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Marion Amies

THE VICTORIAN GOVERNESS AND COLONIAL IDEALS OF WOMANHOOD

THE POSITION OF THE VICTORIAN GOVERNESS HAS BEEN DESCRIBED BY M. Jeanne Peterson as that of "status incongruence in family and society."¹ Her phrase epitomizes the plight of thousands of nineteenth-century women, their portrayals in numerous governess novels, and the views of contemporary writers. Few writers delineated the governess's position so brutally as Elizabeth Eastlake, who insisted that a governess be a "lady, in every meaning of the word," indeed her own "equal in birth, manners and education," but was also adamant that "A governess has no equals, and therefore can have no sympathy. She is a burden and restraint in society. . . . She is a bore to almost any gentleman, as a tabooed woman. . . . The servants invariably detest her for she is a dependant like themselves, and yet, for all that, as much their superior in other respects as the family they both serve."² As a gentlewoman who sought paid employment, the governess could not be encompassed by the ideal of accomplished, leisured womanhood.

Peterson suggests that employers and some writers avoided confronting the conflict inherent in the governess's position by denying, or at least minimizing, the fact of employment, and also by denying the governess's sexuality. Some governesses, she claims, resolved the conflict by taking an engagement on the continent or emigrating, by escaping "to a place where status would be less ambiguous and less painful and where there was more chance of marriage and a permanent resolution to incongruence" ("Victorian Governess," p. 21). Evidence from Australian colonial sources indicates that emigration did allow a degree of resolution for some governesses. Under pioneering conditions and on outback stations the ideal of leisured womanhood was

¹ M. Jeanne Peterson, "The Victorian Governess: Status Incongruence in Family and Society," *Victorian Studies* 14:1 (1970), 7-26; rpt. in Martha Vicinus, ed., *Suffer and Be Still* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), pp. 3-19. Page citations are from the original version.

² Elizabeth Eastlake, "Vanity Fair, Jane Eyre and the Governesses' Benevolent Institution," *Quarterly Review* 84 (December 1848), 177.

SUMMER 1988

modified to encompass the imperative of work so that the governess was no longer outside the ideal. In literary portrayals her sexuality was acknowledged and, provided she was willing to adapt to bush ways, she was welcomed as one of the family and sought after as a settler's wife.³

The nineteenth-century English governess novel could, in the hands of such authors as the Brontës, provide a vehicle to expose the plight of the governess. The governess proved a popular heroine although later novelists, lacking the Brontës' reforming zeal, often produced stereotypical characterizations. The most common stereotype was the pathetic, downtrodden governess whose portrayal was consistent with the notion that she was outside the ideal of leisured womanhood.⁴ English governess novels have since become a major source for reconstructing girls' education and the lives of gentlewomen who sought paid employment. Australian novels reveal interesting literary continuities with their English counterparts, but also adaptations in the light of their authors' experiences of colonial life. According to Joan Rockwell, literary characters not only "personify social norms and values, they also set patterns for imitation which are very much wanted in times when society is being unmade and reassembled in new and strange ways."⁵ Emigration to Australia constituted such an unmaking of society, in which the English ideal of womanhood proved incompatible with pioneering life, and Australian governess novels written by women offer insights into women's daily lives overlooked in histories based predominantly on male literature. Some of the women writers I cite used their works consciously to set patterns for imitation; others only sought to describe colonial life as they knew it, but in doing so made available patterns which helped to legitimate

³ I based the larger study from which I have drawn this paper on 136 nineteenth-century Australian novels and short stories as well as on biographical research into the lives of the 93 authors who wrote them. See Marion Amies, "Home Education and Colonial Ideas of Womanhood," Ph.D. diss., Monash University, 1986.

⁴ For discussions of this stereotype, see Wanda Neff, *Victorian Working Women: An Historical and Literary Study of Women in British Industries and Professions, 1832-1850* (1929; rpt. London: Cass, 1966), pp. 153-174; Alicia Percival, *The English Miss Yesterday and Today: Ideals, Methods and Personalities in the Education and Upbringing of Girls during the Last Hundred Years* (London: Harrap, 1939), p. 99; Katharine West, *A Chapter of Governesses: A Study of the Governess in English Fiction, 1800-1949* (London: Cohen and West, 1949), pp. 13, 72-77; Patricia Thomson, *The Victorian Heroine: A Changing Ideal 1836-1873* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 39, 45-51. The passages cited by West from Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* (1847) provide an apt illustration of the pathetic, downtrodden governess (pp. 72-77). But an alternative interpretation may be that of courage and resistance, consistent with Agnes's cry, "They may crush, but they shall not subdue me!" (chap. 3). This was not the only governess stereotype, yet it remained pervasive and continues to be invoked by Australian researchers. See, for example, A. James Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), p. 20. I have used "English" rather than "British" when referring to the ideal of womanhood because most of my sources and those of previous scholars appear to be English. More attention needs to be paid to specifically Scottish and Irish sources.

⁵ Joan Rockwell, *The Use of Literature in the Systematic Study of Society* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 65; see also pp. 66, 81. See also R. White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity 1688-1980* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1981).

and reinforce the behaviour of colonial readers and to influence the expectations of intending immigrants.

I

Most Australian novels published before 1854, the year in which the first governess novels appeared, were written by men.⁶ Male concerns are reflected in the content of many of these "emigration novels": taking up land, cattle mustering and branding, adventures with aborigines, convicts, and bushrangers, together with information for the intending male settler.⁷ The advent of female authors saw a shift from male to female protagonists, from adventure to domesticity and romance, from building stockyards and husbanding sheep to making homes and rearing and educating children. Many of the male authors viewed life in the colonies as a get-rich-quick sojourn and an opportunity for adventure, but the women, perhaps sensing that riches and a return to England would prove elusive, set about reshaping their lives and making the most of new opportunities.

This study draws upon works by twenty-four women writers, most of whom are little known today. All except Ellen Clacy (dates unknown) knew colonial life, having migrated to the colonies or having been born there, and all recreated personal experience in their novels. They saw themselves as middle or upper class in education, values, and expectations, though often they were without finances to match. Elizabeth Murray (1820-77), Elizabeth Ramsay-Laye (1842-1932), Mary Therese Vidal (1815-73), and Frances Jones (1832?-1928) had firm claims to gentility because their families or their husband's families are listed in Burke's *Peerage* or *Landed Gentry*.⁸

I have not been able to establish how all of the writers were educated. Vidal, Louisa Atkinson (1834-72), Ada Cambridge (1844-1926), Ellie [El-

⁶ Of the novels published by the end of 1854, thirty were by men and six by women. See E. Morris Miller, *Australian Literature from Its Beginnings to 1935*, 2 vols. (1940; rpt. Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1975), II, 595-599.

⁷ Frederick Sinnett, *The Fiction Fields of Australia* (1856; rpt. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1966), pp. 31-32, 42; Charles Rowcroft, *George Mayford: An Emigrant in Search of a Colony* (1846; abridged ed. London: Thomas Hodgson, [1851]).

⁸ *The Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1966-; hereafter cited as ADB) has an entry for Mary Therese Vidal (II, 555-556). For more accurate background on Vidal, see two works by her granddaughter, Faith Compton MacKenzie, *As Much As I Dare: The Autobiography of Faith Compton MacKenzie* (London: Collins, 1938) and *William Cory: A Biography* (London: Constable, 1950); see also Amies, "Home Education," p. 62-63. For information about the other authors, see the introduction by Brian Murray (Elizabeth Murray's grandson) to the reprint of Elizabeth Murray's novel *Ella Norman; or, A Woman's Perils* (1864; rpt. Melbourne: Hill of Content, 1985); Frances Jones, *Broad Outlines of Long Years in Australia* (London: Samuel Tinsley & Co., 1878) — a fictionalized account of the family's life in Australia (events are accurate, but names have been changed); Amies, "Home Education," p. 297 n. 12 (on Clacy) and p. 297 n. 13 (on Ramsay-Laye).

len] Liston (1838-85), and Rosa Praed (1851-1935) were taught at home by their mothers and sometimes by governesses. Others combined early home education with later formal training (at institutions ranging from fashionable European finishing schools to colonial government schools which prepared girls for university entrance) or with specialist instruction (as in the case of Louisa Anne Meredith [1812-95], who earned a living as a portraitist and won a reputation as a natural scientist). Though the nature of their education varied greatly, their lives and works demonstrate that they were well-educated.⁹

