Ideas of home in the non-fictional narratives of British genteel women in colonial Australia

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Abstract

A great number of British genteel women travelled to and settled down in rural Australia in the nineteenth century. Some recorded their impressions and experiences in personal narratives. In addition to providing practical information to future migrants, these women recounted their joys and struggles coming to terms with their new environment. This article explores what strategies British gentlewomen used in order to learn to regard their new country as home. I will argue that the idea of home was a complex concept in rural Australia. To feel at home, gentlewomen had to recreate their former genteel life in an environment that was strikingly different from what they had been used to back in Britain. Learning to see their life and their new country through different eyes was a necessary survival skill and helped British gentlewomen, not only to cope with the harshness of their new country, but also to accept and enjoy colonial Australia as their new home.

In the nineteenth century British gentlewomen's life centred round the home and the family. So when they settled down in the Australian colonies their primary concern was the establishment of a new home and the maintenance of family ties with their loved ones in Britain. A great number of genteel women[1)] sent letters from the colonies and kept diaries in which they recorded their impressions and experiences of rural life. Some targeted a larger audience and published memoirs, recollections, reminiscences and travel books. Despite the public nature of these books, genteel women gave a detailed account of their everyday life. This article aims to show how British gentlewomen defined the word 'home' in a rural and colonial context in their life-writings throughout the nineteenth century. I will argue that the concept of home constituted a set of images and pre-conceived ideas of what life should be like for an ideal gentlewoman. Home was therefore not simply a place where the colonist enjoyed herself but rather the fulfilment of certain genteel expectations.

This paper analyses the non-fictional writings of some genteel female settlers who recorded their experiences of colonial life in their letters, diaries and personal reminiscences. Scholars have treated women's life-writings in a number of ways. While some have celebrated them as examples

1) The terms *gentlewomen and genteel women* will be used interchangeably throughout this paper to refer to the same concept.

of works by pioneer and high-achieving colonial women,[2] others have used these non-fictional accounts as primary sources of historical research.[3] Autobiographical narratives have also been seen as literary renderings of personal histories.[4] I propose to explore these personal chronicles with the aim of investigating the various manifestations of the idea of home in the context of nineteenth-century genteel ideals.

In Britain middle and upper-class women in the nineteenth century lived in a world which was governed by genteel ideals. Emma Floyd argues that

> the cult of gentility was much more than a performance; it was an internalized cultural force with a powerful hold on the psyche of the adherents. [. . .] British gentlewomen had been invested with these notions, and the guarding of them was, for many, simply a matter of self-respect.[5]

Genteel men and women had different roles[6]: while men were supposed to perform public functions, women, on the other hand, were expected to care for domestic duties and their family. This distinction between the two genders on the basis of their different realms of influence is defined as 'separate spheres'.[7] Genteel women were encouraged to find fulfilment in their domestic bliss and therefore abstained from paid employment. Richard Altick points out that the ideal genteel woman was depicted 'as a priestess dedicated to preserving the home as a refuge from the abrasive outside world'.[8] The idea of home was thus a key concept in British gentlewomen's lifestyle. These women were in charge of the household and oversaw the bringing up of their children. In addition, they devoted a considerable amount of time to genteel accomplishments, such as playing the piano, flower arrangement and sketching. These activities were not considered work from a man's point of view. Work in the sense of money-making and an active participation in the

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2) See for example Susanna de Vries, *Strength of Spirit－Pioneering Women of Achievement from First Fleet to Federation* (Alexandria: Millennium Books, 1995).

3) See for example Alison Alexander et al., *A Wealth of Women－Australian Women's Lives from 1788 to the Present* (Sydney: Duffy & Snellgrove, 2001). Ann Standish argues that women's non-fictional works affirmed and naturalised the imperial presence in colonial Australia. Ann Standish, *Australia Through Women's Eyes* (North Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2008), 21.

4) See for example Joy Hooton, *Stories of Herself When Young－Autobiographies of Childhood by Australian Women* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1990), Peter Cowan, "Diaries, letters, journals" in *The Literature of Western Australia,* ed. Bruce Bennett, (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1979), 1–48.

5) Emma Floyd, "Without artificial constraint: Gentility and British gentlewomen in rural Australia." In *Imperial Objects,* ed. Rita S. Kranidis (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998), 86–87.

