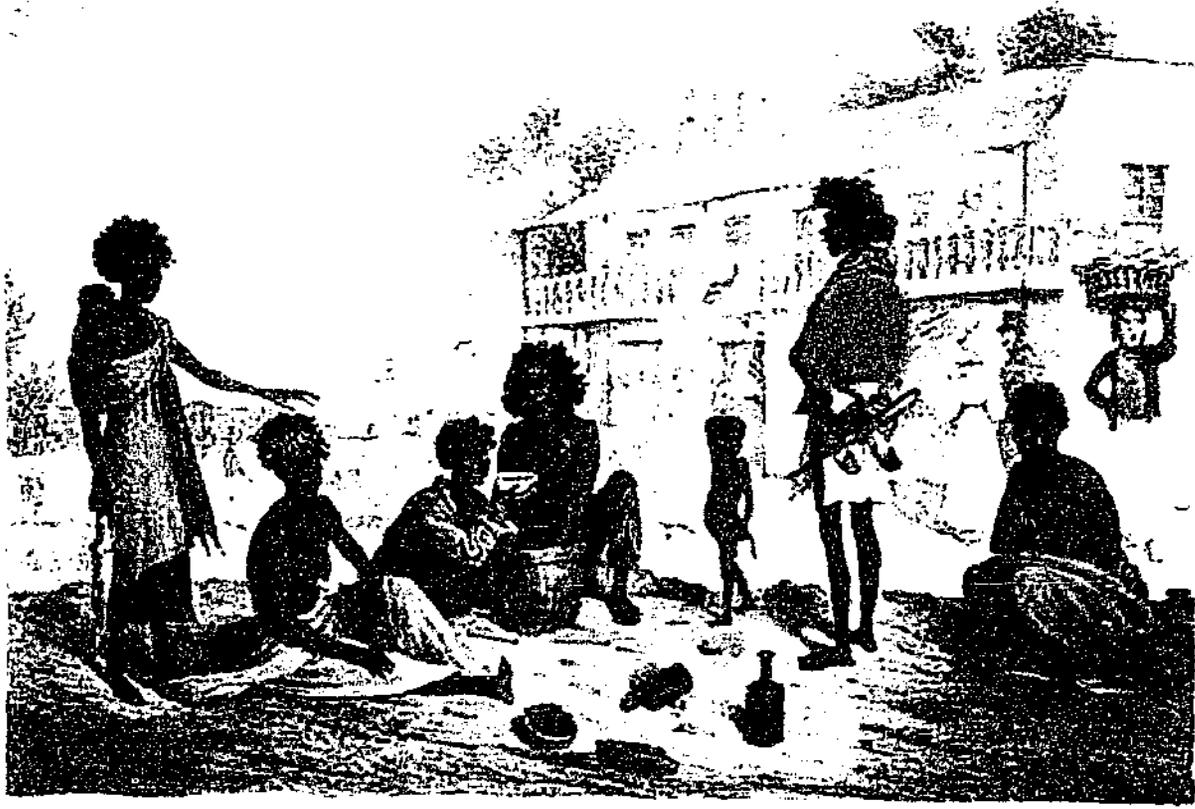
<sup>1125</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>1126</sup> Macpherson, *My Experiences in Australia* 218.

<sup>1127</sup> Maynard, *Fashioned from Penury* 71.

<sup>1128</sup> Meredith, *Notes and Sketches of New South Wales* 100. Men described Aboriginal people's attitudes to clothes in exactly the same manner as women did. See for example Harrison, *Colonial Sketches* 139; and Kerr, *Glimpses of Life in Victoria* 150.

<sup>1129</sup> Hughes, *My Childhood in Australia* 29-32.



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Augustus Earle: Natives of N.S. Wales as seen in the streets of Sydney

Picture 13

**There was a great social divide between the respectable colonial society and the town-dwelling Aborigines, perceived as half-naked, drunk and untidy. Augustus Earle represented this division by the use of pictorial means: colonial society is depicted with more light while the Aboriginal tribe seems to be in the shadow.**

Augustus Earle's well-known lithograph entitled "Natives of N.S. Wales as seen in the streets of Sydney"<sup>1130</sup> (1830) (Picture 13) demonstrates the great divide between Aboriginal and colonial society. This division is highlighted by the amount of light each section of the picture is given. Even though the Aboriginal group is situated in the foreground of the picture they seem to be in the shadow while the colonial society, placed in the background, is painted with bright and