Meredith, Jones, Vidal, Charlotte Barton (1797-1867), Atkinson (Barton's daughter), Jessie Lloyd ("Silverleaf"; 1843-85), and Ella Chaffey (dates unknown) were settlers' wives. They knew bush life at its most uncompromising and learned from daily practice the skills needed by colonial housekeepers. Meredith and Lloyd also found that their earnings from writing provided essential supplements to their husbands' inadequate incomes. Others — Ethel Turner (1872-1958) and Lilian Turner (1871-1956), Ellen Chads (1837?-1923), and Sophie Osmond (dates unknown) — knew little of bush housekeeping. Ethel Turner's marriage to Herbert Raine Curlewis, a Sydney barrister and later judge, gave her security. When younger she had contemplated becoming a governess if she failed as a writer; governessing became for her a symbol of failure, an attitude which colours her short story "School at Jimbaree" (1898). Chads and Osmond were Melbourne journalists. Chads was well-known as a regular contributor to the daily press and to the *Australian Woman's Magazine and Domestic Journal*. For many years Osmond supported her mother on earnings from the press, continuing as a journalist throughout the economic depression of the 1890s.¹⁰

Cambridge and Grace Langford (1839-1908) experienced both town and bush life. As an Anglican clergyman's wife, Cambridge moved often and widely, trekking with her husband as he visited far-flung parishioners. Her first Australian works were published to supplement "the family resources when they threatened to give out"; later she claimed writing as her profession

⁹ The ADB includes entries for Atkinson (III, 59-60), Meredith (V, 239-240), and Cambridge (III, 334-335). Ann Moyal discusses Atkinson and Meredith in *A Bright and Savage Land: Scientists in Colonial Australia* (Sydney: Collins, 1986), pp. 107, 114-115. On Liston, see Ellen A. Harwood, ed., Introduction to Ellen Liston, *Pioneers: Stories by Ellen Liston* (1868-1885; rpt. Adelaide: Hassell Press, 1936); the stories were written for local and national papers and were always signed "Ellie L* * *". On Praed, see Colin Roderick, *In Mortal Bondage: The Strange Life of Rosa Praed* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1948) and Rosa Praed, *My Australian Girlhood* (London: Unwin, 1902). On Meredith, see V. R. Ellis, *Louisa Anne Meredith: A Tigress in Exile* (Sandy Bay, Tas.: Blubber Head Press, 1979).

¹⁰ The ADB includes an entry on Lloyd (V, 97). On Barton, see Marcie Muir, *Charlotte Barton: Australia's First Children's Author* (Sydney: Wentworth Books, 1980). On Ethel and Lilian Turner, see Brenda Niall, *Seven Little Billabongs* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1979), pp. 7-33. On Chaffey, Chads, and Osmond, see Amies, "Home Education," p. 300 n. 45; p. 308 n. 144; and pp. 308-309 n. 145.

and was glad that it and her unpredictable health prevented her from being quite such a drudge as many clergymen's wives. Langford lived in the bustling town of Kyneton in Victoria. Her husband's well-established medical practice, the thriving social and cultural life of the town, and the fact that she had only one child meant that she viewed life in a country town somewhat differently and lived a more leisured life than did Cambridge. All of these women either taught their own children at home or chose governesses for them, and then lived in an intimate working and social relationship with those governesses.¹¹

Margaret Bryant has characterized the education of nineteenth-century English girls as "snatches of disconnected information and the trivial or showy accomplishments which would educate them not for marriage but to get husbands" — an education specifically designed to make them useless.¹² Such an education was based on the ideal of womanhood which emerged in the wake of the industrial revolution as a justification of the increased "leisure" forced upon middle-class women by the withdrawal of productive processes from the home. Bryant describes the usual preindustrial household, whether in town or country, as also

the workplace or centre of operations of its master-craftsman, tradesman, husbandman, yeoman, country gentleman. The housewife needed to be a highly skilled specialist and good administrator of her team of daughters, younger children, apprentices, servants. The growing, marketing, cooking, preserving of food, brewing of beer or cider, distilling, boiling of soap and manufacture of other cleaning materials and the constant struggle against dirt, making, mending, washing of clothes, and even spinning and weaving of yarn and cloth, the concoction and administration of medicine, all fell to the lot of women.

(p. 28).

With industrialization, men (and working-class women) followed the shift of productive processes into the factories and the marketplaces of the commercial world (Bryant, pp. 28-29). Middle-class women remained within the home and became consumers rather than producers, and managers of the outward forms that manifested and defined their male relatives' status in the public sphere.¹³ Their time was largely devoted to overseeing servants, visiting, shopping, and philanthropy. A man's place of work was inaccessible and mysterious to the women in his household, "distant, invisible — a public world of regular time-keeping and rather vague but decidedly important activities."¹⁴

¹¹ See Ada Cambridge, *Thirty Years in Australia* (London: Methuen, 1903) and *The Retrospect* (London: Stanley Paul, 1912). Although married to George Frederick Cross, Cambridge maintained her maiden name as a writer. On Langford, see Amies, "Home Education," p. 301 n. 52.

¹² Margaret Bryant, *The Unexpected Revolution* (London: University of London Institute of Education, 1979), p. 41. See also Sara Delamont, "The Contradictions in Ladies' Education," in Sara Delamont and Lorna Duffin, eds., *The Nineteenth-Century Woman* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), p. 135; Joan Burstyn, *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), p. 40; Josephine Kamm, *Hope Deferred* (London: Methuen, 1965), pp. 133-134, 170.

¹³ Burstyn, pp. 13-14, 30; Deborah Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), p. 8.

¹⁴ Carol Dyhouse, *Girls Growing Up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 4-5.

Women were assigned the role of moral guardians of the nation, paradoxically not by confronting the corruption in the outside world with their moral virtue but by retreating into the separate sphere of domestic life, cultivating self-denial, forbearance, and fidelity, and providing a cultured haven for their male relatives (Burstyn, pp. 32-37). Although regarded as morally superior to men, women were thought to be essentially weaker; indeed, in physical and mental development they were thought not to have reached the superior stage achieved by men. Their supposed natural weakness, combined with the periodic "sickness" of menstruation (and for married women frequent childbirth), and the literal and psychological constraints of heavy clothing and corsets, led to the cultivation of genteel invalidism.¹⁵ These factors were reflected in girls' education: a high moral tone was considered paramount to intellectual development; training in practical housewifery gave way to the acquisition of accomplishments and ornamental handicrafts; initiative and confidence were subdued to submissive dependency (see Kamm, pp. 166-168; Bryant, pp. 28-29, 32; Burstyn, pp. 36-41).

In her case study "No Angels in the House: The Victorian Myth and the Paget Women," Peterson questions the validity of this stereotype through the reality of the lives of three generations of women in one family. She concludes that "their education was more than decorative, their relationship to money less distant than we thought, their physical lives more vigorous, expansive and sensual than either scholars today or some Victorians themselves had led us to believe," and, above all, they were individuals.¹⁶ In encouraging more case studies which may allow historians to determine whether the Paget women were representative of, or exceptions to, the norm of upper-middle-class Victorian womanhood, Peterson stresses the need for analyses that combine gender issues with other issues including that of social geography (p. 707). Conditions and opportunities for women did differ between London, Oxford, and the little suburb of Pinner, not to speak of Melbourne, the gold fields, and outback stations. Marjorie Theobald has shown that the English ideal of womanhood and the accomplishments curriculum which embodied it proved hardy transplants to colonial soil, but after exploring the practice of that curriculum in private girls' schools she concludes that "within the ideological constraints . . . women negotiated and controlled a world of education" to achieve their own ends: they "were not the passive objects of

¹⁵ Carol Dyhouse, "Social Darwinistic Ideas and the Development of Women's Education in England 1880-1920," *History of Education* 5 (1976), 41-58 and *Girls Growing Up*, p. 22; Lorna Duffin, "The Conspicuous Consumptive: Woman as an Invalid" and "Prisoners of Progress: Women and Evolution" in Delamont and Duffin, pp. 26-56 and 57-91.

¹⁶ M. Jeanne Peterson, "No Angels in the House: The Victorian Myth and the Paget Women," *American Historical Review* 89 (1984), p. 706.

oppression.”¹⁷ Nevertheless, principals and governesses of girls' schools retained the patronage of many of the colony's leading dignitaries and families and were arbiters of gentility. Most of their schools were in Melbourne or provincial Victorian towns, whereas the majority of the women writers in this study and all of the governesses they portray lived in bush households.

II

Recent studies have described the residences of the Victorian upper classes in Britain, enumerated the multitude of indoor and outdoor staff, and detailed the complexity and rigidity of the hierarchy which dominated the lives of owners and servants.¹⁸ Jill Franklin calculates that if there were “six children in the family, then ten or twelve people would live in the nursery wing” divided according to age, sex, and occupation and segregated from the rest of the household:

Babies and small children lived, ate and slept entirely in their own nurseries, cared for and ruled over by a nurse, plus one or two nursemaids. As the children grew a little older their place in the nursery was taken by new babies and they were promoted to the school-room presided over by the governess. Later still the boys were sent away to boarding school but the girls remained until they were 16 or 17, though gradually spending more time downstairs.

