2.4: CROSSING BOUNDARIES AND SILENCES IN WOMEN'S TEXTS

In spite of very different formative years and individual means of expression, both Addy and Lucy were still influenced in their lives and their textual representations by the general expectations placed upon them by Victorian cultural and social ethics. At the time they were born, strict guidelines were already in place that dictated the respective positions white middle-class Victorian men and women were expected to occupy, and the ways in which they were expected to behave, even in the colonies where conditions sometimes made staying within those guidelines difficult, even dangerous.

A division between men and women, and between the public and private spheres, had begun well before the nineteenth century, the philosopher Locke seeing the development of rationality as part of a split between the two spheres. Rousseau mirrored Locke’s concept, seeing women as ‘physical and sensual, deficient in rationality and incapable of rational thought’. Because this philosophy placed restrictions on what they could actually achieve in the public sphere, a good marriage was the principal aim of most ‘genteel’ middle-class women with, as I have said,

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1 Sketch by Lucy Gray courtesy Robin Ormerod, New Zealand.
2 Catherine Hall, White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History (United Kingdom: Polity Press, 1995) 75–92.
education structured to accommodate and promote the supposed difference between men and women.³

In this chapter I examine ways in which some of the ideals behind a strict feminine upbringing could be challenged, and boundaries crossed, once women entered a very different environment from that to which they were accustomed – or, in the case of native-born women like Addy, when they undertook duties traditionally seen as men’s work. I suggest that because, in the colonial situation, women often existed in ill-defined spaces, where their work was often undervalued, unacknowledged, and even unrecorded, their participation in the colonial endeavour took place under a degree of difficulty in many ways greater than that of their male counterparts, whose achievements usually dominate colonial discourse. Unsuitable housing and clothing, lack of physical fitness due to previous sedentary life-styles and, for those who came straight from Britain, contact with societies and cultures quite different from those previously encountered, could place women at a disadvantage when compared with their male counterparts, whose education and experience with the outside world in many ways made colonial life less precarious and difficult for them. Also of relevance in a discussion on the crossing of boundaries and questioning of ideals are the omissions and obvious constraints that I have already noted in previous chapters. These ‘silences’ or ‘partial silences’ appear to signal important hidden narratives and subtle subtexts and, as such, invite closer attention.

Sara Mills, Helen Buss and others openly question the traditional acceptance of certain dichotomies that were supposed to have driven the colonial endeavour – dichotomies which, they say, are often still assumed in academic discourse.⁴ Anne McClintock also points to the ways in which certain traditional categories ‘converge,


merge and overdetermine each other’ often in contradictory ways. She cites Kobena Mercer who cautions against ignoring the complexities that can exist in the ‘overdetermined’ spaces between relations of race, class and gender.\(^5\) In the same context, Mills suggests that ‘much post-colonial theory runs the risk of not acting as a critique of colonial texts but simply rationalising certain views of ‘Other’ rather than challenging them’.\(^6\)

As Australia’s Gillian Whitlock says, the time is right for a reading of autobiographies by settler subjects in terms that do not reflect the national tradition or British literary trends. Strict categorisation and binary notions of, for example, colonizer and colonized, man and woman, are being replaced by some critics of postcolonial thinking, who are now concentrating more on connections and ambivalences.\(^7\) Mills suggests, as I do, that the dissemination of knowledge concerning colonisation is much more complex than can be achieved by simply accepting representations of otherness from a Eurocentric and androcentric perspective at either the primary or secondary level, or even accepting the homogeneity of Victorian middleclass women without question. We must search, therefore, as others are already starting to do, for representations that destabilise binary thinking, so that interpretations can be challenged rather than simply affirmed.\(^8\)

As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, one of the greatest challenges women had to face was how to make the best of makeshift dwellings, at least until better accommodation could be arranged. This would appear to go without saying, but was brought dramatically to my attention when I visited the homes in which Lucy lived with her family in Ireland and England. I was able then to compare the dwellings in Birr (Parsonstown), Dorking and Brighton with drawings and a photograph of the Glendower establishments, having situated myself physically in the same spaces that were once occupied by Lucy. By doing so, I was able to better comprehend the extraordinary transition she, and others like her, made.

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\(^6\) Mills, *Gender and Colonial Space* 19.
Housing in the colonies may have been very different. However, women’s clothing was still expected to comply with life-styles in Britain. Designed for a cooler climate and less activity than was necessary in the colonial bush, the ‘ideal’ was a fiction that did not reflect the spatial reality of many women living in the colonies in the nineteenth-century, or even for that matter in an ever-changing Britain. Clothing had evolved to suit stereotypes. Women’s dress was to be modest with very little skin on show, females being expected to take only gentle exercise, while males were dressed to be more active.

Fig. 1 A Lucy Gray sketch of shipboard life, showing the very different clothing worn by men and women. Note the woman’s layered skirts and the beginnings of a bustle, which must have been hot and uncomfortable. Luckily, by the late 1860s when Lucy sailed for Australia, the cumbersome circular crinoline had gone out of fashion. (Sketch courtesy Robin Ormerod, New Zealand.)

Describing women’s fashions in the 1800s Davidoff and Hall say that, by mid century with the crinoline, ‘knickers’ or underclothes were introduced for the first time, together with stiff boned stays which had to be laced every morning from behind. Even more restricting, stays and petticoats had shoulder straps which made it

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difficult to raise the arms. This form of dress, which called for fastening from behind requiring the help of a female servant, had class implications as well, the fashion assuming an adequate income to employ household help. The crinoline, according to Lenore Frost, was ‘an arrangement of steel hoops in concentric circles joined by linen bands’ which ‘allowed women to reduce the burden of heavy petticoats’. She writes:

The crinoline was the dominating element of the fashions of the sixties. It reached its extreme circumference of about eighteen [?] feet at the hem in the first half of the 1860s. The steel hoops gradually changed from a dome to a pyramid shape. After the middle of the decade the bulk of the skirt began to move to the back, gradually flattening in the front. By 1869 the fullness at the back was being taken back into a bustle. [See Lucy’s in Fig. 1.] Light materials were favoured – taffeta and striped silks, though solid stripes went out of fashion by about 1867.

Adhering to fashion could be dangerous and detrimental to a woman’s health. Geoffrey Blainey describes how dresses supported by a crinoline could easily brush against a candle or an open fire, causing injury or death. The tight lacing of corsets for the appearance of tiny waists was introduced in the 1820s, and doctors soon began to warn of the dangers inherent in such a practice. They suggested that corsets were producing a multitude of disorders such as stomach ulcer, gallstones, dislocation of the ribs, headache, dizziness, curvature of the spine, lung disease. In spite of these warnings, women continued to suffer for beauty, some being laced both day and night, even as young teenagers. Jane Bardsley, who lived on a remote cattle station near Normanton in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries writes of having to squeeze into corsets with ‘number nineteen waist’ in the extreme heat of north Queensland, an activity that must have been both unpleasant and unhealthy.