fair colours. A group of half-naked indigenous Australians sits in the middle of the road. They do not look respectable because they are not decently clothed, are drunk and idle. Some of them wear only rags while the others wear second-hand items. Respectable colonial society is depicted in the background of the picture and provides a sharp contrast to the Aboriginal scene. The colonists live in brick buildings, wear nice clothes and are busy with their daily life. Their facial expressions suggest that they are disgusted by the sight of these dirty and idle indigenous people. Among the colonists are two well-bred women who seem to be shocked by the sight of the naked Aborigines, while a third woman refuses to turn her head in their direction. Women's personal narratives suggest that while colonial women felt concerned about Aboriginal nakedness, the indigenous people were not willing to change their lifestyle and abide by European dress codes. This lithograph presents exactly the same viewpoint: whereas Earle depicts a colonial society that is aware of the 'degradation' of Aboriginal people, the indigenous Australians literally turn their back on colonial society and seem not to be hindered by their own nudity. The painting also suggests that Aboriginal people's contact with the settlers brought them only bad things: alcohol ruined their health and bits and pieces of European clothes made them look ridiculous.

Apart from items of clothing, the colonists also distributed blankets among the Aborigines. Raymond Evans notes that blankets were often given with the view to prevent colonial women seeing the naked bodies of male Aborigines.<sup>1131</sup> The Queen's Birthday was an appropriate occasion for benevolence, as many settlers like Sophy Cooke recalled. She noted in her letter home in 1852 that the Aborigines came down to Adelaide 'from the country towards winter; 24 May being the Queen's birthday, the Governor gives them an annual present of blankets'.<sup>1132</sup> The indigenous people came to depend on this piece of material with the passing of time. Their original hunting grounds were turned to sheep grazing ground and their traditional source of fur, which they got from possum and kangaroo skin, was no longer available. Margaret Maynard points out that the Aborigines could therefore no longer rely on natural protection against the cold and so they had to get used to the blankets.<sup>1133</sup>

Work ethics were another important cultural measurement in colonial society. The colonists were under the impression that the Aborigines led an idle life, and therefore they set

<sup>1130</sup> Picture Collection, National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an6016165>

<sup>1131</sup> Raymond Evans, "'Don't you remember Black Alice, Sam Holt?' Aboriginal women in Queensland history" *Hecate* Vol. VIII, No. 2, (1982): 11.

<sup>1132</sup> Irene C. Taylor, ed., *Sophy Under Sail* (Sydney: Hodder and Stoughton, 1969): 135.

<sup>1133</sup> Maynard, *Fashioned from Penury* 65.

about changing indigenous people for the better.<sup>1134</sup> Emma Macpherson noted that the Aboriginal people 'seem to hold to the opinion that the *dolce far niente* constitutes the summit of earthly happiness'.<sup>1135</sup> The Aboriginal people lived on a day-to-day basis and this interpretation of the meaning of life surprised the observers. Emma wrote that 'nothing can really repay them for performing any labour beyond that necessary to procure them enough game to enable them to exist from day to day'.<sup>1136</sup> 'Silverleaf' compared the Aborigines to lilies and ravens that 'neither toil nor spin', 'nor sow nor reap, nor gather into barns', but they enjoy the present'. She contemplated that they may after all be the happier. 'If they do no good they do no ill, and how many of us more enlightened mortals can say this?'<sup>1137</sup> The colonists' view of the Aborigines as indolent should be seen in the context of Protestant European discourse on idleness. J.M. Coetzee points out that idleness was not only a great sin but was also a 'betrayal of one's humanity'. Poverty was equated with sloth and work was declared to have an ethical value.<sup>1138</sup> In this historical context it becomes clear why colonial women were sometimes offended by the sight of idle Aboriginal people who did not seem to make the best use of their time.

Only a few colonists came to understand Aboriginal lifestyle. Constance Ellis did not regard the indigenous people at Narine and Yerranbah Stations in western Queensland in 1890 as lazy because she was aware that their time was taken up with various activities. She noted that the men were busy making weapons and tools such as stone axes and knives, while the women spent their time making yam-sticks. Constance admired their 'marvelous patience' and their

<sup>1134</sup> J.M. Coetzee notes that European colonists of the Cape also regarded the native Hottentots indolent and idle. J.M. Coetzee, *White Writing: On the culture of letters in South Africa* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1988): 12-18.

<sup>1135</sup> Macpherson, *My Experiences in Australia* 205. 'Silverleaf' was also of the opinion that indolence was their great defect. She called the Aborigines 'an ease-loving people' who enjoyed the '*dolce far niente*' lifestyle to the utmost. 'Silverleaf', "Natives" 3. Many men shared this view. Henry Melville noted after twenty years of colonial life that 'the natives of New South Wales taking them as one class of people, are remarkably indolent, and seldom exert themselves without induced to do so, either from want of food, or some other cause'. Henry Melville, *The Present State of Australia* (London: G. Willis, 1851): 118. John Hunter Kerr remarked of the Aborigines near Heidelberg, Victoria in 1839 that their 'constitution is essentially lazy' and they 'luxuriantly' enjoyed 'their *dolce far niente*'. Kerr, *Glimpses of Life in Victoria* 13.