(p. 80).

Usually the schoolroom was included in the nursery wing. The governess's bedroom would be either in the nursery wing or in the attic with the servants' rooms (Franklin, p. 157). Though nursery wings tended to be simply, if not sparsely, furnished, other rooms became progressively more cluttered as the century progressed: drapes, pictures, bric-a-brac, numerous pieces of furniture and the appurtenances of feminine pastimes vied for space and attention. In

¹⁷ Marjorie R. Theobald, “Women and Schools in Colonial Victoria 1840-1910,” Ph.D. diss., Monash University, 1985, chap. 1, esp. pp. 9, 14, 32. See also Marion Amies, “The Career of a Colonial Schoolmistress,” *Melbourne Studies in Education* 1984, pp. 53-80. Australian historians, including feminist historians, have largely glossed over the role of governesses. Three writers have included home education in wider studies, and increasing interest in governesses as a class of women who sought paid employment has resulted in several useful studies: Patricia Heywood, “Elementary Education in Port Phillip 1836-1851,” Ph.D. diss., Monash University, 1984; Noeline Kyle, “*Her Natural Destiny*”: *The Education of Girls in New South Wales* (Kensington: New South Wales University Press, 1986); Elizabeth Windschuttle, “Educating the Daughters of the Ruling Class in Colonial New South Wales,” in *Melbourne Studies in Education* 1980, pp. 105-133. See also Patricia Clarke, *The Governesses: Letters from the Colonies 1862-1882* (Hawthorn, Vic.: Hutchinson, 1985); although Clarke's work is based closely on the letters, it contains extracts and commentary rather than an edition of them.

¹⁸ See Mark Girouard, *The Victorian Country House* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); Jill Franklin, *The Gentleman's Country House and Its Plan 1835-1914* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981); Adeline Hartcup, *Below Stairs in the Great Country Houses* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1980); Jenni Calder, *The Victorian Home* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1977); Frank Dawes, *Not in Front of the Servants: A True Portrait of English Upstairs/Downstairs Life* (London: Wayland Publishers, 1973). Two depictions of country houses in well-known English governess novels are Cumnor Towers in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters* (1864-66) and Thornfield in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847).

Jane Austen's day a supper party could become a dance with little effort beyond rolling back the carpet; such flexibility was impossible in the English Victorian drawing room (Calder, p. 19).

Compared with the homes of the English upper class and genteel middle class, the bush homes in which governesses worked were on a different scale. Buildings were smaller and so was the number of staff, and furniture and decor were adapted to the exigencies of climate and bush housekeeping. Throughout the nineteenth century there were pioneer families living in the most basic huts, assisted, if they were lucky, by one all-purpose servant; other families were more comfortably settled in rambling homesteads softened by flourishing gardens, and there were some who had replaced their original homesteads with grander structures serviced by indoor and outdoor staff. A governess could be employed if there was a spare room, even though that might be an enclosed veranda off a four-room hut.

Isolation and distance demanded that the bush family be largely self-sufficient. As the property was developed, gardens and straggling clusters of buildings and yards surrounded the house: detached kitchen, wash house, men's quarters, storage sheds, overseer's cottage, the station store (with supplies for both household members and employees), forge, shearing shed, stock and fowl yards, and sheepwash. In many ways the homestead community resembled the English preindustrial household, and there was no sharp division between the workplaces of men and women: men's work was familiar to women, not inaccessible and mysterious. Though women worked within the house, their responsibilities often extended to the garden, the dairy, and the fowl house. Men's work in the paddocks, yards, and sheds was visible, understood, and in the early stages of pioneering often shared by women.

Peter Freeman has described the rambling growth of homesteads in the Riverina district of New South Wales, yet even the most substantial dwelling detailed by him is not comparable to the country houses of the British gentry. The homesteads for which he provides plans and drawings are similar to those portrayed by the women novelists.¹⁹ In *Tasmanian Friends and Foes, Feathered, Furred and Finned* (1880), Louisa Meredith describes Loorana as "a pleasant country house" surrounded by bush, quite some miles from any neighbours.²⁰ Despite the term "country house," Loorana is a modest estate where a cook, housemaid, gardener, and one or two outdoor hands are employed; nevertheless a large part of the farm and domestic work is done by the

¹⁹ Peter Freeman, *The Homestead: A Riverina Anthology* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1982), esp. pp. 58, 83, 240-241.

²⁰ Louisa Anne Meredith, *Tasmanian Friends and Foes, Feathered, Furred and Finned: A Family Chronicle of Country Life, Natural History, and Veritable Adventure* (1880; rpt. London: Marcus Ward & Co., 1881), p. 9. For a more detailed discussion of such households, see Amies, "Home Education," chap. 2.

family. Mr. Merton and his sons Guy and Louis plough, harvest, mend fences, and do other outdoor chores (pp. 12, 21-22, 26, 62, 74). Lena shares the dairy tasks and housework with her mother (p. 162). The one sitting room combines the functions of workroom, dining room, and drawing room. It is a "pleasant room . . . strewn with letters, newspapers and book-packets . . . the furniture, though simple and inexpensive, was well-kept, comfortable. . . . The pretty wall-paper (put up by Mrs Merton's own clever hands) harmonized with the fresh chintz covers of the easy-chairs and sofa . . . whilst a few fine old family pictures and choice engravings told both of pride of ancestry and love of art" (p. 10). Though Loorana is a "pleasant country house," in size, simplicity of furnishing, and the practicality of its mistress's hands it is a far cry from the English country house. In such bush houses the simple furnishings were easily moved aside so that guests could dance in the evenings. Newcomers, used to English drawing rooms crammed with "more than the necessary amount of furniture," thought that such rooms had an "unfinished, scantily furnished look."²¹ Colonial women realized that less furniture gave small rooms a greater feeling of spaciousness, made them cooler on hot summer days and more adaptable to family demands, and lightened the burden of housework.

The diminished scale of the colonial home and its domestic staff entailed two important corollaries. First, children again became part of the family. They were no longer isolated with their own staff in a separate area of the house where they ate, slept, played, and were educated apart from the other members of the household. In Elisabeth Boyd Bayly's *Alfreda Holme* (1882), the heroine found on arrival in the colony that "children pervaded every part of the house, at all hours; if they were not present in their body, their voices penetrated every partition" (p. 69). Second, it was necessary for colonial ladies to be involved in the care of their children and in housework. Alfreda soon realized this difference, too:

Let it not be supposed that all . . . young ladies have to make beds and wash up the breakfast dishes . . . but in families of social standing you would find, in Australia, two servants where there were young children, one if there were not, and all the washing done at home. Make every deduction for less ornamental furniture . . . it is still plain that the work of a hospitable house could never be accomplished unless the ladies took their full share.

(p. 59).

Helen Thompson claims that an important contribution made by Catherine Helen Spence (1825-1910) to the Australian novel is the inclusion of a "fuller picture of the part work played in the lives of her characters, women as well as men." Pauline Kirk also notes that colonial women writers

²¹ For evening dances, see, for example, "Noel Hope" [Matilda Goldstraw], *Milliara: An Australian Romance*, 2 vols. (London: Fisher Unwin, 1893), I, 93. On simple furnishings, see "Alien" [Elisabeth Boyd Bayly], *Alfreda Holme: A Story of Australia* (London: Jarrolds, 1882), p. 82.

were at their best when they wrote about daily life and work.²² Maude Jean Franc [Matilda Jane Evans, nee Congreve] (1827-86; see *ABD*, IV, 143), like the other women writers surveyed here, includes many descriptions of work in her novels, constantly reminding the reader of the importance of work in the lives of colonial women. Her women scrub and clean, bake, cure bacon and hams, boil scraps and feed them to the pigs, grow vegetables, nurse invalids (not just mopping a fevered brow but boiling the soiled linen), black grates, and whitewash walls without losing any of their feminine graces or delicacy of feeling.

Work, paid and unpaid, played an important part in the lives of many colonial writers—as young unmarried women, as wives and mothers, as widows supporting children, or as women who worked for most of their adult lives. Many were breadwinners; others supplemented the inadequate income of male breadwinners. Barton, Franc, Liston, and Spence were private governesses; all except Barton also taught in schools (Amies, “Home Education,” pp. 76-77, 81). Matilda Goldstraw (1842-1913) began her teaching career as a government schoolteacher. Starting at the age of thirteen in a tent school on the Ballarat gold fields, she received her teacher training at the Model School, Melbourne, in 1858. Later she became founding principal of two prestigious private schools, Alexandra College in Hamilton and Queen’s College in Ballarat, both of which prepared girls for university entrance examinations.²³ Barton was in paid employment only briefly; when widowed she inherited income from a substantial grazing property (Muir, pp. 24-25). Goldstraw and Franc moved in and out of teaching depending on their marital status; when widowed they returned to their teaching careers.²⁴ Spence and Liston did not marry, and both were responsible for the financial support of relatives. Ill health caused Liston to leave teaching and seek employment as a telegraphist and postmaster. Spence left teaching for journalism (on Spence, see *ADB*, VI, 167-168; on Liston, see Harwood, p. 6).