6) Judith Godden, "A new look at pioneer women," *Hecate－A Women's Interdisciplinary Journal* V/2 (1997): 13.

7) Sue Rowley, "Things a Bushwoman cannot Do" in *Debutante Nation－Feminism Contests the 1890s* ed. Susan Magarey, et al (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1993): 185.

8) Richard D Altick, *Victorian People and Ideas* (London: J. M. Dent, 1974), 53.

public world was men's business. Genteel women aspired to a state of idleness.[9] There were some, however, who took up work as governess or wrote books due to pressing financial need.

On arriving in Australia many genteel settlers set about establishing those material circumstances and moral values that defined their genteel identity in Britain. Colonial Australia, however, presented a rough scene for the upholding of respectability. Those women who settled in remote and sparsely populated areas found themselves in a particularly bad situation. Katharine Kirkland, an early Scottish settler, noted that 'the wilds of Australia present at this time some strange scenes'.[10] Writing of her experiences of life in the Port Phillip District between 1838 and 1841, Katharine Kirkland was a true pioneer who had to face exceptional challenges. Women had no other choice but to modify their expectations and adapt to the colonial circumstances as best as they could. Several lady settlers recorded their experiences of colonial life on the pages of their personal accounts. While the sheer act of writing for publication violated the norms of genteel society, through books like these female settlers depicted their Australian adventures and evaluated their colonial identity as seen from a British genteel woman's point of view.

Establishing the private sphere

The house showcased the most visible external aspect of the genteel performance. After months of ship life, colonists were obliged to put up with a very simple form of accommodation: at first they usually stayed in a tent. Louisa Clifton arrived aboard the *Parkfield* in March 1841 with her family. She was the daughter of Marshall Clifton, the new settlement's chief commissioner.[11] Louisa looked back at her tent life in Australind, Western Australia in 1841 as a 'singular episode' that abounded in 'peculiarities, drolleries, discomforts'.[12] Tents, however, were temporary abodes until a more appropriate construction such as a slab hut was built. It was then followed by a pisé, a wattle and daub or a thatched cottage and finally a proper house.[13] Wealthy colonists built homesteads. From the 1820s and 1830s onwards the verandah became a standard feature of the Australian house and functioned as a particularly feminine site. Tanya Dalziell claims that the verandah served as an 'extension of the private sphere'.[14] For Harriett Daly, whose father was appointed the first Government Resident of the Northern Territory in 1870,[15] the verandah

9) Altick, *Victorian People and Ideas,* 51–52.
10) Katharine Kirkland, "Life in the bush." in *The Flowers of the Field－A History of Ripon Shire together with Mrs Kirkland's Life in the Bush from Chambers's Miscellany, 1845,* ed. Hugh Anderson (Melbourne: Hill of Content, 1969), 173.
11) Lucy Frost, ed., *No Place for a Nervous Lady* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1984), 39.
12) Frost, *No Place for a Nervous Lady,* 74.
13) John Archer, *Building a Nation－A History of the Australian House* (Sydney: William Collins, 1987), 25–58.
14) Tanya Dalziell, "Beyond the Verandah," *Antipodes* 11/1 (1997): 38.
15) Barbara Murray, "Harriett Daly" *Northern Territory Dictionary of Biography* Vol.1: 70–71.

provided an additional living space in her home in Palmerston: '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.'[16] During periods of hot weather, Harriett Daly passed her hours of idleness on the verandah.

Gentlewomen's narratives recount the development of colonial housing in rural Australia. But rather than giving a chronological account of the various types of abodes they resided in, these women shared their emotional response to these forms of housing with their readers. Their narratives suggest that their tents, huts or verandahs were not simply shelters against the elements, but provided a living space for genteel women. However rough and uncomfortable those constructions were, they created the private sphere that was so essential in the definition of a genteel woman. Anne Leake wrote in a letter from Fremantle in 1830 to her governess in England: '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.'[17] No matter how harsh the living circumstances were, colonial gentlewomen strove to experience the comforts of the female sphere inside. A house-like building provided the space where genteel women could resume their normal role.