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While dresses were made of lighter, more practical fabrics for the tropics, Margaret Maynard says that impractical fashions were still followed by women in the Queensland bush.\textsuperscript{15} This is confirmed by Lucy’s brother-in-law, Robert Gray. He describes a fire that destroyed a tent and most of their possessions when he and his wife Charlotte were travelling overland from Bowen to settle at Hughenden in 1863.

My wife lost some valuable portions of her wardrobe, including a crinoline, which was a most necessary article in those days, and her ingenuity was afterwards severely taxed to manufacture one.\textsuperscript{16}

In a book mostly concerned with ‘manly’ activities such as cattle mustering, stock prices, floods and droughts, this mention of female attire stands out. The loss of a crinoline must have been a momentous event to be mentioned at all.

On 29 November 1859 Addy Bowler complains about having to wear a crinoline, or steel as she calls it.

Oh! that I ever allowed myself to be persuaded into having a steel … here have I been the whole day making one and the result, Oh heavens!\textsuperscript{17}

Three weeks later, describing the inefficiency of a friend who was to be bridesmaid at a wedding, she writes:

She had put her bridesmaids dress into an old chair cover with the intention of tying it round her wrist [waist?] if Willie should not be able to take it … for her – which fortunately he said he would or heaven knows the figure she would have been had she had that in addition to her steel in which she rode whether comfortably or no is doubtful.\textsuperscript{18}

Mary Gilmore recalls how women adapted crinolines for riding, the right side of the steels being gathered up in the hand and tied up close to the waist. The rest of the

\textsuperscript{15} Margaret Maynard, \textit{Fashioned from Penury: Dress as Cultural Practice in Colonial Australia} (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 153.


\textsuperscript{17} Adelaide Bowler, ‘Bowler (Sutton) Diaries and Memoirs 1840–1890’, (private collection, Sydney) book 1, 22.

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Ibid.} book 1, 23, entry dated 15 December 1859.
garment then fell as a loop over the pommel-knee, and was arranged to cover the stirrup leg.\textsuperscript{19} Although this adaptation was not elegant, Gilmore says it relieved the rider of the embarrassment of asking a male friend to carry the cumbersome undergarment, or else of the rider having to carry it herself. It seems that fashions totally unsuitable for the Australian climate and conditions were adopted in the colonies soon after they came into vogue in Europe.\textsuperscript{20} Lenore Frost states that crinolines were introduced in 1856, and Addy Bowler’s writings reveal that Bathurst ladies were already wearing them by 1859.

Fig. 2 Examples of skirts worn over crinolines in the 1860s. (Frost, Dating Family Photos 54.) While Addy Bowler felt the need to wear a crinoline, bustles had replaced crinolines by the time Lucy Gray travelled to Australia in 1868.

Maynard suggests that, while fashions were seen to be followed in the colonies, circumstances often dictated that in actual fact concessions were made. However, neither Addy Bowler nor Lucy Gray mention such concessions. In fact, women are more likely to suggest in journals or letters home how hard they are trying to conform to fashions and etiquette, rather than describing improvised dress and habits which might suggest they were letting British standards slip. As a result, Maynard says, there are many ‘sanitised accounts’ which point to the virtues of women who ‘sustained bourgeois styles of dress and who maintained a neat and clean

\textsuperscript{19} Mary Gilmore, Old Days, Old Ways (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1986) 54–55.
\textsuperscript{20} Maynard, Fashioned from Penury 110.
appearance’. In fact, many Australians ‘were so anxious about being judged “colonial” that they worked harder at their behaviour than they would have done in Britain’. 21

Women’s health problems, and their inability to perform tasks satisfactorily when wearing unsuitable clothing, come to light through women’s writing and through their drawings and sketches. However, Addy Bowler suggests that the more confined garments of the years before the crinoline must have presented even greater difficulties for ladies forced to undertake physical activity. She writes in her diary on 21 August 1859:

A very wet day and so mild how the weeds will grow it has already nearly been the death of Mother trying to weed the onion bed – I wonder if Mothers [sic] ancestors were all as stiff in the joints as she is I suppose they had to be as their

21 Maynard, Fashioned from Penury 111, 115.
dresses were not wide enough to cu: capers in or stoop much – the flowing
robes of the present day give much more freedom to the limbs.\textsuperscript{22}

Bush riding was made particularly difficult because of the clothes women were
expected to wear. Designed to comply with the idea that too much fresh air and
strenuous exercise were not good for women, and that they should be well covered if
they did venture outside, women were forced to wear heavy cumbersome riding habits.
Frost says that habits were made to last, in a classic style which altered little over the
decades. A riding habit consisted of a jacket, breeches, and a skirt to cover the
breeches. It was usually made in black or dark blue cloth, with a single-breasted
jacket.\textsuperscript{23}

Addy describes in her diary how dangerous the habit could be:

Julia and I went to look for some of our turkeys that have gone wild she caught
her habit in a log and Jack took fright and nearly upset her tearing the bottom
off her habit, then to add to the excitement I got off to take down the sliprails
and in getting on again by a log my habit caught in a piece of the bark and as it
began to crack Diamond began to jump and after holding on for some time with
only my foot in the stirrup I came down but did not let Diamond go.\textsuperscript{24}

This demonstrates the dangers of long skirts when women had to venture beyond a
sedentary lifestyle, as they so often did in the Australian bush. Note the sense of pride
in this passage, as Addy describes how she holds on to the horse’s reins after her fall.

Even in England long skirts were impractical and unsafe for the more
energetic lifestyle some women began to adopt during the second half of the century,
although they persevered for the sake of appearances. In ‘The Dangers of Bicycling’
Helena Swanwick wrote in 1891:

My long skirt was a nuisance and even a danger. It is an unpleasant
experience to be hurled on to stone setts [paving stones] and find that one’s
skirt has been so tightly wound rough the pedal that one cannot even get up

\textsuperscript{22} AB book 1.
\textsuperscript{23} Frost, \textit{Dating Family Photos} 113.
\textsuperscript{24} AB book 1.2, an entry dated February 1859.
enough to unwind it. But I never had the courage to ride in breeches except at night.25

Breeches do not appear to have been contemplated by either Addy or Lucy, except perhaps, as Frost says, for use under their habits – if they were, it is not mentioned in their writing. Not only could long skirts cause death or injury, the Bowler women (and Lucy Gray) would have ridden side-saddle, hence Addy’s need to mount from a log. Side-saddles were particularly dangerous for riding in the bush and hill country as the rider could not grip the horse with her legs for balance, and could more easily be torn off by low-hanging branches and scrub.