<sup>1136</sup> Macpherson, *My Experiences in Australia* 205.

<sup>1137</sup> 'Silverleaf', "Natives" 3.

<sup>1138</sup> Coetzee, *White Writing* 21. During the Middle Ages religious contemplation was regarded a higher state of activity than actual work. Luther rejected this doctrine and after the Reformation, preachers in Germany, in particular, were advocating the importance of work as an atonement for Adam's fall. Social parasitism was also condemned and a war was waged on vagrancy and the beggar class from the middle of the seventeenth century. Authorities wanted to put an end to these lifestyles and put vagrants and beggars in houses of confinement and houses of correction. Coetzee, *White Writing* 19-21; and Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather - Race, gender and sexuality in the colonial contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995): 252-253.

artistic skills because they ornamented everything they made.<sup>1139</sup>

Some colonists were aware that the Aborigines were content with their lifestyle and did not envy the settlers. Moreover, they seemed to feel sorry for the colonists whose future wellbeing and prosperity kept them constantly worried. Louisa Atkinson captured this feeling in her article in the *Sydney Mail* on 12 September 1863. She noted about the natives of the Shoalhaven and Berrima districts of New South Wales that 'the Aborigines appear to pity the Europeans, as persons under self-imposed slavery to toil, holding themselves as quite their superiors'.<sup>1140</sup> An Aboriginal man called Billy Munck at Elsey Station in 1902 told the same thing to Jeannie Gunn. His comments shed light on the main difference between how the colonists and the indigenous people regarded the livestock.

Billy Muck [...] said he was a 'bigfellow fool' when he rounded up a big mob of cattle, and worked hard day and night only to brand them and let them go again. If Billy owned cattle he would kill them all and invite his friends to the feast. Somehow as I sat looking at the generous, honest, simple, unspoiled blackfellow – absolutely free from vice or care – I felt that perhaps he was right, and the white man is 'bigfellow fool', after all.<sup>1141</sup>

Colonial women regarded the Aboriginal people as indolent because they failed to see the difference between the British and the Aboriginal way of life. They were unable to comprehend why the indigenous people did not work on a daily basis and why they thought about the present only instead of storing up provisions for the future. Colonial women's way of thinking was also strongly influenced by a Protestant work ethic and this quasi-religious doctrine gave an extra incentive for looking at the natives' idleness the way they did. Colonial gentlewomen's own idleness, however, was not a matter of shame. Ann McMahon notes that 'idleness was a form of evil among the poor, [but] it was a badge of class in the lady'.<sup>1142</sup>

Many colonists wanted to make economic use of the Aboriginal people as labour and they employed them on their station either as station hands or domestic servants. In this section I will concentrate on Aboriginal domestic servants. During the first decades of settlement in New South Wales the British relied primarily on convict labour and did not regard the natives as a good labour force. On the south-eastern frontier, however, Aborigines were regularly employed. Their employment became widespread from the 1840s and 50s onwards, but Aborigines

<sup>1139</sup> Constance Jane Ellis, *I Seek Adventure – An autobiographical account of pioneering experiences in outback Queensland from 1889 to 1904* (Sydney: Alternative Publishing Co-operative, 1981): 122.

<sup>1140</sup> Elizabeth Lawson, *Louisa Atkinson: The distant sound of native voices* (Canberra: English Department, University College, Australian Defence Force Academy, 1989): 49. 'Silverleaf' put it more jokingly: 'they laugh at the foolish white man sweating, toiling, labouring'. 'Silverleaf', "Natives" 3. William James Woods also noted the idle nature of the Victorian Aborigines and that they seemed to pity the Europeans for working so hard every day. Woods, *A Visit to Victoria* 42.

<sup>1141</sup> Gunn, *The Little Black Princess* 93-94.

constituted only a small percentage of the entire domestic servant population.<sup>1143</sup>

On the whole, the colonists were dissatisfied with the Aboriginal work force. The wandering lifestyle of the Aborigines made them unreliable in the eyes of the colonists who expected them to remain at one place for a long time. Eliza Brown's comment is a good summary of the main reasons why the settlers were uneasy about employing indigenous people:

The greatest inconvenience in employing natives is that they are not constant, their services cannot be secured, and it takes up a great deal of time to persuade some of them to accept employment. There is also no punishment for them when they evade the engagement and often when they forsake others cannot be found to fill up their places as they will vacate a district suddenly and not appear again for several weeks.<sup>1144</sup>

Their wandering lifestyle perplexed the settlers who did not understand Aboriginal walkabouts. Emma Macpherson noted this restlessness of the Aborigines and tried to search for an answer. She pointed out that 'they have in general a great dislike to remain so long in one place – a dislike partly arising, no doubt, from the game in the neighbourhood becoming quickly exhausted, but also founded on some superstitious reason which we could never understand'.<sup>1145</sup>