Appropriating the landscape

Women's personal narratives reveal, however, that it was not just the house that answered women's ideas of home. There were some other areas of life, as well, where women sought to feel at home before they could come to terms with their new life in Australia. Settlers' relationship with the land is a theme that often concerns writers of nineteenth century Australian history. Genteel women also commented on the surrounding environment. There were areas that appealed to the colonists, but at the same time, they found certain landscape formations unsightly. Apart from simple expressions of their likes and dislikes, women evaluated the surrounding environment in a more sophisticated way, too. On looking back at her five-month-long trip to country Victoria in 1860, Clara Aspinall admitted, "I have seen some very pretty spots, and some very fine views in Australia; but whenever this happened to me, my first exclamation was, 'How very lovely! How very English!'"[18] Clara Aspinall, a genteel female visitor who stayed with her brother Butler Cole Aspinall, a successful barrister and journalist, in Melbourne between 1858 and 1861,[19] seemed

16) Mrs Dominic D. Daly. Digging, Squatting and Pioneering in the Northern Territory of South Australia (Victoria Park, WA: Hesperian Press, 1984), 52.
17) Mrs J. Cowan, "Some pioneer women," *Western Australian Historical Society* 1/X (1931): 46.
18) Clara Aspinall, *Three Years in Melbourne* (London: L. Booth, 1862), 162–163.
19) Kay Walsh, et al., *Australian Autobiographical Narratives* (Hereafter AAN) (Canberra: Australian Scholarly Editions Centre, University College of New South Wales, 1998) Vol.2: 5.

only to appreciate the kind of landscape that evoked memories of her native England. The sight of familiar colours and land formations raised her interest in Australia and made her happy. It was the resemblance to the English countryside that comforted her and not the kind of landscape that actually opened up to her.

Delys Bird suggests that it was easier to describe the familiar than to depict the unknown. Applying a familiar set of images to a new environment might have helped women come to grips with the novelty of their experience. 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.'[20] Physical control was, of course, male domain.

Areas with undulating ground and pleasant arrangements of trees were particularly enticing to British gentlewomen, because they reminded them of English parks. Elizabeth Ramsay-Laye, who arrived with her husband in Victoria in 1851,[21] recorded that the view that opened up along the road from Castlemaine to Mount Franklin resembled an English park. She wrote that, '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.'[22] In her eyes the most charming scenery was provided by an example of an English park. First, she was glad to be surrounded by homelike scenery and secondly, the landscape brought back good memories of horseback-riding trips. The Australian expedition therefore reminded Elizabeth Ramsay-Laye of a former genteel lifestyle, because riding was a respectable accomplishment among genteel women in Britain.

The term 'English park' was the creation of the landscape gardener Lancelot 'Capability' Brown in the eighteenth century. He created parks on undulating ground with wide expanses of lawn and clumps of trees here and there. His parks were considered 'natural' in contrast with the formal landscape gardens that had been previously fashionable. Tim Bonyhady points out that it was the artist Sydney Parkinson who first perceived the Australian landscape in the form of a park in his account of Captain Cook's first voyage, and many colonists followed his way of seeing the country.[23] Tim Bonyhady also claims that only the gentry and the aristocracy could afford to own such English parks in Britain in the nineteenth century.[24] So when Elizabeth Ramsay-Laye noted one particular area's similarity to a typical English park, she situated herself within a genteel environment. Feeling at home was therefore not just a physical concept but a cultural one, as well.

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20) Delys Bird, Gender and Landscape: Australian colonial women writers (London: University of London, 1989), 9.
21) *AAN,* Vol.2: 220–221.
22) 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.
23) Bonyhady, Tim. *The Colonial Earth* (Carlton South: Miegunyah Press, 2000), 77–78.
24) Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth,* 78.

For a woman like Elizabeth Ramsay-Laye 'open plains', 'shadowy glades' and 'groves of trees'[25] created the background to a way of lifestyle she either wished to have again, imitate or belong to in the future. Social aspirations also determined the way colonial gentlewomen looked at the surrounding environment.

By articulating her opinion on the surrounding landscape, Elizabeth Ramsay-Laye sought to make her immediate environment meaningful. The application of familiar terminology and the association with former ideas and ideals attempted to transform that unknown scenery into a well-known one. Colonial gentlewomen yearned to recreate the private sphere under nomadic conditions and longed to be situated in a genteel-like geographical milieu. They made note of the roughness and strangeness of their new environment, but they were more concerned with the realization of genteel ideals in the colonial circumstances.