The other women (except for Goldstraw, whose only known publication is her novel) supplemented their incomes by writing novels, regular columns, or occasional short stories and essays for Australian or British publications. Spence lived in Adelaide all her working life while the others moved from town to town, from city to bush, as employment or business opportuni-

²² Helen Thompson, “Catherine Helen Spence: Pragmatic Utopian,” in Shirley Walker, ed., *Who is She? Images of Woman in Australian Fiction* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983), p. 12; Pauline Kirk, “Colonial Literature for Colonial Readers,” *Australian Literary Studies* 5 (1971), 141. For more background on Spence, see Catherine Helen Spence, *Catherine Helen Spence: An Autobiography* (1910; rpt. Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 1975); Susan Magarey, *Unbridling the Tongues of Women: A Biography of Catherine Helen Spence* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1985).

²³ For background on Goldstraw, see Amies, “Colonial Schoolmistress,” pp. 53-80.

²⁴ Amies, “Colonial Schoolmistress,” pp. 59-60, 72; W. Gray, “Mount Barker Pioneers: The Authoress, Maude Jean Franc,” *Mount Barker Courier*, 27 June 1930, p. 5.

ties offered. As governesses, principals, and proprietors of private schools, they controlled their own lives and finances.²⁵ Like the Paget women, their education was more than decorative, their lives were vigorous, expansive, and sensual, and their relationship to money practical. In seeking paid work these women acknowledged no loss of status. Indeed, for some, such as Goldstraw (the daughter of a Yorkshire dyer), it was a means of increasing status. Despite their autonomy and ability to support themselves, however, these novelists assumed that most women would marry, as did the heroines of their stories.

Spence and Franc, in the tradition of the time, were avowedly didactic writers. Though their records of daily life in the colonies are demonstrably based upon personal experience, their characterizations of women are coloured by their perceptions of woman's role. Both create women who are capable, adaptable, strong-minded — the qualities both knew were needed in colonial life. But Franc wrote from religious conviction and her female characters devote themselves to the mission of God's work, whereas Spence wrote from feminist conviction and the desire to show that the colony offered greater opportunities for women to lead more individual lives. Spence penned *Clara Morison* (1854) as a response to an article by Thackeray contending that "anything wearing petticoats" would quickly become a gentleman's wife in the colonies. Spence knew that many women would not find husbands, while those who did required certain qualities to attract a good husband and, more importantly, to find fulfilment in marriage under pioneering conditions. Even so she felt that colonial life was preferable to that faced by many women in Britain and encouraged women of good sense and adaptability to emigrate.²⁶

III

Not surprisingly, the writers who portrayed governesses did not describe their duties in detail, in part because they assumed the duties were familiar to readers. More particularly, they emphasized those aspects of governesses' routines which helped to delineate their characters' social status. Nevertheless, some short episodes and fragmentary references provide an outline of the governess's daily round and the program of studies she provided in bush households.

²⁵ On the economic contribution of women, including governesses, to the founding of the Australian colonies, see Katrina Alford, *Production or Reproduction? An Economic History of Women in Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1984).

²⁶ Spence, *Autobiography*, p. 22. Though Murray was prompted to write *Ella Norman* by a similar article, she was emphatic that ladies of sensibility had no place in the colonies, and her heroine was one of the few who returned to England (Elizabeth Murray, Preface to *Ella Norman*).

In huts, farmhouses, and homesteads, lessons were conducted each weekday and on Saturday morning; Saturday afternoon was a half-holiday and Sunday a day of rest and worship. At Christmas time and during the hot summer months of January and February, lessons ceased for several weeks. The daily round of the governess and pupils was closely integrated into the domestic routine. The governess sometimes had the privacy of a separate schoolroom, but frequently the schoolroom was wherever she was working (in the sitting room as she sewed, in the kitchen as she cooked) or, on hot days, in the cool of the vine-shaded veranda. The routine started at six or seven o'clock in the morning (depending on the season) with music practice for the older girls. Breakfast and family prayers were followed by three or four hours of formal lessons, allowing a break of half an hour or so before dinner. In the afternoon there may have been another hour or two of formal lessons or lesson preparation in the schoolroom while the girls had music lessons or practice. The rest of the afternoon was devoted to recreation with opportunities for informal natural history lessons. Evenings, particularly winter evenings, found the family gathered in the sitting room enjoying instructive amusements. In all her daily activities the governess regarded instilling attitudes and codes of behaviour as of equal importance to the acquisition of subject knowledge.²⁷

No formal curriculum promulgated by a remote bureaucracy governed home education, yet there was a common program of studies which most governesses followed — an English education and accomplishments:

At its best an English education offered not, as historians of education have assumed, basic literacy, but a comprehensive programme in all the elements of the English language — literature, grammar, composition, elocution and calligraphy — with history, geography, arithmetic and the elements of science. The terminology “an English education” was therefore used in contradistinction to the classical education in Latin, Greek and mathematics which was still important in the middle-class boys’ schools.

(Theobald, p. 14).

In 1873, after visiting a number of government schools in the colony of Victoria, English educationists Rosamond and Florence Hill noted that the school program embraced “all the branches of a plain English education.”²⁸

²⁷ [Goldstraw], I, 209, 225; II, 84; Ellen Augusta Chads, “Tracked by Bushrangers: A Story of the Fifties,” in *Tracked by Bushrangers and Other Stories, together with Work for the Master, a series of papers for women* (Melbourne: George Robertson & Co., 1891), p. 66; Ellie Liston, “Louey and I,” in *Pioneers*, pp. 24, 26-27. Jessie M. Waterhouse, *The Medhursts of Mindala: The Story of the Development of a Soul* (London: Eliot Stock, 1897), pp. 24, 28-29, 50-51, 63, 91; Meredith, *Tasmanian Friends and Foes*, pp. 22, 26-27, 55, 164; Maude Jean Franc, *Marian; or, the Light of Some One's Home: A Tale of Australian Bush Life* (1861; rpt. London: Sampson Low, Son & Marston, 1868), pp. 143-144. For a discussion of evening amusement, see Marion Amies, “Amusing and Instructive Conversations: The Literary Genre and Its Implications for Home Education,” *History of Education* 14 (1985), 87-99.

²⁸ Rosamond and Florence Hill, *What We Saw in Australia* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1875), p. 395.

The Education Act of 1872 specified the course of instruction in such schools. All grades shared a common program consisting of reading, writing, and arithmetic with the addition of spelling, rhymes, dictation, explanation (comprehension), grammar, and geography, depending on the grade level. Girls at all levels were taught plain needlework. History was not taught, for the secular provisions of the act had excluded it from the syllabus, but much historical information was subsumed under reading. Comparison with a private visiting governess's timetable of 1897 shows a similar program. The major distinction between the two programs is in the inclusion of French by the governess. Neither program mentions Latin, Greek, or advanced mathematics, the basis of classical education for boys.²⁹

The "accomplishments" included music (piano and singing), painting and drawing, modern languages, and needlework (Theobald, p. 14). An understanding of their nature and purpose was a crucial part of instruction. Australian women writers understood an accomplishment as something acquired through thorough understanding, self-discipline, and hard work which, aligned with taste and elegance of manners, perfected one for society (fig. 1).³⁰ That they subscribed to the notion of accomplished gentility is reflected in their works in two ways. First, they assume their readers take for granted that the program of studies encompasses an English education, and they stress those subjects which denote the values and codes of behaviour they regard as the hallmarks of gentility. Music and French are the most frequently mentioned subjects, symbolizing self-discipline, refinement of taste, conformity with middle-class values, and awareness of the social obligation implicit in learning accomplishments. In *A Romance of the Bush* (1855), Ramsay-Laye recalls this obligation: "Accomplishments are only to be cared for as they contribute to make you of value in society."³¹ At a social gathering, a lady was expected to provide an accompaniment without hesitation, or add her voice to a duet or quartet. To do so required considerable proficiency ac-

²⁹ For the course of instruction specified by the 1872 Education Act, see *Victorian Government Gazette*, July-December 1873, p. 2063; on the implementation of the act see Denis Grundy, *Secular, Compulsory and Free: The Education Act of 1872* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1972). The 1897 governess's timetable is in my possession.

³⁰ There is no entry for "accomplishments" in the *Oxford English Dictionary* or its predecessor, James A. H. Murray's *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1884). However, both define "accomplishment" as "Anything that completes, finishes off, or completely equips . . . a facility or quality that completes or perfects a person for society — that adds delicacy of taste and elegance of manners to accuracy of knowledge and correctness of thought."