Mrs Cowl also disliked Aboriginal servants and refused to employ them. When she arrived in Normanton in 1871 she realised that no domestic help was available. She could have employed 'black gins' but she was against hiring them. She argued that 'the way they were run in from their tribes, and the constant care necessary to keep them from contamination horrified and disgusted me'. So she ended up doing everything by herself.<sup>1146</sup> Some indigenous Australians, however, made good workers.<sup>1147</sup> Their knowledge was especially appreciated in colonial women's gardens. Lucy Ann Edgar was content with the way Aboriginal people weeded her garden near Melbourne because they were careful not to do damage to her flowers.<sup>1148</sup>

Settler women frequently employed Aboriginal women to wash clothes. Chapter Three showed that gentlewomen undertook quite a few housework duties but they usually refrained from doing the laundry. Colonial gentlewomen considered washing as strictly servant's work and were reluctant to do it themselves. Washing was after all a physically demanding task in the nineteenth century before the onset of washing machines. H. Pfeil argues that 'the sight of

<sup>1142</sup> Anne McMahon, "The Lady in early Tasmanian society: A psychological portrait" *Tasmanian Historical Research Association, Papers and Proceedings* Vol. 26, No. 1, (1979): 11.

<sup>1143</sup> B.W. Higman, *Domestic Service in Australia* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2002): 60.

<sup>1144</sup> Peter Cowan, ed., *A Faithful Picture – The letters of Eliza and Thomas Brown at York in the Swan River Colony 1841-1852* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1991): 43.

<sup>1145</sup> Macpherson, *My Experiences in Australia* 203.

<sup>1146</sup> Cowl, *Some of my Experiences* 21.

<sup>1147</sup> Ann McGrath describes the situation of female Aboriginal domestics in the northern half of the Northern Territory between 1910 and 1940. Even though her research focuses on a later period she gives a good account of the kind of jobs Aboriginal women were expected to do in the house. Ann McGrath, *'Born in the Cattle' – Aborigines in cattle country* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987): 59-67.

washing itself challenged respectability' because the act of washing was linked with 'arduousness, repetitiveness and dirtiness'.<sup>1149</sup> Female colonists were not satisfied with the way Aboriginal women washed their clothes, but not even their clumsiness could make them do the washing by themselves. Rachel Henning was not happy with her native washerwoman Biddy at Exmoor Station in 1863. She wrote that 'the things are of rather a remarkable colour when they come out of her hands' but acknowledged that 'she does her best'.<sup>1150</sup>

The colonists felt it their duty to set a good example for the Aborigines in the hope that they might give up their wandering lifestyle and start working for their own good.<sup>1151</sup> The question of whether or not they could be 'civilised' divided the public. Some argued that it was possible and advocated the work of missionaries, while others were wary about the outcome of European efforts. Janet Millett was one of the pessimists. She cautioned that 'I do not believe that under any circumstances a wild race can be educated with justice to itself on the open ground of civilization'.<sup>1152</sup> Louisa Atkinson recorded the case of one native woman in her article in the *Sydney Mail* on 19 September 1863. She noted that a 'black school' was founded at Blacktown but the children ran back to their tribes as soon as they could. Louisa singled out the case of one girl whose longing for freedom exemplified the feeling of most of her fellow Aborigines living in white settlements. The Aboriginal woman was taught how to work and read but considered her life among the colonists too restricted and missed her freedom. She told Louisa that 'I can work and read too; but it's confined living with white people, and I get tired of it [...] Liberty is sweet'.<sup>1153</sup>

Elizabeth Ramsay-Laye was one of the few optimists. She stated that 'I cannot agree with those who imagine that they can never be civilised'. She did not expand her views on this issue in greater detail, though. Elizabeth was a visitor who spent some time at the Victorian diggings and in Melbourne. She greatly enjoyed her eight-year-long residence in Victoria in the 1850s and

<sup>1148</sup> Edgar, *Among the Black Boys* 22.

<sup>1149</sup> H. Pfeil, " 'The last piece of furniture procured' - Some mistresses' perspectives in mistress-servant relationships, 1870-1900" *Lilith* No. 10, (2001): 98.

<sup>1150</sup> David Adams, *The Letters of Rachel Henning* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1963): 124. Jeannie Gunn described the washing days at Elsey Station as a great comedy. She noted that 'when washing is done by black lubras the fun is always fast and furious'. She usually sat in the shade while the Aboriginal women and girls were washing the clothes. Jeannie greatly enjoyed the 'washing circus'. Gunn, *The Little Black Princess* 30.

<sup>1151</sup> McGrath, "Sex, violence and theft" 141.

<sup>1152</sup> Millett, *An Australian Parsonage* 295.