Domesticating the landscape

Familiar landscape features and the physical establishment of the private sphere in the Australian bush created the boundaries within which colonial gentlewomen felt a sensation of home. Their next step often included the direct alteration of their immediate environment in an attempt to make it less strange. The planting of English trees and flowers was a widespread practice in colonial Australia. Acclimatization Societies were formed with the aim of introducing English plants and animals both for economic reasons and for the pleasure of homesick colonists. Tom Griffiths treats the works of these societies as agents of a 'biological imperialism that accompanied and strengthened the expansion of Europe across the globe.'[26]

Hawthorn hedges, in particular, appealed to the settlers. When Mrs Charles Meredith spent two weeks in Newtown, Tasmania in 1840 she noted, 'the most English, and therefore the most beautiful things I saw here, were the hawthorn hedges.'[27] Just like Clara Aspinall, Louisa Anne Meredith also equated the word 'beautiful' with 'English'. These shrubs created a typical English setting and Louisa Anne Meredith delighted in their sight. Robert Dickson suggests that colonists praised certain things because they had formed good memories of them in their earlier life. Past images therefore influenced the way colonists defined the word 'beautiful'. This is what Robert Dixon terms 'the aesthetic cult of associationism'. He argues that

> material objects appear [. . .] beautiful because the spectator endows them with sentiments

25) Ramsay-Laye, *Social Life,* 48.
26) Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 16.
27) Mrs Charles Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania, During a Residence of Nine Years* (London: John Murray, 1852), Vol.1, 26.

> 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.[28)]

English plants like the hawthorn hedges recreated the environment where colonial gentlewomen once felt delighted. Such recollections provided a link with the past and foreshadowed the possibility of future happiness in a different environment.

The garden served as a treasure house of flowers and was therefore beloved by the settlers. Since it included only those plants that were familiar to the colonists, the garden was seen as a safe zone in sharp contrast with the surrounding wilderness. It was aesthetically pleasing to the eye and offered light work to gentlewomen for whom gardening was another favoured genteel accomplishment.[29)] Just like the verandah, the garden was also 'seen as an extension of the home'[30)] and thus it was considered women's domain. They spent their hours of idleness taking a stroll in the garden or looking after the flowers. At first, most women insisted on English flowers. Eliza Brown requested her father in England to send some flower seeds to her in the Swan Colony in 1843. In her letter she made the promise, '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 them.'[31)] Eliza Brown was anxious to have familiar-looking flowers around her and planned to rejoice in the sight of the flower garden in her colonial home. As the colonists' familiarity with Australia grew, they also experimented with native flowers.

Flowers did not only adorn the settlers' gardens but they also provided worthy subject matters for paintings and drawings. Genteel women made sketches of the native plants not only for their own enjoyment but also to inform their friends and family at home of what Australia was like.[32)] Non-fictional accounts and travel narratives were also illustrated. Louisa Anne Meredith's nature sketches, in particular, brought fame and widely acclaimed reputation to her books. She is especially remembered for her book entitled *Some of My Bush Friends in Tasmania*[33)] – a

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28) Robert Dixon, 1987. "A 'Complicated joy': The Aesthetic Theory of Associationism and its Influence on Tasmanian Culture," in *The Flow of Culture: Tasmanian Studies,* ed. Michael Roe (Canberra: Australian Academy of the Humanities, 1987), 122–123.

29) Susan K Martin, "'there garden is much more forward than ours': Place and Class in Colonial Australian Women's Gardening," *SPAN* 46 (1998): 47.

30) Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes – Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780–1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 370.

31) 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.

32) Caroline Ambrus, *Australian Women Artists* (Woden, ACT: Irrepressible Press, 1992), 14.

33) 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).

collection of verse, flower sketches and nature writings. This work demonstrates Louisa Anne Meredith's passion for and detailed knowledge of the natural beauties of Australia. She was English by birth but settled with her husband Charles Meredith in the colonies in 1839. After a brief period in New South Wales the couple moved to Tasmania in the early 1840s. Her personal narrative *My Home in Tasmania*[34] indicates the strong link that bonded her life and heart to this island. Familiarity with the surrounding environment made genteel women feel more at home in their adopted country.