As I have said, both men and women’s clothing was adjusted slightly for the colonies. Fabrics became lighter, larger hats were worn, and umbrellas carried by women when out for a walk. In the 1880s and 90s, riding habits became more fitted, doing away with the very full skirts.26 However, the design of women’s clothes generally remained impractical and even unsafe for anything other than ‘ladylike’ activities. The likelihood of accidents accelerated when women were forced to move beyond their customary sheltered existence, for which their dress was designed, to take part in vigorous outdoor occupations like riding through the bush or cooking over an open fire. On the other hand, as Maynard suggests, once beyond the public eye (and beyond the written word) the stoic acceptance of their ‘lot’ may have been cast aside as they opted for more sensible and safe attire.

The heat of the Australian summer must have caused the greatest discomfort. Robert Gray describes how Charles and Lucy first travelled inland to Hughenden.

On 11th October he [brother Charles] arrived… accompanied by his wife, who had ridden with them the two hundred and thirty-six miles from Townsville. The heat at this time was intense, the thermometer standing at 106 to 108 degrees [Fahrenheit] in the shingled verandah, during many hours of the day.27

There is no mention here of a riding habit or a side-saddle, but they were almost certainly used, Lucy having come direct from England where they were the norm for ladies. The fact that the incident was mentioned at all in a man’s book mainly

25 Murray. Strong Minded Women 73.
26 Gilmore. Old Days Old Ways 55.
27 Gray. Reminiscences 143.
concerned with station matters demonstrates again how much Robert admired Lucy’s stamina. This was hardly the physical frailty resulting in finer and delicate feelings supposedly admired by his male counterparts. Lucy’s version of that first trip is more detailed, although complaints about her personal discomfort are noticeably absent. The following is typical of the way in which she describes the journey.

The weather seemed to grow hotter every day & the season being very dry made it worse. Once or twice we had to travel all day with only what water we could carry in a water bag.\(^{28}\)

![Fig. 4 Drawing by Lucy of a canvas waterbag, embedded in the above text. These containers kept water cool and were a life-saver for those living in the hot Australian outback.](image)

Appearing towards the end of the 1860s, the canvas water bag was a lifesaver for outback settlers. Lucy’s drawing demonstrates how little the design had changed when I was living in Queensland in the mid-twentieth century. My parents always had a similar bag hanging in a cool spot outside the back door of the homestead, with a mug on a hook which everyone shared. Waterbags were also slung beneath trucks and under trees near where men were working.

Lucy’s understated account of what must have been an extremely difficult journey, suggests many things left unsaid. The discomfort of overdressing in the heat, and the physical pain of riding long distances on a horse after a comparatively comfortable life in England, are left to the imagination of the reader. However, other sources reveal that pain and discomfort were very much part of such an exercise.

Susanna de Vries describes how Bessie Bussell set out in the 1830s on horseback from Augusta in the south of Western Australia to travel the 100-kilometre journey to Vasse, where her brothers were setting up a new property. Riding side-saddle in her long skirt she crossed rivers and swamps, having to be rescued from time to time by her brothers. De Vries writes that, on the second night, Bessie had to sleep with ‘her back propped against a tree, as by now she was so stiff, saddle-sore and sunburnt that the pain prevented her lying flat’.

Although Lucy admits to being tired after her first long day’s ride, in her journal home she does not describe being stiff, saddle-sore or sunburnt, although she almost certainly was. Of the first evening, her enthusiasm for the new experience conceals some of the harsher truths.

I wanted to sleep in the open air, but the dew was very heavy & I had my first experience of ‘camping out’ under a tent. Mr C. [no name mentioned but perhaps Robert Christensen from neighbouring Lammermoor] had cut a quantity of rushes which made a most luxurious bed but I was so tired from the ride, (for I had not ridden for nearly two years) & the novelty of the thing that I could not sleep.

Among fragments filed with the Lucy Gray Papers is a scribbled description of this first night camping out in the bush. Lucy notes: ‘I was much too tired [‘& stiff’, inserted above the line] to sleep’. However, in the final journal account, the word ‘stiff’ is omitted, and she was simply ‘so tired from the ride & the novelty of the thing’ that she could not sleep. Perhaps a ‘stiff’ body was thought inappropriate for discussion in a journal that would be read by both sexes, or perhaps Lucy was simply trying to ‘make light’ of a difficult journey. In any case, the use of such terminology would look like complaining – and Victorian ladies did not complain.

Female problems such as menstruation are, of course, not mentioned in the writings of either Lucy or Addy, although the logistics of dealing with such matters would have been complex during long rides where water was short and, in Lucy’s case, privacy difficult because of the danger of attack by Aborigines. On 6 March, while living at Glendower, Lucy has placed an ‘X’ in the margin of her ‘private’

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31 LG, ‘Fragment’.
dairy. This may indicate the commencement of menstruation as a similar ‘X’ occurs at fairly regular intervals throughout the first part of the diary. Perhaps she was keeping account in case of pregnancy. However, it is possible that she was experiencing debilitating period pain because, beside the 6 March cross, is the following entry.

C. still head cook. Read on the veranda in the afternoon ‘Life of Wilberforce’ afterwards took our customary prowl down about the melons & huts.

The day before that she had written:

Kept to my bed obedient to my spouse all day very low espirit –

Bed rest, light household duties and a short walk, rather than a ride, all point to ‘women’s problems’ that could only be decently recorded indirectly. On 7 March, apparently finding nothing worthwhile to write about, Lucy adds a running line of o’s, emphasising a lost day when she was perhaps still not feeling well. The suggestion of frustration and discomfort in this symbolism alerts the reader to personal matters that impacted on a colonial woman’s life but were inappropriate to describe in words.

Later, in an undated diary entry in July 1870 (probably the 6th) Lucy uses a long row of dots to voice her displeasure at the unforgiving climate, safe in the knowledge that her family will not see it.

C. not back yet – high hot wind rode out & got all burnt up .....................

And on 25 August of the same year:

At home all day ......................

Suggestive silences in the form of X’s, dots and circles, if recognised for what they almost certainly represent, reveal the more personal feelings of stoic individuals like Lucy. Such symbolism also had the advantage of not being easily interpreted by an anxious husband who expected his wife to be uncomplaining and supportive. Of
course, such complaints (even in symbolic form) do not appear in the more public journal, and admissions of loneliness, although common in her diary, are not often found in the journal.