³¹ [Elizabeth] P. Ramsay-Laye, *A Romance of the Bush* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1855), p. 48. See also "Isabel Massary" [Elizabeth P. Ramsay-Laye], *Social Life in Sydney; or, Colonial Experience, an Australian Tale* (Edinburgh: R. Grant & Son, 1866), p. 133. On teaching music and French, see, for example, Franc, *Marian*, pp. 62-63; [Goldstraw], I, 214-215; Murray, I, 266-267; II, 27; Mary Therese Vidal, *Bengala; or, Some Time Ago*, 2 vols. (London: John W. Parker & Son, 1860), I, 245; Grace Langford, *Werona: A Romance of Australian Domestic Life* (London: Remington & Co., 1893), p. 25. On self-discipline, taste, and conformity, see Maude Jean Franc, *Golden Gifts: An Australian Tale* (1869; 2d ed. Adelaide: E. S. Wigg & Son, 1874), pp. 27, 145, 149-150.



Fig. 1. Ellie Liston at the spinet, c. 1870. Photograph courtesy of the Liston family.

VICTORIAN STUDIES

quired through long hours of practice. Lack of competence and taste in the performance of accomplishments indicated a lack of gentility.

In Goldstraw's *Milliara* (1893), Bell Newton is an accomplished musician who combines sensitivity with technical skill; she performs Chopin as an exquisite "poem in music" yet knows when to play the simple ballads beloved by her Scots neighbours and how to avoid apparent competition with the Brummagen governess, Adela Bentinck. A colonial cousin of Becky Sharp in *Vanity Fair* (1848), Adela plays brilliant amateur concert-style pieces with all the dramatic effects favoured by Blanche Ingram in *Jane Eyre* (1847). Her showy hand movements and the "hard manual labour" which she substitutes for feeling and interpretation offend Bell's refined taste.³² In Elizabeth Murray's *Ella Norman* (1864), the McLarens are of working-class origins, though in the colony they have acquired property and Mr. McLaren has become a member of the Legislative Assembly; their musical taste encompasses only the newest colonial polkas and waltzes (I, 76). But lack of taste was not limited to obviously parvenu families. In Spence's *Clara Morison*, Minnie Hodges's neighbours are "accomplished" in form only, not in genuine taste or in sensitivity to the pleasure of others. This failing causes Minnie to lament, "The only young ladies in the neighbourhood are so busy with their accomplishments that they are but dull company. First Miss Forbes plays, then Miss Jemima, then Miss Rose, then little Miss Jane; and last the governess winds up with a thundering piece. Then out come the drawings and the fancy work; and this with complaints of bad servants . . . forms all our amusement."³³

A second mark of these writers' subscription to the notion of accomplished gentility is that their heroines strive to keep up their accomplishments despite the demands of colonial housekeeping and relatively few social occasions at which to use them. In Jessie Waterhouse's *The Medhursts of Mindala* (1897), Ruth Medhurst keeps up her studies in French, German, and music even though picking fruit, milking cows, cooking, and gardening fill many of the hours until eleven o'clock each night (pp. 28-29, 91). For Waterhouse, there is no conflict between the keys of the piano and the keys of the storeroom (Burgan, p. 61): both are essential to a colonial lady. In Meredith's *Tasmanian Friends and Foes*, Mrs. Merton speaks fluent French and uses her drawing and painting skills accurately and exquisitely to record native flora (pp. 163-164). Spence's Clara Morison and Liston's Nora Carlon in "Louey and I" (1870) have few accomplishments, but both authors stress

³² [Goldstraw], I, 42-43, 235-239. See also "Chloe," "Mrs. Lyndon's Governess," *The Australian Woman's Magazine and Domestic Journal*, May 1884, pp. 788-791; June 1884, pp. 815-818; July 1884, pp. 838-841; August 1884, pp. 866-871; September 1884, pp. 896-899; esp. p. 790 (I have not been able to identify "Chloe"); Mary Burgan, "Heroines at the Piano: Women and Music in Nineteenth-Century Fiction," *Victorian Studies* 30:1 (1986), 62-63.

³³ Catherine Helen Spence, *Clara Morison: A Tale of South Australia during the Gold Fever* (1854; rpt. Adelaide: Rigby, 1971), p. 283.

the difference between true accomplishment and the superficial show lamented by Minnie Hodges (*Clara Morison*, pp. 19-20; "Louey and I," pp. 9-10). They also seek to stress a shift in the meaning of accomplishments as understood by colonial ladies in the bush, a shift which may have shocked some English readers. In doing so they helped prepare intending immigrants for the realities of colonial life.

IV

Practical competence in domestic tasks — the ability to tackle plain, hard, and often dirty work — was not regarded as incompatible with gentility in the colonial lady, especially under pioneering conditions. Indeed, such competence was valued as an asset in a settler's wife; it was, as Spence notes in *Tender and True* (1856), a "colonial accomplishment."³⁴ In Meredith's *Tasmanian Friends and Foes*, Mrs. Merton stresses that learning domestic skills is an essential part of the education of her daughters. She acts in the belief that her "duty . . . next to training them to be good [is] to teach them to be useful." Colonial girls, she maintains, "ought to be skilled in all those duties which can be truly and significantly summed up as 'women's work.'" She abhors "fine-ladyism" and blames it for much of the misery and discomfort in ill-run colonial homes. Her friend, Mrs. Bexley, who in her early days in the colony managed the housekeeping in her bush hut singlehandedly, neglects to teach her daughters domestic skills; having become affluent, she feels she should uphold the ideal of indolent gentility and argues that "surely young *ladies* ought *never* to go into the *kitchen*?" Mrs. Merton responds, "I should sincerely commiserate all such ladies if they ever became wives in these colonies" (p. 162). Atkinson, who like Meredith knew from many years of personal experience the necessity for "colonial accomplishments," expresses similar attitudes in *Gertrude the Emigrant* (1857). Mrs. Settle, a decidedly working-class woman who prospers in the colony, concludes that gentility consists in "exemption from all occupations." She sends her daughters to school in Sydney "to be accomplished," but that "misguided education," aligned with her vision of gentility, robs them of "all a woman's true happiness; that which springs from duties fulfilled, and a competency for her station in life."³⁵

Governesses new to bush ways at times found difficulty in reconciling their notions of gentility with the need to be practical. Although astonished

³⁴ Catherine Helen Spence, *Tender and True: A Colonial Tale* (1856; rpt. London: Elder Smith, 1862), p. 105.

³⁵ Louisa Atkinson, *Gertrude the Emigrant: A Tale of Colonial Life* (Sydney: J. R. Clarke, 1857), p. 91; see also p. 85.

by the Mortons' involvement in domestic activities, Emily Trevor in Mrs. W. May Howell's "Plentiful as Blackberries" (1869) cannot deny that they are genteel: "The parents of my pupils are quite a lady and gentleman, and well educated. . . . I could not find any of my pupils the other morning at nine o'clock, and when I did so, how do you think I found them engaged. Mary the eldest was ironing a shirt, Matilda making candles, Ada climbing up a tree to get some apples, and Robert driving in the cows; and these I find are their usual employments, and yet they really are genteel well-behaved children." Far from being affronted by their behaviour or regarding the Mortons as parvenu, Emily feels ashamed of her lack of knowledge respecting household affairs. Her request for lessons in breadmaking is greeted with pleasure and the teasing suggestion that she wants to learn so that she may "become a settler's wife."³⁶

Becoming an accomplished colonial lady involved not just acquiring domestic skills but learning to ride (fig. 2). While many English women rode, the reasons why they rode (exercise and the display of social status) differed from the practical needs of bush women. In Liston's "In Memoriam" (1871), when Allie Bruce takes up her first engagement as a governess, Mr. Ranford explains that "every lady in the bush should learn to ride," and offers to teach her.³⁷ Some governesses had to be able to ride to reach their places of employment on isolated stations. Before emigrating, the heroine of Franc's *Marian* (1861) lived in London and had no opportunity for cross-country riding. Understandably, she finds the fifty-mile ride up the bush fatiguing, but her apprehension at traveling alone with her new employer, a stranger she had met only the day before, is dispelled by his kindness (pp. 34-37). A bush woman who could not ride had no independence, could not easily join in picnics or go visiting, perhaps could not even go to church. She was not useful in station life, nor could she be of use or guarantee her own safety in an emergency. She might even be an inconvenience or a liability in all these circumstances (see, for example, Howell, pp. 257, 261, 280; Paterson, p. 37). In Liston's "In Memoriam," Mrs. Ranford urges Allie to accept the offer of riding lessons because she wishes to include her in a party to visit the lakes. Allie soon becomes a competent rider and enjoys the exercise and the new experience of kangaroo hunting. At Ranford's annual cattle muster, she and

³⁶ Mrs. W. May Howell, "Plentiful as Blackberries," in *Reminiscences of Australia: The Diggings and the Bush* (London: W. May Howell, 1869), pp. 256, 261, 280. I have not been able to find any information about Mrs. Howell. The book was published privately by W. May Howell and, as the title claims, reads like fictionalized personal experience. For similar scenarios, see "Solus" [Alice F. Paterson], *Mid Saltbush and Mallee: A True Australian Bush Story* (Adelaide: Scrymgeour & Sons, 1897), p. 37 and Franc, *Marian*, pp. 37, 58-59.