Besides flowers, pets were also kept in order to conjure up the atmosphere of home. Mary Macleod Banks grew up on a Queensland station called Cressbrook in the 1860s and 1870s and she summed up the significance of pets in Australia the following way: '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'.[35] She argued that pets were necessary in an environment where the native fauna was still considered odd and unfamiliar. Cats, dogs and birds were the most popular pets in Britain. Mary Macleod Banks was of the opinion that by keeping native animals as pets, colonists could get to know the native fauna. In her book of recollections Mary Macleod Banks cherished the memory of her animal companions. Her family became particularly attached to the kangaroo. She noted, 'as a domestic pet we knew the kangaroo intimately and found him eminently lovable'.[36]

In addition to flowers and pets, the piano provided another field of interest to colonial gentlewomen. Playing the piano was a highly valued genteel accomplishment[37] and gentlewomen indulged in it. Despite the rudimentary conditions of early colonial life, most genteel homes prided themselves on the piano. Even though life in the newly settled Palmerston in the early 1870s was rough, social life was maintained to a certain extent. Harriett Daly recalled that there was a piano in one of the log huts and she spent many evenings singing to the accompaniment of the piano.[38] Without music, 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.'[39] In the absence of the piano, gentlewomen's genteel identity suffered. Women's insistence on their pianos suggests that they sought to create the physical outlook of the private sphere as they had known it in their native country. As long as they had a piano the roughness of the log hut did not concern them too much. The upholding of genteel values provided a link with the past and secured a safe

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34) Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania.*
35) Mary Macleod Banks, *Memories of Pioneer Days in Queensland* (London: Heath Cranton, 1931), 48.
36) Banks, *Memories,* 48–51.
37) Marjorie Theobald, *Knowing Women – Origins of Women's Education in Nineteenth-Century Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 9.
38) Daly, *Digging, Squatting,* 52–53.
39) Mary Burgan, "Heroines at the Piano: Women and Music in Nineteenth-Century Fiction," *Victorian Studies* 30/1 (1986): 51.

environment for the future where colonial genteel women could feel at home.

Not only plants, pets and objects had the power to reproduce the home-like environment. Leisure activities such as horseback-riding[40] and hunting[41] were also essential elements of the genteel lifestyle both in England and in Australia. While providing recreation and showing the maintenance of the genteel lifestyle, these pursuits helped colonial women get to know the surrounding environment. Their riding expeditions took them away from their abodes and showed them what Australia was like. Elizabeth Ramsay-Laye described a hunting expedition along the banks of the Yarra River and explained that she was happy because hunting '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'.[42] It is noteworthy that she wrote of 'lovely scenery' and 'new and interesting objects'. These phrases suggest that Elizabeth Ramsay-Laye was not daunted by the novelty of the landscape, but rather she was willing to notice the beauty of the environment she was exploring.

In colonial Australia traditional foxhunting often gave way to kangaroo-hunting, especially in areas where foxes had not been introduced yet.[43] Rachel Henning regularly sent letters to her sister Etta in England from Exmoor Station near Port Denison. In November 1862 she recalled a riding party during which they sighted a mob of kangaroos: 'We saw some kangaroos on the plains, and the dogs went after them and we went after the dogs as hard as we could for a long distance, but the kangaroos got into a patch of scrub where we could not follow them.'[44] Apart from kangaroos other bush animals, such as koalas and possums, were also hunted for pleasure.

Horseback-riding trips and hunting expeditions in colonial Australia affirmed British women's gentility. Moreover, they provided an opportunity for the colonists to experience rural Australia. Genteel women delighted in activities that they had previously pursued in England and at the same time they began to appreciate what Australia had to offer. Colonial gentlewomen's contact with the bush was, however, rather limited in the sense that it was within the scope of a genteel accomplishment that they gained an insight into rural Australia.

Exploring the surrounding environment

After they had surrounded themselves with familiar-looking objects and created a home-like

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40) Janet Dunbar, *The Early Victorian Woman – Some Aspects of her Life* (1837–57) (London: George G. Harrap, 1953), 92.

41) Paul de Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees – The Upper Class in Victoria 1850–1880* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1991), 139.