The occasional company of women, like teenage neighbour Jeannie Thompson, did little to ease the loneliness. On 31 August 1870 Lucy wrote in her diary:

Every one away. Dull day & evening lonely – I rode out with Jeannie to help Walladur to bring the cattle in – found a mob straying off towards the tablelands – got very sleepy after tea [brewed] two pots of tea to keep awake & wished for my ole man –

Being tired, and even lonely, was ‘acceptable’ in women’s writing, whereas other functions and frailties of the female body were not. There is a suggestion in Lucy’s shorthand, and elsewhere, of just how hard it could be for a woman to adjust, both in her writing and her life, in a land where her ‘place’ no longer provided the comforts experienced in England and Ireland. As Sara Mills suggests, when we read a text a multitude of contextual factors must be considered, such as expected audience, the social, cultural and historic background of the author, and the context of writing, all of which might determine, and help explain, any silences, gaps and inconsistencies.32

When Charles and Lucy finally arrived at Hughenden Station on that first trip inland, Lucy was at first pleased to be making the transition back into the domestic sphere, and her relief tends to bring to notice some of the ‘not saids’ in her account of the journey.

R [Robert] & C [Charlotte] came out to welcome us & till I saw them I felt as if we were leaving civilisation and everything belonging to the old life we had been accustomed to behind us – but we came upon it again … C with her white hands and pretty cool dress did not look much like roughing it.33

Lucy may have been glad to regain the comfort and security of a semblance of her recently remembered past, represented by the Hughenden homestead and her sister-in-law’s white hands, but it was not long before she grew to love riding in the bush in

33 LG, ‘Journal’ XII.
spite of danger and discomfort. Robert Gray recalls how his sister-in-law often made the four-hour ride from Glendower to Hughenden, although ‘a risky thing to do with blacks about’. Alone and armed only with a revolver, Lucy rode through the bush, or remained by herself at the lonely Glendower homestead, to which few travellers ever came.\(^{34}\)

![Open woodlands along the Flinders River through which Lucy Gray rode to Hughenden Station, carrying a revolver as protection against possible attack by Aborigines. (Photographer: M. Vivers, August 2005.)](image)

Although there were obvious dangers, Lucy Gray’s love of adventure and exploration, and Addy Bowler’s participation in men’s work as a young girl, defy the ideal that women always lived inactive and sheltered lives. At the same time, women like Addy and Lucy often depict the colonial spaces in which they lived as places of fun and adventure.\(^{35}\) Lucy’s frequent ‘delicious’ swims in the waterholes of the Flinders River were no doubt taken naked – although she does not say so, and Addy’s

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\(^{34}\) Gray, *Reminiscences* 149–50.

\(^{35}\) See, for example, Rosa Praed, *My Australian Girlhood* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1902).
anecdotes about her childhood suggest that, although she was forced to conform later on as a young lady, life as a little girl was much less constrained. 36

In reality, Victorian modesty and the boundaries that were supposed to divide public and private spheres could quickly dissolve in the heat and remoteness of the Australian bush. Women crossed boundaries, not only in the transition from Britain to the colonies, but also in the lives they led in the bush. Although there were some, like Lucy, who enjoyed the bush experience, inappropriate clothing and inadequate strength and protection meant that women were often at greater risk of serious injury or death than were men, who were better prepared both physically and mentally, and more appropriately clothed. Such gender related difficulties have been too often taken for granted in the telling of colonial history, where the accomplishments of men usually dominate the discourse. Women’s life writing ensures we revisit such matters and recognise, not only the dangers women faced, but also the danger in taking for granted certain binary oppositions that much colonial and post-colonial discourse depends upon.

Helen Buss is concerned that, because female participation has been treated as marginal to the mainstream endeavour, some of the complexities of participation of colonial women within the imperial enterprise need further examination. The male gendering of certain power systems, says Buss, is dependent upon a female subjectivity that ‘labors for the system, but is not of the system, a female subjectivity that defers its own existence’. 37 Failure to recognise the participation of women within the ‘system’ could, as Buss points out, and as I have already shown, result in a loss of protection for women who crossed traditional boundaries – in both a moral and physical sense. Whereas protection had been previously offered, in terms of responsibility parameters, by a strict division between public and public spheres, by taking on extra duties and activities not normally carried out by females, women could be left vulnerable and powerless.

For example, Buss describes how a doctor’s wife, Isabel West, living in a remote Canadian settlement, was voluntarily involved in the care of native children

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outside her own home. As a consequence of being caught between a moral desire to improve the system, and inability to go against her husband’s instructions not to interfere, two children died – which must have been both devastating and frustrating for West.\footnote{Buss, ‘A Feminist Revision of New Historicism to Give Fuller Readings of Women's Private Writing’ 94–97.}

Lack of legitimate authority could also cause women frustration in the Australian colonies. Lucy Gray’s desire to move further into the manly realm of bush riding and cattle mustering is demonstrated when she describes how, on a ride into the Glendower tablelands, she and Charles come upon a group of wild cattle that had joined up with a quieter mob for which the Glendower men had been searching.

C’s first thought was to take them [the cattle] back at once. I liked his idea, I thought it would be a fine feather in my cap. But C [was concerned to] take them in with only my help when stockmen had failed to get them. The fact is that with so many quiet ones to ‘coach them’ it would have been quite easy but C thought it would be too much for me as we had been in the saddle all day. So after riding round them as they stood quietly staring at us, we left them in the hope of finding them together in the morning.\footnote{Ibid. I–VIIb.}

Lucy was keen to prove she had stamina, and could ride as well as the men. She may also have wished to avoid the financial loss if some of the cattle went missing. Charles, however, wanting to protect his wife from danger and fatigue, decided to delay taking the mob down until next day. Meanwhile, some of the animals wandered off and could not be found later on. Lucy had tested the boundaries of acceptable behaviour by questioning the authority of her husband – and had been proved right.\footnote{Ibid. I–VIIb.} She recorded the matter in her journal as though to emphasise her ability to make the right decision in what was seen to be a man’s domain. Ultimately, power for Lucy was in the recording of the event, rather than in the event itself.

Incidentally, the word ‘coachers’ was still being used to describe quiet cattle used to lure wilder ones to the yards when I helped with mustering in the bush in the mid-twentieth century in southern Queensland. The terminology had obvious been carried over from colonial times.
In these Australian and Canadian examples, the colonial context troubles the simple binary divide between private and public because the ‘power relations inscribed therein are cross-cut with other power relations’. Through women’s writing we are reminded that in the colonies, and particularly in the bush, parameters were called into question as women tested the boundaries of acceptable behaviour and even questioned the authority of their husbands. As Joy Hooton notes:

If life in a new country brought certain limitations, it also presented women with new challenges and there are countless accounts of the equality of women’s efforts and of their pride in their achievements.