³⁷ Ellie Liston, "In Memoriam," in *Pioneers*, pp. 104-105. The term "engagement" epitomized the class distinction in women's work. See "Rita" [Eliza Margaret J. Humphreys], *Sheba: A Study of Childhood* (1889; rpt. New York: Garland, 1976), p. 5; when Sheba Ormantroyd spoke of seeking a situation she was rebuked: "Don't talk of it as a housemaid would. Call it an engagement."



Fig. 2. Ellie Liston at Nilkerloo Station, c. 1870. Photograph courtesy of the Mortlock Library of South Australia.

VICTORIAN STUDIES

Miss Grey ride all day with the stockriders, mustering and yarding wild bullocks. To keep off the drizzling rain they wear blankets cut to serve as ponchos. When a bullock charges one of the men, Allie whips her horse forward and swings her blanket in its face, giving the man time to jump clear (pp. 104-105, 110-111).

The accomplished colonial lady also had to develop the self-possession and courage to cope with everyday pioneering conditions and the stresses and dangers of bush emergencies. Outback coach travel could be exhausting and demanded courage, especially from a governess traveling alone. Howell's Emily Trevor, after a rough journey over the Blue Mountains, is left aching so terribly she can hardly keep from crying. Being crammed with seven other passengers into a coach designed to seat four helps reduce the jolting a little, but even so she finds the ride absolute torture. The coach travels all night, urged on by the driver, who sings a none-too-reassuring ballad about the fate of the Bathurst mail coach while cheerfully pointing over a precipice to a wrecked coach below (pp. 252-254).

Though women writers mention the the fatiguing trials of the journey and the dangers of fast coach travel on bad roads, they touch lightly on the shock such travel must have given to the sensibilities of young women brought up in comfort and protection, particularly those newly arrived in the colonies. For them each mile into the emptiness and strangeness of the bush made their links with the past and home more tenuous.³⁸ The novelists do suggest the inadequacies of the bush pub with its greasy, unappetizing fare and dirty sheets, but do not mention how women coped with primitive or nonexistent washing and toilet facilities, especially with the added discomfort of menstruation.

A governess afraid of the bush was of little use when a child was lost, nor was it helpful to become hysterical when bogged in a flood at night or confronted by bushrangers, fire, or the ghastly sight of a man who had committed suicide by cutting his throat.³⁹ Most of the fictional governesses cope with such emergencies with self-possession and good humour. In Frances Jones's *Broad Outlines of Long Years in Australia* (1878), Miss Maurice overcomes her fear of being bogged in a flood with thoughts of telling her friends of the adventure: "If they could only see me now at Versailles what would they say?" (pp. 244-245). In the face of such dangers, however, a few governesses expose their lack of courage and self-control, and therefore their

³⁸ When Liston journeyed from Adelaide to Nilkerloo station to take up a governing engagement, she described the three-day journey in a letter to her sister. On the second night she camped out in the company of the coach driver and a male passenger, both complete strangers. The journey was completed in a dray with a "well behaved" pig as a footrest. Letter to Mary A. Harwood, 23 January 1869, transcript in my possession.

³⁹ See Liston, "Louey and I," p. 23; Bayly, p. 79; Rosa Praed, *Mrs. Tregaskiss: A Novel of Anglo-Australian Life* (1895; rpt. London: Chatto & Windus, 1897), pp. 27-28; Jones, p. 237.

unsuitability for their work. When striking shearers set fire to the homestead in Praed's *Mrs. Tregaskiss* (1895), the ladies quietly shepherd the children to safety and drag furniture and possessions away from the flames — but Hetty Lawford, the governess, shrieks hysterically and rushes uselessly hither and thither. Hetty again proves a liability when a child is lost in the bush (pp. 207, 308). Similarly, Adela Bentinck in Goldstraw's *Milliara* becomes hysterical when her lover is bitten by a snake, but Bell Newton deftly cuts the bite, sucks out the poison, sends for the doctor, and arranges transport (I, 180-181).

Hetty Lawford and Adela Bentinck are soul sisters of Becky Sharp who migrate to try their luck on the colonial marriage market. Praed acknowledges her debt to Thackeray in her portrayal of Hetty: "Miss Lawford might be described as a crude Australian edition of Becky Sharp in the Jos Sedley epoch, and was open to any matrimonial establishment on the basis of an income exceeding two hundred a year, though she continually spoilt her chances by too daring flirtations" (p. 72). Goldstraw's allusion to Becky in her portrayal of Adela is more subtle. Adela cultivates Becky's trick of slaying her quarry with one direct glance from under seemingly modest, downcast lashes and uses the technique to good effect. Her calculations regarding the most suitable matrimonial target and her campaign to ingratiate herself with Mrs. Newton bring to mind Becky's tactics in her relationship with Miss Crawley. Adela and Hetty's unusual features suggest their ambiguous characters; the sinuous coils of Adela's unusual tortoiseshell-coloured hair resemble a tiger snake and hint at her venomous nature (I, 197, 208). Praed and Goldstraw rob their adventuresses of Becky's irrepressible daring — neither proves a match for the bush — and their inability to acquire colonial accomplishments indicates their lack of true gentility.⁴⁰

V

Proof that the acquisition of colonial accomplishments does not unsex a woman appears in the number of heroines who attract worthy, discerning husbands (fig. 3). In Vidal's *Bengala* (1860), despite a reversal of fortune and a stint as a governess, Isabel Lang marries a cultured, usually reticent English settler who, in response to the condescension of a visiting English snob, proves a firm supporter of the true gentility of colonial women: "A vulgar person will be equally so, whether in the gay world [of Europe] or in the Bush. It is not making butter or playing the piano that makes the difference. I am proud to say that I have met with as graceful, gracious women in this country

⁴⁰ For other antipodean sisters of Becky, see "Isabel Massary" [Elizabeth P. Ramsay-Laye], *Our Cousins in Australia; or, Reminiscences of Sarah Norris* (Edinburgh: William P. Nimmo, 1867), pp. 23, 25, 34; Spence, *Clara Morison*, pp. 12, 82-83; Howell, pp. 259-260; Liston, "Louey and I," p. 14.



Fig. 3. Frontispiece to Maude Jean Franc's *Marian; or, the Light of Someone's Home* (1861): "Her natural beauty spurned artifice, her brow mirrored strength and nobleness of character, her eyes revealed her full sexuality."

SUMMER 1988

as in any other — women who, not being slaves to the many absurd conventional customs of English society, are not ashamed of their household duties, and exercise hospitality and goodness without fashion or shame” (I, 111). The heroine’s suitor in Bayly’s *Alfreda Holme* is of a similar opinion. When he finds Freda in the kitchen chopping suet and cleaning knives, he considers her to have lost none of her femininity: “Though she had on a very plain calico, and a coarse apron over it, her little white collar and silky hair were as neat as ever, and herself as true a lady over knife-wiping as when singing or playing” (p. 187).

Contrary to the model of English “silver fork” novels such as Lady Blessington’s *The Governess* (1839), in which the governess is reinstated to privilege and fortune before marriage, colonial governesses bring no monetary dowry to their husbands. Of greater importance are strength of character, adaptability, courage, and practical skills. In *Bengala*, neither literary convention nor good management wins back Isabel Lang’s father’s property before her marriage to John Herbert. Moving with her mother to a small farm, Isabel runs it with the assistance of a ticket-of-leave man (a convict whose “ticket” entitled him to work and live in a specific colonial district for the remainder of his sentence; II, 148). Her accounts show that their hard-earned profits from farm produce and the firewood and shingles they sell to Sydney merchants merely reduce her father’s debts (II, 155). When the farm is running smoothly, she leaves it in her sister’s care so that she can earn extra income as a governess and pay for her brother’s education (II, 223, 233). Herbert had first known Isabel as a “wild impulsive girl.” Her trials help her to develop the character, courage, and practical skills that comprise her dowry.⁴¹

That the governess was sought as a bride is one measure of the degree to which her status incongruence was resolved in the colonies. Another measure is the portrayal of her position in family and society. Vidal’s portrayal of Miss Terry and Isabel Lang, and Emily Trevor’s adjustment to governessing in the bush, illustrate the difference in the relationship between the governess and her employer in England and in the colonies. Vidal published *Bengala* after having returned to England. Looking back to the 1840s when she lived in New South Wales, she delineates the tension between the attitudes of those who cling to the English view of the governess’s place in the family and those who subscribe to emerging colonial attitudes. English attitudes are reflected in the comments of Mrs. Lang and her oldest daughter, who are dismayed at the suggestion that a neighbour should marry their governess, Miss Terry (I, 147). Mrs. Lang expresses annoyance at the trouble

⁴¹ For other governesses who marry despite lack of monetary dowries, see Liston, “In Memoriam,” p. 114; Jones, pp. 204, 206, 208–211; M. Ella Chaffey, *The Youngsters of Murray Home* (London: Ward, Lock & Co., 1896), pp. 253–254.

taken to include the governess in a picnic party, especially as she does not ride, and later queries whether she should accompany them on a visit to a neighbour: "Did Mrs. Vesey ask her? . . . It is not everyone who expects the governess" (I, 44, 213). When Miss Terry announces that she is to marry the local clergyman, Mrs. Lang reacts with anger and hurt pride: "The very idea of a governess behaving in such a scandalous way. Taking precedence of the two young ladies of the house, pushing herself forward!" Mrs. Lang thinks of Miss Terry not as a person but as "the governess" (II, 10-11).