<sup>1153</sup> Lawson, *Louisa Atkinson* 56. Men also pointed out that Aboriginal people did not endure white society for long and they escaped back to their tribes. See for example Mrs Augustus Prinsep, ed., *The Journal of a Voyage from Calcutta to Van Diemen's Land: Comprising a description of that colony during a six months' residence* (Hobart: Melanie Publications, 1981): 79; and An eight years' resident, *The Queen of the Colonies; or, Queensland as I knew it* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1876): 343.

had a lot in the way of entertainment both in the city and in the bush. She stated in her Preface that many people may think of her account as being 'too *couleur de rose*' but she had no bad experiences in the colony.<sup>1154</sup> This may account for her optimistic views concerning the civilisation of Aborigines.

Several colonists took Aboriginal people, especially children, into their homes. They gave them clothes, taught them English and provided permanent shelter. Usually their efforts turned out to be fruitless, though. Sooner or later the indigenous people sought to rejoin their communities. Mary McConnel took an Aboriginal orphan boy of seven to her home. In the early 1850s she was living with her family at Toogoolawah, a few kilometres away from Brisbane. When Mary's health necessitated their removal to Scotland they took the native boy with them. They sent him to school and even baptised him. Mary emphasised that they treated him like a 'white' boy. They seemed to make headway with him and she remarked that 'day by day he tamed down, and was very good-natured'. By the time he reached sixteen years of age he became a 'well-behaved boy, honest and truthful' and they wished to train him as a carpenter. In 1862 the whole family returned to Australia where he came in contact with the local Aborigines. Mary thought that after such a long period he would not give up his civilised life and would refuse to return to the wild. But he became confused and perplexed about the ambivalence of his situation and for this reason the McConnells decided to send him back to Britain. He chose not to sail for Europe, though. He jumped overboard and swam ashore. The family never saw or heard from him again. His loss grieved Mary. Living with an Aboriginal person nevertheless taught her a great deal. She realised that the Aborigines were 'not by any means so low down in the scale of the human race as they are generally supposed to be'.<sup>1155</sup> Mary's story also illustrates the impossibility of erasing even young Aboriginal children's memory of and connection with their tribal community.

Jeannie Gunn believed that indigenous Australians could not be changed into Europeans. Any such effort only made them 'bad, cunning [and] sly'.<sup>1156</sup> They were willing to learn a few things but could never be expected to identify with English values and norms. In looking after Bett-Bett Jeannie began to notice that her protégé was homesick or, as she put it, 'bush-hungry'. Jeannie showed much sympathy with Bett-Bett's feelings and it was she who advised Bett-Bett

<sup>1154</sup> Elizabeth P. Ramsay-Laye, *Social Life and Manners in Australia – Being the notes of eight years' experience by a resident* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1861): v-vi.

<sup>1155</sup> Mary McConnel, *Memories of Days Long Gone By: By the wife of an Australian pioneer* (Brisbane?: M. McConnel, 1905): 42-43.

<sup>1156</sup> Gunn, *The Little Black Princess* 92.

to return to the bush. She regarded this move the best 'cure' for her illness. Jeannie was aware that if she forced Bett-Bett to stay with her, she would run away sooner or later. She understood that the bush was a vital element of Aboriginal culture. She admitted that 'We whites [...] can never even guess at the pain of a blackfellow's longing for his own people, and his beloved bush'. Jeannie let Bett-Bett go back to her tribe. It was by all means a wise decision and in the interest of Bett-Bett, but at the same time it caused sorrow to Jeannie. When Bett-Bett finally said goodbye to her she realised how fond her heart had grown of this child.<sup>1157</sup>

Many women sought to 'civilise' Aboriginal children and their accounts suggest that they firmly believed that it was their duty to transform these 'wild' people into law-abiding and hard-working members of society. I pointed out in Chapter One that most Victorian gentlewomen devoted their entire lives to their family. Yet these same women disregarded the sacred nature of the family in the colonies and took indigenous children away from their own families and tribes. Many women were of the opinion that it was more advantageous for these young Aboriginal people to grow up in a 'white' family than in their own. These women therefore had double standards: they insisted on the integrity of the European family but sought to break the indigenous system that they regarded as an inferior and harmful place for the education of the young generation.

Lucy Ann Edgar's narrative recorded the outcome of an official attempt at civilising the Aborigines. Her book *Among the Black Boys* recalled the period of 1848-1851 during which time the Edgar family lived at the junction of the Yarra Yarra and the Merri Creek five kilometres from Melbourne. Lucy's father was the Superintendent of the Aboriginal Institution there, and a few young Aboriginal men were put under his charge. It was a government initiative to find out to what extent indigenous people could be educated. Lucy recorded the story of her family's attempts at 'civilising' some Aborigines by teaching them the European way of life. They chose only young men because they found there was no use in training old people and parents were unwilling to part with their young children. The Aboriginal youth or 'boys' as she called them were from the Melbourne tribe, 'Gipps' Land' and Port Fairy.<sup>1158</sup>

Lucy gave a detailed description of their daily life and their efforts to teach and Christianise the indigenous Australians. They achieved some kind of success with only one of the participants but the result was not completely satisfactory. The transformation of Charley was so effective that he stopped thinking about himself as Aboriginal. Instead he began to look at

<sup>1157</sup> Ibid., 105-107.