In Lucy’s case, her formative years encouraged not only achievement, but also perhaps a questioning of, and even rebellion against, the status quo. However, in spite of the ambitious plans John Waters may have had for his children, Lucy’s intelligent and visionary father could never have begun to imagine the ways in which his daughter would put her energy, enthusiasm and imagination to use in the Australian bush.

Crossing over between male and female spheres reflects a double standard that existed even when I was a girl in the 1950s and 60s in outback Queensland. Expected to help my mother in the house whenever needed, I also assisted with mustering cattle and undertook some of the other lighter ‘outside’ work, where my help was accepted but never formally acknowledged. On the other hand, my brothers were usually excused from ‘women’s work’ around the house, and rewarded for the ‘outside’ work that they did. When the time came, two of my brothers were encouraged to attend university and went on to successful academic careers. Another brother took over the running of the family farm. Meanwhile, my sister and I studied shorthand and typing, and worked as office assistants until we married. I was to rebel later, in my own way, when I enrolled as a mature-age student in a university degree.

One hundred years earlier, more extreme circumstances and difficult transitions continually challenged imperial ideals and Victorian sensibilities. As such, there is scope, and indeed a need, to question some of the realities of the binary oppositions that underpin popular colonial discourse, and subsequent historical interpretations. Much of our history tends to embrace dichotomies that corroborate the hierarchies of, for example, coloniser over colonised, male over female, public over private, and white over black. Women’s life writing denies the simplicity of this project. While, as Gillian Whitlock observes, first settlers shared a strong sense of affinity and loyalty to their class, homeland and race, the standards of masculinity and femininity they sought to emulate in their behaviour, households and relationships were often found wanting. In fact, it was in many cases a ‘precarious enterprise’ to try to maintain the distinct boundaries established by the domestic order in Britain. But try they did, whether their formative years overseas encouraged adventure and vision or whether, like Addy Bowler, they spent a carefree childhood in Australia and lived and wrote within the parameters set for them by the traditions of their parents.

Like Lucy Gray, Addy Bowler resorted to shorthand in her diary when unable, as a young woman, to adequately describe personal emotions and desires. As I have said, her memoirs depict a happy childhood in the Bathurst district. This was partly because, when she galloped without a saddle on her pony around the family farms in

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43 Whitlock, *The Intimate Empire* 46–47.
the 1840s, she was young enough to be free of some of the constraints of etiquette and modesty expected of Victorian middle-class females. She wrote:

I had an old pony called Jack ... I use'd to ride him without a saddle anywhere where I pleased – then when a little older I used to go every where with my brothers – they would catch a horse in the bush and put the hobbles round his neck and me on his back with a switch in my hand to guide him ... I often wonder I was not killed but I suppose I had to stick on and so I did.44

Addy’s freedom was not to last. When she was eleven her parents, in compliance with Victorian tradition, bought her a side-saddle. However, she thought it ‘a horrid uncomfortable thing’ and avoided using it whenever possible.

Later on, as a young woman, Addy was unable, or unwilling, to put her true feelings into words when falling in love with old friend Willie Suttor. She wrote on 18 December 1859:

Willie Suttor came at dinner time. E.H. cried out Oh our dresses – I was glad they had come and for other reasons best known to myself – 15

Here is a woman who, unlike her friends, is unconcerned about her dress, but concerned about saying too much in her diary. She writes that she is especially ‘glad’ Willie has arrived. He is singled out, although the word ‘they’ suggests there were others in the party. There is an air of intrigue in the phrase, ‘for other reasons best known to myself’, which is intensified when considered along with the empty dash at the end of the diary entry.

Another ‘unspoken’ thought can be detected in the simple exclamation ‘Oh!!’ in the following extract, written two days later. Addy had been helping with preparations for a friend’s wedding.

I have been making bows all day for all the bridesmaids – it is well to be so busy or I should get melancholy at the thought of in a measure losing my dearest girl friend. I fear none of my other girl friends will fill Emily’s place in my heart – the only way I can see to keep up the same feelings and interests

44 AB book 1: 3.
between us will be that I get married myself – surely Addy Bowler has no such intention. Oh!46

The double exclamation marks suggest a conspiracy, and promote a sense of things to come. Two years later, on 1 December 1861, Addy notes that her thoughts ‘fly from one subject to another without control’. What her thoughts are she does not say, but there is sexual suggestion in the following statement.

I would gladly centre them [her thoughts] upon something good if I could thoughts that [might] for a while at all events lift me out of myself and all that is not pure ... 47

Again there is a pregnant pause, in the form of three dots, suggesting important something left unsaid. In this passage we see Addy struggling to control, not only what she writes, but what she thinks and feels as well. Careful control of ‘wicked’ notions was encouraged by the Anglican Church, to which Addy belonged, where thinking ‘evil’ thoughts was considered almost as bad as acting on those thoughts. As a single girl, suppressed sexuality can be detected through symbolism and silences in Addy’s diary, as the writer struggles with ways in which to express her feelings. After marriage, a woman’s husband became her first priority, and close female friendships were difficult to sustain when married couples were forced to move away, sometimes long distances, from the girl’s family home.

Cynthia Huff notes the juxtaposition of symbols, such as dots and dashes, and the use of French phrases, in the diaries of Lady Marianne Brougham, later the wife of Lord Brougham, a well-known Whig politician in Britain. These symbols, she suggests, indicate both joy and consternation. Joy because of her growing love for Brougham, and consternation because of her pregnancy to him out of wedlock. Huff suggests that what is not said, or said indirectly, situates Lady Brougham’s sexuality within her text.48 Innuendo, carefully chosen language, and unusual punctuation, may all disguise deeper feelings. Helen Buss, observing much the same thing, suggests that the controls and constructs of acceptable written language are much more tidy and

46 Ibid.
rational than the complex nature of the lives that some women lived. By adopting unconventional discursive styles, women like Addy Bowler and Lucy Gray created special ways of representing the untidy and the irrational.

Restraint in expressing personal feelings, and matters concerning the body, was expected of Victorian ladies and gentlemen. For women in particular, any open display of sexuality, discussion of nudity, or feelings of a sexual nature were frowned upon. Sexuality was regarded as ‘one of the most irrational forces, and was relegated to the inner core of marriage’. According to the dictates of Victorian middle-class ideology women were expected to be sexually passive in marriage, sexual desire being considered unseemly for females. Pregnancy and birth were spoken of in hushed tones, particularly in the presence of men, while clerics discouraged even inappropriate thoughts (as in Addy’s case above). Penny Russell points to the pressure of ‘genteel performance’ placed upon ladies in all aspects of their lives. Such pressure, says Russell, left women with ‘a number of troublesome emotions and experiences for which there was no legitimate outlet’. At least, as we have seen with both Lucy and Addy, a shorthand system in diary writing allowed for some release.