In contrast, Isabel, Mr. Lang, and the Herberts see her as an individual, "a gentlewoman — a lady," who happens to be a governess (I, 213). They appreciate her personal qualities, are concerned that she may be unhappy in the bush, gladly include her in family outings despite inconvenience, and admire her tact, her courage, and her management of the children. Indeed, they agree that she would be a fit wife for any man of their own circle (I, 7, 44, 72-73, 120-121, 128). After her husband's death and the loss of their property, Mrs. Lang feels humiliated further by Isabel's determination to seek an engagement as a governess. Isabel feels no such humiliation and is welcomed most warmly by her employers, whose principle it is "to make the governess, our children's teacher and companion, one of the family" (II, 232-235).

In Howell's "Plentiful as Blackberries," Emily Trevor has had several engagements in England. She experienced the chilling isolation of the remote nursery wing and the contempt of employers who regarded governesses as throw-away commodities as plentiful as blackberries. When seeking a position in Sydney she is therefore astonished by the consideration shown by prospective employers, and even more so when in her first engagement she receives a personal invitation to a ball attended by her employers (pp. 243-246). In her first bush engagement she comes to a full realization of the difference in her status within the family and their perception of her as a woman, not just a governess. When visitors descend unexpectedly, Emily is introduced — with no mention that she is the governess — and she is expected to entertain the guests and share her room as if she were a daughter of the house. Her confidence as a woman is further restored by the pleasant attentions of the male guests and by the gales of laughter which greet her comment that she has not ridden since she was young. Ever since becoming a governess she has felt "very old" but, as she confides in a joyous letter to a friend, "a new existence seems to be mine, and I have suddenly been as it were 'ground [sic] young again,' and no longer recognise in myself the governess of the last few months" (pp. 257-259). In the majority of homes the governess is treated similarly, with respect and consideration; Emily finds a home and becomes a loved and valued member of the family. Few employers in the bush espouse attitudes such as Mrs. Lang's. The nature of the governess's place in the family depends on her age and the constitution of the family. She may be re-

garded as surrogate mother, daughter, sister, companion and confidante, or just as "one of the family."⁴²

The pathetic, downtrodden governess so often found in English novels rarely appears in Australian fiction.⁴³ Governess characters usually typify an ideal of womanhood suited to pioneering conditions. The "pioneer governess" is a young woman, usually of English or Australian birth, who is readily identified as "a lady" though her parentage is often difficult to equate with the rigid classifications of the English professional and upper-middle classes.⁴⁴ More often than not she becomes a governess when orphaned or in straitened family circumstances, but at times she wishes to assert her independence by being usefully employed, despite having a family willing and able to support her. She is not a drooping drab or a fashionable beauty: she might have a quietly pretty face which reflects her innate refinement; she might be plain (though not ugly), but with animation indicative of strength of character and ability; or she might be healthy, fresh-complexioned, and graceful. Her trim figure is likely to be dressed with good practical taste as befits someone who teaches children, assists with domestic chores, or entertains visitors. Courageous, tenacious, and adaptable, she takes responsibility for negotiating her own employment and copes with the discomfort and dangers of a long, lonely journey to the station homestead where she becomes a valued member of the household.⁴⁵ Within the terms of nineteenth-century ex-

⁴² For portrayals of the governess as surrogate daughter, see Franc, *Marian*, pp. 181, 188; Sophie Osmond, *Snags: A Story of the Shearing Strike* (Melbourne: Pater & Knapton, 1895), p. 25. For the governess as sister, see Franc, *Marian*, p. 200; Lilian Turner, *The Lights of Sydney; or, No Past is Dead* (London: Cassell & Co., 1896), p. 84. For the governess as companion and confidante, see Paterson, p. 25; Osmond, p. 26. Liston describes a governess as "one of the family" in "In Memoriam," p. 102.

⁴³ Of the 110 governesses portrayed in the 136 works surveyed in my thesis, there were only eleven downtrodden governesses and most were minor characters in works by male authors. West identifies six stereotypes in English fiction: the "downtrodden governess," the "self-seeking adventuress," the "snob exhibit," the "villainess," the "strict instructress or dragon," and the "valued friend" (p. 13). All may be identified in colonial novels, together with other character types not found in the English novels. See Amies, "Home Education," chap. 7.

⁴⁴ Not all male authors clung to the downtrodden governess stereotype. The name "pioneer governess" is based upon the title of the novel *The Pioneer of a Family; or Adventures of a Young Governess* (1874; 2d ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1883), by "J. R. H. Hawthorn" [John Richard Houlding]. For other pioneer governesses, see "Rolf Boldrewood" [Thomas Alexander Browne], "The Governess of the Poets," in *A Romance of Canvas Town and Other Stories* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1898); Ernest William Hornung, "The Governess at Greenbush," in *Some Persons Unknown* (London: Cassell & Co., 1898); [John] H[ermann] L[eopold] Z[illman], *In the Land of the Bunya; or, The Convict and the Boy: A Tale of the Early Days in Queensland* (Sydney: W. Dymock, 1899).

⁴⁵ On social status and place of birth, see, for example, Chaffey, p. 249; Paterson, p. 25; Vidal, I, 147; Osmond, p. 25. For examples of reasons for becoming a governess, see Catherine Helen Spence, *The Author's Daughter*, 2 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, 1868), I, 4; Liston, "Louey and I," p. 9 and "In Memoriam," p. 101; Franc, *Marian*, p. 17. Discussions of the governess's appearance and dress may be found in Chads, p. 58; Julie Blitz, *An Australian Millionaire* (London: Ward, Lock & Bowden, 1894), p. 352; Mary Elizabeth Bakewell Gaunt, *Deadman's* (London: Methuen & Co., 1898), p. 27; Franc, *Marian*, pp. 17, 58. For the governess's relationship with the family, see, for example, Liston, "In Memoriam," pp. 102, 111 and "Louey and I," pp. 11, 16, 17; Vidal, II, 225, 233; Murray, I, 264; Jones, pp. 234, 244.

pectations of female education, she is "well educated" for her position; she provides a sound "English education," with "accomplishments" for any older girls in the family, and mathematics and the basics of Latin to prepare older boys for school.⁴⁶

Her pupils are self-reliant, high-spirited, and at times naughty, but they respond with improved attention, growing respect, and love as they come to appreciate her qualities. She is given full control over their education and is supported by their parents in her endeavours. Though not necessarily highly paid, the bush governess is cared for and made to feel at home by her employers, who consider themselves to be in loco parentis.⁴⁷ Her employers are squatters or small landholders who, in terms of education and aspirations if not in accommodation and current financial status, perceive themselves, and are accepted by their friends, as part of the genteel middle class.⁴⁸ Often they have few domestic staff. Under such circumstances the governess performs tasks which in England would have been regarded as demeaning, working beside members of the family in recognition that certain jobs must be done if the family is to survive and live in some degree of comfort (for a pictorial comparison of the characterization of English and Australian governesses, see figs. 4 and 5).⁴⁹

Afraid that she might not like the bush or be able to adjust to its ways, employers try to make life pleasant for their governess and include her as part of the family. As she is frequently the only other woman for many miles around of the same social class as the mother and older daughters, her presence is regarded as a blessing and she becomes their friend and companion (for examples, see Chads, p. 66; Howell, p. 258; Franc, *Marian*, pp. 143-145; Jones, pp. 204, 240, 248; Liston, "Louey and I," pp. 19-21 and "In Memoriam," p. 102; Vidal, I, 72, 212; Gaunt, p. 31; Blitz, p. 341; Osmond, p. 26). If she has not already acquired "colonial accomplishments," she realizes that she will be more useful, more a part of family life, if she does (see, for example, Franc, *Marian*, p. 34; Howell, pp. 256, 261, 280-281, 323; Liston,

⁴⁶ For depictions of well-educated governesses, see Howell, pp. 224-225; Osmond, p. 26; Spence, *The Author's Daughter*, I, 50; Ellen Clacy, "Emmeline," in *Lights and Shadows of Australian Life* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1854), p. 8. For mention of subjects comprising a sound "English education," see, for example, Waterhouse, pp. 50-51; Chaffey, pp. 259-260; Bayly, p. 137. Waterhouse, p. 51, also mentions extra mathematics to prepare a boy for school.