<sup>1158</sup> Edgar, *Among the Black Boys* 5, 35.

himself as a gentleman and insisted on equal treatment. He wanted to build his own house and for that reason was even considering writing to the Queen and asking her for a plot of land. Moreover, he even sought a 'white' wife. 'White' society, on the other hand, did not welcome him but laughed at him behind his back which he failed to see.<sup>1159</sup>

Charley was a success story in the sense that he not only acquired the principles of British society but also wished to live by its rules. Why was it then that the colonists did not take him seriously and did not grant him the privileges he was asking for, namely a wife and a stretch of land? Did not he prove himself a civilised Aboriginal? Colonial society's refusal to accept him reveals that the colonists did not really know how to treat a man like Charley. They put effort into civilising the Aborigines but were entirely unprepared or even unwilling to regard these 'civilised' Aborigines as equals. They advocated the necessity of their Christianisation but ostracised them when they became too English in their inspirations and behaviour.

The other Aborigines under the guardianship of the Edgar family could not be influenced to this extent. One escaped to the bush under the pressure of the 'wild blacks' while some of the others asked Mr Edgar's permission to return to their home tribes. Lucy Edgar put down her family's failed attempt at civilising this group of Aborigines to a number of factors. She emphasised that 'fear of their own race; dislike to continual restraint; longing for their "own country;" and love of old associations, were all strongly acting upon their impressible natures to keep them within bounds any longer'.<sup>1160</sup> She was greatly surprised, though, that they could endure this submissive life for so long.<sup>1161</sup> Even though Lucy was disappointed by this outcome she did not take it too much to heart because she had learnt to feel sympathy towards them during the course of three years. She concluded that her family

were grieved beyond measure at the failure of all these efforts for their good; but we could not find it in our hearts to reprobate their conduct so strongly as we might have done, if our sympathies had not been so largely awakened for the poor misguided fellows who had made their homes with us, and shared the ups and downs of life at the Merri Creek for so long.<sup>1162</sup>

The above examples show that a number of women of different ages and positions, took Aboriginal children into their homes to see if they could 'civilise' them. Men, on the other hand, did not do so, as the nurturing and raising of children were seen as women's work. This explains the fact why considerably more women wrote about such experiences than men did even though men were also present in the family homes where such attempts were made. Mary McConnel's husband and Lucy Edgar's father also witnessed the education of these young Aborigines. As

<sup>1159</sup> Ibid., 22, 93-95.

<sup>1160</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>1161</sup> Ibid., 19.

Superintendent of the Aboriginal Institution, Mr Edgar was presumably interested in the outcome of his family's attempts at 'civilising' some young Aboriginal fellows.

This section has shown that Christian ideology strongly influenced the way colonial gentlewomen perceived the Aborigines. Women sought to change them and transform them to the European way of life. There were attempts at clothing them and teaching them the true value of work but apart from a few isolated success stories Aboriginal people refused to become 'Europeans'.

### Conclusion

There were many colonial women who mentioned the indigenous Australians in their narratives but only a few women like Christina Smith, Jeannie Gunn, Katherine Langloh Parker and Ethel Hassel described them in much detail. These women seemed to be enormously curious about the indigenous people and had the time, means, courage, enthusiasm and willingness to learn about their culture. They were exceptional in an age that was just beginning to explore and appreciate supposedly inferior civilisations. These women were, however, still constrained by the dominant racial ideologies of their time. Some scholars claim that Jeannie Gunn was not entirely free from racist remarks. Her reference to a 'nigger hunt' at Elsey Station in *We of the Never-Never* is taken in support of this argument.<sup>1163</sup> Jan Larbalestier argues that 'Jeannie Gunn's racism is that of the educated liberal of her time. This combines taking white superiority for granted with tolerance for others in which curiosity about the world and its inhabitants allows some accommodation of cultural relativity.'<sup>1164</sup> These women were unique because they were able to show goodwill and genuine interest in the indigenous Australians at a time when they were mostly seen as merely inferior and savage.