Details of Addy’s pregnancies and confinements are noticeably absent in her diary and memoirs, although such events could be times of great tragedy for colonial women where medical help was often inadequate or non-existent. On 6 March 1865, writing from Borambil, Addy dwells more than usual upon her suffering after the death of her first baby – while still leaving much unsaid. Note the reference to God, and the effort to take consolation from conventional religious belief – a religious dependence not found in Lucy’s texts.

I am again at home [from a stay at Wyagdon and Brucedale] and tho still very weak I feel I am getting well after a most terrible illness in which I nearly lost my life and did lose our little son – who God has seen fit to take to himself

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50 Murray, Strong Minded Women 19.
and all my fears for the future of my then unborn child are at an end I was for many weeks quite out of my mind.53

A visitor to Brucedale during Addy’s confinement in December of 1865 writes in more detail about what must have been an extraordinarily harrowing time for Addy, and those around her. The writer is Jessie Augusta Francis, a niece of Charlotte Sutor of Brucedale.

20 December 1864
Fine morning. Addy did not make her appearance at breakfast. Aunt Charlotte went in to see her and came out with the intelligence that we might expect a small addition to the home circle before evening. Addy was very ill indeed all the afternoon. Aunt Charlotte was staying out in Herbie’s room, completely knocked up with worry and excitement … Addy’s baby not born when we went to bed at 11.30.

21 December 1864
Fine day. Lottie and I rather late for breakfast. I wondered no one spoke of Addy, but did not like to ask questions till I knew how matters had progressed. Poor Addy, her baby was born about 1.30 a.m.: it only lived a few minutes. Aunt took me in to see the baby. It was the finest and largest child born I ever saw and such a pretty little fellow. It looked almost as large as Norman, who was nearly three months old. Aunt Charlotte told me in confidence that it never could have walked as its feet were deformed in some way. Adelaide did not know it, though, so perhaps, poor little soul. it was a mercy it was taken.

22 December 1864
Fine day. Everyone seemed miserable.

23 December 1864
I went in to see Addy for a little while. I had not seen her before since her illness. She said it was much kinder to keep away. She fretted a good deal about her baby. She said every fresh face she saw come into her room she felt it keenly not having her darling boy to show them.

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25 December 1864

Addy had passed a wretched night and was very ill indeed.

31 December 1864

Addy was very ill indeed, had been delirious all the afternoon. Willie was in dreadful distress about her.⁵⁴

Jessie’s account fills in many gaps in Addy’s short account of the birth. Her description of the emotion and concern surrounding Addy’s illness and loss, when compared with Addy’s rather short-hand account, reflects the expectation that a Victorian woman should be more concerned for others than for herself. However, full details of the emotional and physical pain were perhaps too horrific for Addy to reproduce in her diary. There was also, of course, the taboo on writing about bodily functions, even in a private diary.

Bodily discomfort, pregnancy, birth, death and sexual desire are expressed, suggested or suppressed according to the genre used, anticipated audience and cultural constraints. Meanwhile, something of the character of the writer, her suffering, and the cultural milieu that surrounded her at the time of writing, are suggested through disturbances and blockages within a discourse. Silences and symbolism, such as Addy Bowler’s ‘Oh!!’ and Lucy Gray’s ‘X’, offer insights into colonial life that are both intriguing and informative. They alert us to ways in which Victorian morality, and social and cultural ideals, continued to influence and constrain, not only the writings, but also the lives of women in the colonies. Women like Addy, and even Lucy, attempted to uphold certain standards in an environment very different from that of Britain where the original standards were set and, interestingly, where some of those standards were already beginning to be questioned. As such, a multitude of sub-texts and marginal narratives are signposted by irregularities and constraints within women’s life writing, suppressed by Victorian sensibilities and imperial ideals. Recognition and interpretation of such signs must necessarily be an important part of better understanding the social, psychological, cultural, material and economic forces that constrained women’s writing and underpinned their lives – and the lives of those around them.

In spite of attempting to adhere to certain standards, Australian colonial women sometimes, through their writing, seem to challenge certain Victorian ideals, thus testing the very boundaries that they strive to respect. We have already noted a suggestion of rebellion when Lucy questioned the decision of her husband to delay bringing of the cattle down from the tablelands. The same trend can be detected in some of Addy’s writing. Although seemingly cheerful about the heavy outdoor work she was expected to do as a girl and young woman, there is sometimes a sense of helplessness and inadequacy reported in Addy’s diary entries. For instance, on 17 February 1861, she appears to rebel against what was expected of her as a young woman.

I feel that in spite of being always busy in a general way – I seem to lead a very aimless and to some extent a useless life because there is nothing I do that would not be done by some one else if I were not here. I trust it will not be always so …55

In this passage, Addy questions a life that involves repetitious domestic chores. Her writing then trails off with three dots, suggesting perhaps that she anticipates a change ahead. Is she questioning how men and women’s work is valued differently? As she watched her brothers and their male friends setting off on droving trips, and on other exciting expeditions, Addy’s thoughts no doubt turned to her girlhood when she galloped freely, without a saddle, around the family farm. The comings and goings of the men, with their stories of adventure, must have sometimes made a woman’s life in the private sphere appear very boring and mundane by comparison.56

On 27 February of the same year this more philosophic and poetic entry appears in Addy’s diary.

Work, work, work, tis the iron ploughshare that goes over the field of the heart, rooting up the beautiful hurtful weeds and pretty grasses that we have taken such pleasure in growing – laying them all under fair and foul together

55 AB book 1: 37.
56 See Sue Rowley, ‘The Journey’s End: Women’s Mobility and Confinement’, Australian Cultural History 10 (1991) 70–83. Rowley says that artists and poets tend to situate young women and girls as moving beyond the domestic sphere while mature women and mothers are ‘almost invariably’ represented within the home. Addy represents herself as fitting these stereotypes.
— making plain dull looking arable land for our neighbours to peer at — until at
night time — down in the deep furrows the Angels come and sow.