⁴⁷ On the relationship between governesses and pupils, see Chaffey, p. 254; Franc, *Marian*, pp. 135, 143; Howell, pp. 219, 228; Spence, *The Author's Daughter*, I, 131, 208. On the relationship between governesses and employers, see Spence, *The Author's Daughter*, I, 134-135, 208; Chads, pp. 66, 71; Jones, pp. 203-204, 206, 208, 248; Osmond, p. 25.

⁴⁸ Squatters were originally settlers who ran stock on Crown land without government permission, but later with a lease or licence. By the 1830s the term was also applied to a group of rich and influential rural landowners. For rural settlers of the genteel middle class, see, for example, Franc, *Marian*, chap. 1, pp. 58-59, 100-101, 145; Vidal, I, 15-16.

⁴⁹ Depictions of governesses sharing domestic tasks appear in Jones, p. 242; Howell, p. 261; Clacy, p. 136; Chads, p. 58; Osmond, pp. 28-29; Franc, *Marian*, pp. 37, 58-59; Paterson, p. 37; Maude Jean Franc, *Into the Light* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1885), p. 181.

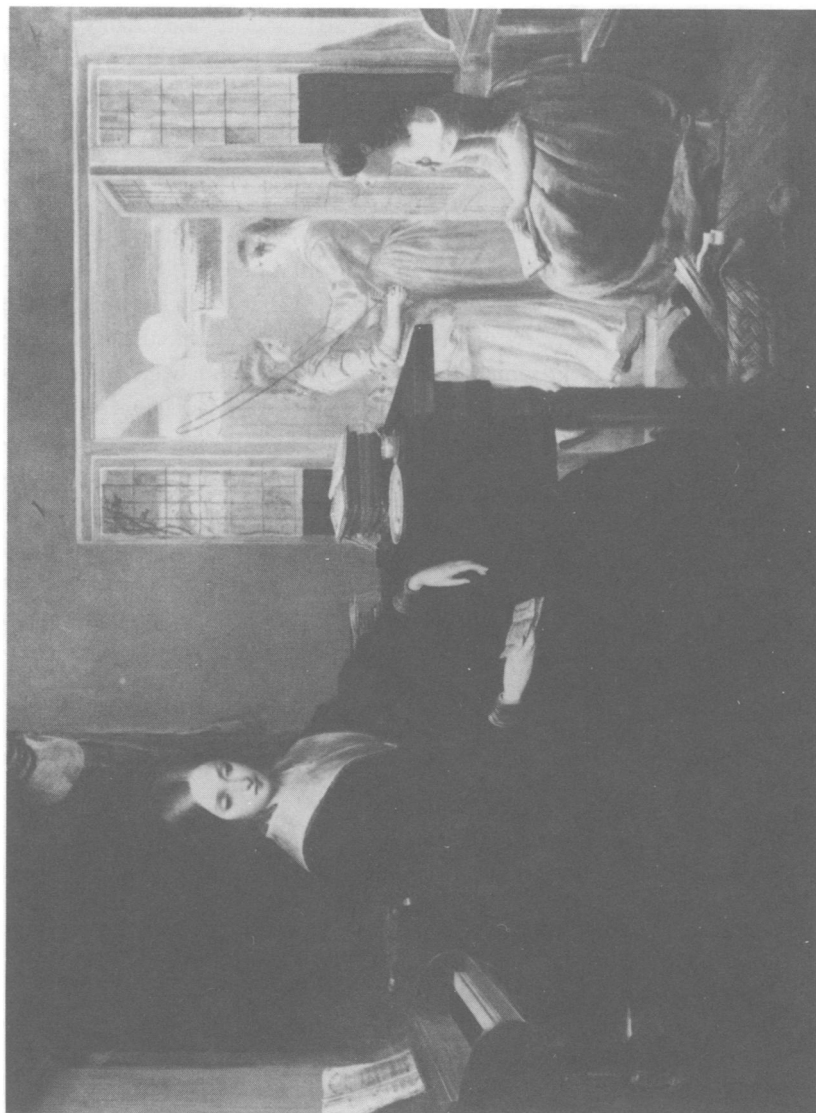


Fig. 4. Richard Redgrave, *The Poor Teacher* (1843). Reproduced by courtesy of the Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

VICTORIAN STUDIES



Fig. 5. Emmanuel Phillips Fox (1865-1915), Australian, *The Lesson* (1912); oil on canvas, 182.2 x 111.8 cm. Felton Bequest, 1925; reproduced by permission of the National Gallery of Victoria.

SUMMER 1988

"In Memoriam," p. 104). In short, she has the opportunity to take control of her own destiny and to find enjoyment and fulfilment in a position of considerable autonomy. Eagerly sought after as a desirable wife, she marries into her employer's social circle (see, for example, Chaffey, p. 293; Jones, p. 210; Vidal, II, 154). Specific characterizations of the pioneer governess do not necessarily follow this outline point by point. Of considerable interest, however, is the commonness of the outline among writers scattered over the eastern colonies and South Australia and throughout the forty-six-year publication period represented by the fiction I have surveyed. This seems to indicate that, with some allowances for the demands of the romance plot, the pioneer governess was readily recognized in real life, just as the plight of the down-trodden governess had been in the 1840s in Britain.

Discussing the governess in *The Victorian Heroine*, Patricia Thomson identifies three character types: the daughters of Emily Morton (from Elizabeth Sewell's *Amy Herbert* [1844]), those of Becky Sharp, and those of Jane Eyre. Jane and her daughters, Thomson claims, were "engrossed in principle and passion" — principle born of "inner powers of self-discipline and spiritual resources" which enabled an appreciation of self-worth and the value of one's love, love freely and openly given to a man deemed worthy of it (p. 50; see also pp. 39, 45-46, 48, 49). The pioneer governess is in this sense a daughter of Jane Eyre. Unlike Jane, however, she faced no Gothic terrors. Her creators sought to portray pioneering life realistically, and living conditions in the bush provided a sufficient test of her "self-discipline and spiritual resources" without the introduction of imaginary terrors.⁵⁰

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 de-

⁵⁰ Chloe's "Mrs. Lyndon's Governess" typifies both the characterization and outline for the pioneer governess and demonstrates how certain episodes in *Jane Eyre* were reduced to a formula. Although the creators of the pioneer governess did not resort to Gothic terrors, others, particularly urban writers, adapted the sensation novel to colonial circumstances. Governesses in these works were embroiled in revelations of bigamy, daring crime, and skeletons in the family closet, not to mention the more colonial sensations of unwittingly accepting employment as a "governess" in a sly grog shop or being caught in the scandal of convict origins. See, for example, Ramsay-Laye's *Our Cousins in Australia*, one of the few stories narrated by a governess heroine; "Kyra Keith" [Mrs. T. Kirkham], *Pains and Penalties* (Melbourne: George Robertson & Co., 1899); Patrick Edward Quinn, "The Bacchus Vase," in *The Australian Storyteller for an Idle Afternoon: The White Yacht and Other Stories* (Sydney: Marcus & Andrew, n. d.).

fined their male relatives' status. Indeed, without the physical appurtenances of gentility, their role became more important and more dependent upon their personal qualities.

The writing of novels and short stories gave colonial women a public voice through which they could redefine the notion of gentility to encompass the imperative of work. Their stories are, in a way, an extension of so-called "emigration novels." Usually written by men, emigration novels presented an essentially male view of the colonies and gave potential male settlers useful information on crops, land, prices, equipment, and the prospects for short-term capital gain before returning to England. With the advent of women novelists, there emerged the female view, based on personal experience, which realistically described the colonies as a place for permanent domestic life. They catalogued the qualities a woman must bring to the new society (courage, adaptability, strength), the price she must pay for a stake in the new land (hard work, the compromise of comfort, and different expectations of gentility), and her social and economic prospects (greatly increased chances of marriage, with reasonable status and some degree of personal autonomy). Fictional heroines epitomizing these qualities and capitalizing on these prospects helped to legitimate and reinforce the behaviour of colonial women and to influence the expectations of prospective immigrants. Prominent among the heroines were governesses: portrayals of their position in family and society were congruent with colonial ideals of womanhood.

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