The question of whether or not British colonial gentlewomen were racist is a complex one. Some of their comments and forms of behaviour could indeed be interpreted as racist. Anyone who looks down on another group of people as a degraded and inferior race would most certainly be labelled a racist person in the twenty-first century. Furthermore, the colonists strongly believed in the superiority of their own stock and claimed that their culture was more advanced and civilised than the Aboriginal system. For these reasons the colonists felt it their duty to teach and civilise the indigenous people for their own good. In other words, the settlers

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<sup>1162</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>1163</sup> Katherine Ellinghaus, "Racism in the Never-Never: Disparate readings of Jeannie Gunn" *Hecate* Vol. 23, No. 2, (1997): 84; and Jan Larbalestier, "Amity and kindness in the Never-Never" *Social Analysis* No. 27, (1990): 79.

set about changing Aboriginal culture and lifestyle and many gentlewomen assisted in this process. These women were therefore racist in the sense that they did not accept cultural diversity.

On the other hand, these gentlewomen were the products of their time and as such should be analysed in that historical milieu. I would argue that in the context of imperialism these women conformed to the view that the Anglo-Saxon race was superior to all the peoples that the British Empire wished to colonise. The settlers sought to Europeanise the native peoples of Australia because they believed that it was in their own interest and betterment to adapt themselves to the colonisers' culture and way of life. Colonial women felt bound by this imperial obligation and they, too, wished to civilise the Aboriginal people. The Aborigines were doomed to extinction in an age that advocated the 'survival of the fittest' and where the Anglo-Saxon race was seen as the fittest without any doubt. Colonial gentlewomen identified with this view of the world and accepted their superior position in relation to the Aborigines without question. They saw themselves as members of the more advanced race of white people whose destiny was to rule the world and to change and in the end replace the inferior societies of people. They were therefore paternalistic and supported a benevolent form of racism. I have shown in this chapter that only a very few women were able to attain a different perspective.

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<sup>1164</sup> Larbalestier, "Amity and kindness" 74.

## Conclusion

This thesis has focused on the difficulties and problems British gentlewomen encountered when they settled down in rural Australia. The experience of isolation lasted only a relatively short period of time in the lives of the settlers and represented a transitory stage. It is this special phase of history and human experience that this thesis has sought to capture and analyse.

The Australian frontier was gradually receding with the expansion of settlement. As a consequence, colonial life became more and more comfortable and civilised. Later settlers and visitors no longer had to put up with the kind of inconveniences earlier pioneers had to cope with. The colonisation and opening up of the Australian continent, however, was not entirely completed by the end of the nineteenth century. The later settlers of far north Queensland, the Northern Territory and the northern sections of Western Australia found themselves on the frontier of western civilisation. Their experience of pioneer life often reflected the difficulties the early settlers of the southern states had to face in the first half of the nineteenth century.

The period between the 1820s and 1900 witnessed a series of social and legal changes that were meant to advance and improve the position of women in England and the colonies. Issues such as women's admittance to universities, their right to vote and divorce were put on the political agenda in the second half of the nineteenth century. Within the context of these changes it is important to analyse how the class of well-bred and respectable women led their everyday lives in colonial Australia. They were aware that their colonial life was unique and therefore they sought to communicate their life experience through the medium of private and published accounts. Colonial gentlewomen were no longer content with staying in the background but wanted the world to know their side of the colonial story. Their insistence on a public voice might be seen as another aspect of the wider women's movement.

Colonial gentlewomen claimed in their personal narratives that they showed colonial life from the female point of view. They also seemed to some extent make a virtue of difference by addressing female readers. Their efforts at publishing their texts signalled that they had something unique to say about their colonial self and they were confident, albeit a little bit modestly, that their point of view was worth recording for the sake of history. Understandably, their life-writings show many similarities to colonial men's personal texts. Some women tried to emulate the male perspective because they wanted to prove that they, too, were able to write in that style. But there were areas that women approached and treated in a different way.

However hard most women sought to write in the same style as men did, it was

impossible for them to deny their female identity. Their personal writings reflected the genteel world of Victorian English society in which women were allocated the domestic and private sphere. Gentlewomen were in charge of the household and for this reason it is not surprising that they devoted a large part of their narratives to the discussion of domestic issues. This was a topic that characterised women's narratives but was only lightly dealt with in men's accounts. Another distinctive feature of women's colonial accounts is the emphasis on the personal side of their colonial life. While most men wrote to give advice to future emigrants and sought to depict the colonies in a matter-of-fact manner with their detailed accounts of political and economic issues, women, on the other hand, wrote about how they felt about their new life. They, too, touched on wider issues such as pastoralism, to show that they were capable of understanding the public world of men, but their narratives highlighted the individual female experience. Women told their audience how they felt about the modest living conditions, the lack of female company and the shortage of a reliable domestic labour force.

The establishment and maintenance of relationships was another great concern for most women. The company of Aboriginal women often helped ease the loss of female community. Women also developed a positive attitude to the native flora and fauna: Australian pets ensured that female colonists could form a personal link with the indigenous animals, while the amateur pursuit of botany drew women even closer to the love and enjoyment of the native flora. The existence of these personal bonds with the indigenous women and the native flora and fauna made women feel more at home in an environment that was initially strange and novel to the European eye.