This passage comes from a book written in England by Dinah Maria Craik (née
Mulock), entitled _The Head of the Family: A Novel_ (1858). The words were
obviously attractive to Addy, already having mixed feelings about her lot in life, and
the language suggests powerful constraints and tensions. The opinions of neighbours,
rural metaphors that emphasise life’s complications, tensions between beauty and
pain, and between feelings and actions — all are present. This particular passage may
have been chosen by Addy because it brought more clearly into focus the
complexities of her own life. She was in love at the time, and anticipating marriage
and possible motherhood, after which she knew that domestic duties would only
intensify. First published in 1852, and cited by Addy in 1861, Craik’s novel was, like
Hugh Miller’s _Testimony of the Rocks_ (see Chapter 1.2), a fairly recent publication.
Addy obviously had access to some new books from the old country, and with them
came new ideas.

Entries like the above, and suggestive discursive irregularities, can be seen as
subversive and even as perhaps heralding the beginnings of deeper questionings as
women became more assertive and independent. In any case, they cannot be
overlooked if we wish to better understand women’s life writing and the colonial
situations represented therein — and also to better understand how certain attitudes
were to impact upon the future.

Both Addy and Lucy are particularly loyal to their husbands and this loyalty
almost certainly accounts for some of the silences in their texts. In fact, Addy never
criticises Willie or his actions in her writings, and Lucy seldom complains about
Charles leaving her alone at Glendower, the latter being mentioned only in her
‘private’ diary. This, along with her lack of admission of fear, and the lack too of
descriptions of exactly how Charles and his men ‘dealt’ with the local Aborigines,
perhaps tell us more about Lucy’s loyalty to her husband and her determination to

57 Dinah Maria Mulock Craik, _The Head of the Family: A Novel_, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1858) 205.
support him in his grazing venture, than about the degree of violence that was actually taking place. At the same time, she manages to protect her wider reading audience from unpleasant ‘truths’. There were economic implications too – station owners like the Grays and the Suttors had to promote the better side of colonial life if they ever wished to sell their holdings at a profit.

I earlier mentioned Sara Mills’ caution in using psychoanalytic analysis to explain colonial behaviour because, she says, it tends to erase specificity. She prefers to use materialist feminist theory, which takes into account some of the material aspects of invasion, discrimination, murder, rape, expropriation of land, and also resistance. As Mills says, and as is evident in the seemingly harsh attitude of Charles and Robert Gray towards Aborigines who disturbed and killed their stock (see Chapter 1.3.), a more complex model of textuality and interpretation is called for than can be found in a psychoanalytical approach alone. The late 60s and early 70s were difficult times financially for Australian graziers, especially those in remote regions. Not only did Aboriginal disturbances cost station owners dearly, the remoteness meant that access to markets for sheep and cattle was difficult, especially during the wet season. Charles and Lucy arrived in the colonies at a time when prices for beef and wool were falling, and there was a financial crisis in Queensland following the failure of the London bank of Agra and Mastermans, from whom the government had borrowed heavily. For a time all government funding ceased. However, gold discoveries in the Cape River region in 1867, and later along the Palmer in 1873, gradually helped improve markets for Glendower beef.

As with the admission of feeling ‘stiff’ in the fragment above, some of the silences in Lucy’s journal concerning possible Aboriginal attack are revealed through scribbled notes on fragments filed among the Lucy Gray Papers. One of these is again from the first trip Lucy and Charles made from Townsville to Hughenden. The writing is untidy and difficult to read and, for that reason, easily overlooked. However, with perseverance, careful scrutiny reveals some important constraints and omissions in the final document. The jottings appear to have been written on (or soon after) the events described, and then used as a reference point for the journal, as there are comments and descriptions common to both. There are even cross-outs in the

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58 Mills, Gender and Colonial Space 5–12.
fragment that seem to highlight items Lucy decided later were not appropriate for a journal to be read by concerned family members. As the writing is difficult to decipher, there are quite a few gaps in my transcription, but the general gist is obvious.

In this part of the country the blacks have been troublesome & dangerous – the wall ⁶⁰ being a city of refuge to which they could always escape after they had committed depredations among the flocks and herds besides killing white people [? whenever] they had an opportunity … it was … open warfare … knew perfectly what they were doing … but they liked ‘bullocky’ better than kangaroo & chose to run the risk – they were 20 to 1 [with the] settlers – but their dread of firearms left them at a disadvantage – their own weapons are formidable when they have a chance of using them but at short distances – although they were supposed to be so numerous we saw [none of them] on the way – [however] among the dark stems of the [iron] barks it would not be [easy].⁶¹

This disjointed information, perhaps noted down after discussions at a homestead Charles and Lucy visited on their way inland, confirms what can only be assumed from the final journal, and even the diary. Words like ‘troublesome’ and ‘dangerous’ spring immediately to notice, as do ‘killing white people’ and ‘open warfare’. Lucy does not use such strong, threatening language in her journal. However, cross-referencing with other sources, such as private letters and Robert Gray’s Reminiscences, confirms that the 1860s and 70s were indeed dangerous times in north Queensland, and recent research has produced clear evidence of bloody conflict during that period.⁶² A comment from Charles in a letter written to Lucy on 13 February 1869, six months after they arrived in Australia, confirms that the couple

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⁶⁰ A steep rocky cliff, probably the basalt wall shown in the map of the Hughenden region (see Fig. 9, Appendix 1).
⁶¹ LG ‘Fragment’.
had every reason to be afraid. Lucy was staying with Robert and Charlotte at
neighbouring Hughenden when Charles wrote:

I hope you will not feel anything approaching nervousness on the score of
the blacks but I have too good an opinion of your courage to think it of
you.\textsuperscript{63}

Lucy was certainly not ignorant of the gruesome details of the conflict that was going
on – as another letter from Charles implies

We got two niggers near Betts range we ought to have got more, they have
taken I hear 2000 of Betts sheep which he went after and recovered if he had
sent over here I would have lent him a hand, to go after them. They have
been having a rare corroboree at the back of Mt. Agnes, a few days ago they
speared a Kanaka at Betts.\textsuperscript{64}

While Lucy may have had private concerns about her own fate and that of her
husband (if not the fate of the Aboriginal people), it is repressed as she ‘takes sides’
with Charles. At the same time, she manages to protect her wider reading audience
from unpleasant truths.