42) Ramsay-Laye, *Social Life,* 187.

43) Linden Gillbank, "The Origins of the Acclimatisation Society of Victoria," *Historical Records of Australian Science* 6/3 (1986): 372.

44) David Adams, ed., *The Letters of Rachel Henning* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1988), 117.

atmosphere, colonial gentlewomen stepped outside the private sphere of their home. At first, gentlewomen viewed the surrounding landscape from the safety and comforts of their home. Their verandahs provided a platform where they could freely observe the natural area around them. Robert Dixon points out that this 'veranda-diorama' was a characteristic feature in colonial writing by women.[45] Louisa Anne Meredith depicted the scenery around her house Riverdale in Tasmania in the 1840s as she saw it from the verandah: 'From the 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 nobly hollyhocks, carnations, tiger lilies, and other autumn flowers.'[46] Louisa Anne Meredith gave a detailed account of what was visible from her verandah. Her careful depiction and the fact that she considered it important to record this view in her personal narrative show that this piece of environment was seen as a worthy topic to be written about.

Some women dared to go out in the bush in order to study the native flora. Australia was an intriguing place for amateur botanists with its wide variety of flowers. In country Victoria in 1860, Clara Aspinall recorded 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.'[47] She evidently developed a passion for bush flowers. Most colonists delighted in the native flowers and enjoyed collecting them during their rambles in the bush. At home they would arrange them in their vases and they would often sketch them in their diaries. Many of their sketches were also sent home to show their family what these Australian flowers looked like. The time colonial women spent with flowers assured their gentility and at the same time brought them closer to the surrounding environment.

Aboriginal women often guided and assisted the colonists in their exploration of the bush. Katherine Parker spent a great deal of her time in the company of the local Aboriginal tribe at Bangate Station in northern New South Wales in the 1890s. She noted:

> 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.[48]

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45) Robert Dixon, "Public and Private Voices: Non-Fictional Prose," in *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia,* ed. Laurie Hergenhan 126–138. (Ringwood: Penguin, 1988), 135.
46) Meredith, *My Home,* Vol.2, 269–270.
47) Aspinall, *Three Years in Melbourne,* 164.
48) Marcie Muir, ed., *My Bush Book－K. Langloh Parker's 1880s Story of Outback Station Life* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1982), 146.

Apart from enjoying her excursions in the bush, Katherine Parker also learnt that nature was not just for people to admire but it had a deeper cultural significance. While undulating grounds and cloves of trees created a culturally meaningful landscape for genteel people in England and the colonies, the Australian flora and fauna were deeply rooted in the cultural memory of the indigenous people. Both the genteel and the Aboriginal ways of life therefore had preconceived notions of and stories about landscape formations.

In their exploration of the bush, however, colonial women had to exercise great caution. The bush could also pose threat to the settlers and was therefore often seen as a place of danger. Several people got lost in the bush, were bitten by snakes or were attacked by Aboriginal people. These incidents were sometimes fatal.

Conclusion

As we have seen, coming to terms with Australia was a challenging process. Colonial gentlewomen missed their native country and tended to appreciate only those living circumstances and landscape features that reminded them of England. Images of home shaped the way gentlewomen reacted to their lives and the surrounding environment in Australia. Certain genteel pursuits, however, permitted some contact with rural Australia and helped gentlewomen form associations and thus develop fondness for their new country.

When British gentlewomen settled in or made a trip in rural Australia they brought with them a number of images and notions of what home should be like. These ideas were strongly tied to genteel notions. Despite the roughness and harshness of the Australian settlement in certain areas gentlewomen sought to safeguard genteel ideals. Gentlewomen in remote and sparsely populated areas of colonial Australia rejoiced in the establishment of the private sphere in their tents and log huts, insisted on their pianos, favourite plants and genteel pursuits because these objects and activities created the kind of home they had once had in England. At first these women appreciated only those aspects of their Australian home that resembled their former home. It was only later through the development of associations and a genuine interest in the surrounding environment that women learnt to accept and even like their adopted country. Home was therefore not just a sensation of feeling and a question of material construction but an attitude that was based on cultural and social concepts. Rural Australia presented a new environment for the establishment of the genteel world. The Aboriginal face of Australia became apparent only to a few exceptionally motivated colonists.

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