I have argued in this thesis that there were common problems throughout the nineteenth century that the female colonists had to face in isolated and remote areas of settlement, where the concept of the Victorian gentlewoman was both threatened and questioned. To survive, women had to modify their notions of gentility and adapt themselves to the new circumstances. Complete idleness had to be sacrificed and certain domestic activities such as cooking and needlework had to be taken up by gentlewomen in rural Australia by sheer necessity. There were a few areas, however, where women resisted changing or even relaxing their genteel ideals of life: they sometimes employed native women to wash their clothes (despite being dissatisfied with the quality of their work) and still rode side-saddle, for example, because they felt that it was their duty to keep up their respectability. Women were expected to function as civilisers in a rough and pioneering society. Once the pioneer phase was over, however, certain genteel values made a comeback. Social rituals such as calling cards were re-established, proper houses

replaced tents, church and medical facilities ensured the wellbeing of the settlers' religious life and physical health. Settlement brought European civilisation and services to the previously wild Australian bush.

While gentlewomen used their writing to record the difficulties involved in maintaining their gentility in colonial Australia, they also revealed a degree of freedom and liberation from the social restraints imposed by that gentility. Women gained satisfaction from their active share of the housework and their family's colonial enterprise in general. Furthermore, they took pride in their novel situation and circumstances and learnt to appreciate their new challenges. In this way they could distance themselves from those conventions and regulations that imprisoned them to the domestic sphere in England.

Colonial life provided British gentlewomen with different experiences. They could step outside the restrictions of genteel life and the domestic sphere by undertaking certain activities that seemed too adventurous and daring for most genteel ladies in the home country. They could contribute to science by collecting new floral specimens from the frontier and by describing Aboriginal tribes and customs that were quickly disappearing. They could also gain an insight into and learn to appreciate another culture that was believed to be primitive and on the verge of extinction. Colonial gentlewomen's contact with the Australian flora, fauna and the indigenous people enriched their characters and enabled them to make modest contributions to scientific knowledge. The publishing of books was another outlet for colonial gentlewomen.

Victorian gentlewomen learnt to adopt a different point of view in the colonies. Their tents and huts, as well as their involvement in housework, must have been shocking to these women after their comfortable urban middle-class lifestyle in Britain. They willingly accepted these hardships and challenges, firstly, because they enjoyed the novelty of their colonial experience, and secondly, because they felt to some extent empowered and liberated by them. In accordance with the prevailing views of the time, they described the Aboriginal people as a seemingly inferior and primitive race, but their personal experience taught them to respect these people for their wisdom and adaptation to the peculiar Australian conditions. Women also saw the land not only as their family's main source of income but also in terms of its aesthetic and recreational values.

Through writing about their colonial life on the pages of their letters, diaries, memoirs, reminiscences and travel books, British gentlewomen evaluated and analysed themselves. In addition to making their voice heard and their stories known to the close circle of their family and friends and the wider female audience of their publications, their writings helped to define

their colonial self. Their narratives recorded a process of change over a period of time. What appeared strange and novel in the first few years became part and parcel of their new life a few years later. Georgiana Molloy disliked the native flowers at first but later grew particularly fond of them. The landscape that seemed initially 'curious' for Rachel Henning was later inscribed with meaning and became a source of pleasure and scene of recreational activities. The indigenous Australians were mostly described in terms of their inferiority and low stage of civilisation yet personal contact with Aboriginal women helped colonial women widen their bush horizons. Life in rural Australia brought about considerable changes not only in settler women's identity as gentlewomen but also in their perception of and outlook on the world. The fact that they wanted to record their colonial life suggests that they were fully aware of the novelty, excitement and usefulness of their new experiences.

Women's personal narratives were distinctive from similar texts by their menfolk in the sense that women's accounts were much more about themselves than about Australia's economic progress and potential. Through the act of writing and publishing women sought to step outside their limited place in the domestic sphere and wanted to challenge themselves in the public world of men. Their publications therefore not only reflected the female perspective of the colonial story but they also documented and indicated women's changing orientation and sense of place in the nineteenth century. The ability to offer a reflective and critical analysis of colonial life on the pages of printed texts most certainly boosted their writers' self-confidence. These women sought to copy their menfolk as well as to add something new to contemporary knowledge. When many women realised that they could equal their menfolk in the field of autobiographical writing they possibly felt justified to test themselves in other areas, as well. University degrees and the right to vote could have been the next targets for those women who wanted more than just the role of motherhood.

While letters and diaries reflected an immediate response to the novel conditions of life in rural Australia, published texts, on the other hand, offered a more mature view as the women looked back on their past from the comforts of settled life. Colonial women's writings – both published and unpublished – were powerful in effecting change personally and socially, both at the time, and now in contemporary Australia through giving us important accounts of a crucial time in Australia's history and women's role in it.

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