To stay as long as she did at Glendower suggests both love and loyalty on
Lucy’s part. The same could be said of Addy’s willingness to live at remote
Borambil. Both support their husbands, by not revealing their inadequacies. Isabella
Beeton, in her ‘doctrine’ on ‘The Decorums of Friendships’ (1861), advised her
English women readers that a wife should ‘never let an account of her husband’s
failings pass her lips’.\textsuperscript{65} Support of one’s husband’s actions and ambitions, was a
Victorian wife’s role, and it was encouraged from childhood. Small girls were
supposed to wait upon brothers and fathers, and to indulge their selfishness.\textsuperscript{66} As a
small boy, Charles Gray was reprimanded by his father for his lack of respect for
others, in particular for his governess Miss Butcher.\textsuperscript{67} At that particular time Charles
had obviously gone too far in spite of his privileged status as a boy in the Gray

\textsuperscript{63} Charles Gray, ‘Correspondence’, \textit{Lucy Gray Papers}.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid. Allingham, ‘Victorian Frontierswomen’ vol. 1: 79.
\textsuperscript{65} Murray, \textit{Strong Minded Women} 151.
\textsuperscript{66} \textit{Ibid.}, 26, 81.
\textsuperscript{67} Information supplied by Robin Ormerod, New Zealand.
household. Although they do not say so in their writings, examples like this highlight some of the problems women had to face when they shared married life with men who had been indulged as boys.

On a visit to Hughendon in August 2005 the current owners of Glendower, Mrs and Mr Clive Poole, took me and my husband by four-wheel-drive vehicle to the site where there are still some remains of the old homestead in which Lucy lived. Lying amongst the gravel on the little plateau above the Flinders River we discovered a small rusted stirrup iron. About the size and shape one would expect to find attached to a Victorian lady’s side-saddle it lay half covered with sand, a silent symbol of a time gone by – a time when women’s lives, and their voices too, were shaped by convention and respect for others.

Like the stirrup iron that once supported Lucy Gray (or someone very like her) symbols of the unsaid lie, in the form of dots, dashes, crosses and circles, across the uneven surface of women’s life writing, awaiting recognition and interpretation. Obscure, but often important points of signification, they serve to support a better understanding of colonial life, and an understanding too of how colonial women moved back and forth across the boundaries originally prescribed for them. With their pens and brushes Victorian women have exposed some of the truths left unrecorded by their male counterparts. The texts of Addy Bowler and Lucy Gray remind us that, as historians, we must learn to listen more carefully not only to what is said and how it is said, but also to the sounds of silence, if we are to more fully comprehend the complexities of the colonial situation during an extraordinary, and often precarious, period of imperial progress and Victorian constraint.
Conclusion

The task of understanding then depends not on the extraction of an abstract set of principles, and still less on the application of a theoretical model, but rather on an encounter with the singular, the specific, and the individual.¹

I have argued that women’s life writing has much to offer those who attempt to reconstruct Australia’s colonial past. In doing so, I have not tried to reach general conclusions concerning women and their writing, my selection of source material is too limited for that. However, significant interdisciplinary work supports some of my findings thus allowing for certain tentative generalisations. For example, I found that Addy Bowler and Lucy Gray tended to write in a more personal and inclusive way than their male counterparts, drawing the feelings, actions and opinions of others into their discourse, rather than situating themselves at all times as the central subject. This is particularly true with the natural environment, where the male masterful gaze comes up against the female locus of relationships. Both Lucy and Addy appear more conscious than the male writers of the body, and parts of the body, mentioning them often. In texts destined for relatives and friends, Lucy’s spatial descriptions in particular are more carefully detailed, imaginative and evocative than those of the male authors. This would seem to reflect the culturally determined understanding many women had (and perhaps still have) of the needs of others.

Drawings, sketches and paintings by women like Lucy Gray contribute a visual dimension. Of course certain men also added sketches and drawings to their diaries and journals, and it would be misleading to promote the use of mixed media as gender specific. However, at least for the men discussed here, the subject matter chosen for both their visual art and their writing generally does not evoke such inclusiveness with, and empathy for, the Australian countryside, its native flora and fauna, and even for its Indigenous people. On the other hand, although there are some obvious differences between the writings of men and women, there are also similarities, as I found when I compared the diaries of Addy Bowler and Graham

Mylne. In fact, feminist theorists are beginning to be wary of anticipating that
women’s texts will always be different from those of men, being more concerned with
the differences in the condition of the production of the texts. This, too, has been my
concern.

Behind all the textual representations of women and men there are forces at
work, some of them gender related, which shape the direction, tone, emphasis,
constraint, and general discursive style. As I have shown, the backgrounds of the
writers, and the context in which they produced their pictorial and written texts, tend
to inform those texts, as do their expectations as to a certain audience. Gallagher and
Greenblatt speak of the ‘embeddedness’ of art and history and point enthusiastically
to the possibility of treating all of the written and visual traces of a particular culture
as a mutually intelligible network of signs. This I have emphasised, particularly
where Lucy Gray’s journal is concerned. I have included both the sketches and
drawings situated within Lucy’s written text, and her standalone artworks, and
highlighted ways in which a useful dialogue can be seen to exist between visual art
and associated writing.

In the Introduction I summarised some of the interdisciplinary work that has
been carried out in relation to women’s life writing, particularly in colonial situations.
I then discussed matters relating to my principal primary texts, moving on to give
details of the two women’s backgrounds. In Chapter 1.1 the memoir genre was
examined. I searched for special characteristics of, and uses for, writing that depends
upon memory. The memoirs of Addy Bowler and her brothers Adolphus and Ernest
were discussed in parallel, and I concluded that, although specific truths often become
confused during the process of recall, other truths speak from the margins. This
encourages closer examination of the context of the writing, and of the ways in which
certain writers construct their discourse with a particular audience and an evolving
cultural, social and familial circumstance in mind. I concluded that anecdotes from
memoir can provide extra energy when inserted into historical discourse, regardless of
the doubtful reliability of smaller detail. Personal stories provide windows through
which can be glimpsed some of the complexities, not only of the colonial endeavour,

3 Gallagher and Greenblatt, Practicing New Historicism 7.
but also of matters, some gender specific, that influenced the writers and informed their lives and their writing.

Then, in Chapter 1.2, I concentrated on the diary of Addy Bowler as I explored ways in which the diary genre might be useful to historians, showing how Addy recorded her immediate environment from a perspective different to her brothers. As a young woman, in spite of a lack of formal education, Addy’s diary is expressive, evocative, and often very personal. From it, we learn a great deal about how it actually felt to be a young middle-class woman living in the Bathurst district during the 1850s and early 60s. As a married woman, living near Condobolin, quite a distance from her family and friends, Addy adopts a more laconic style, briefly mentioning matters on the station and problems and events around the home. She often leaves large gaps when family tragedies occur, or when there is seemingly nothing important to relate. There is a sense at first that the isolation is impacting adversely upon her, as she occasionally engages in self-examination and self-criticism. However, the companionship of her husband appears to have excluded the need to confide in her diary to the extent she had felt necessary as a single woman. Later, returning with Willie to the Bathurst district, her diary tells of community work and family responsibilities, the style reflecting Addy’s maturity and comfortable sense of place in a society that was very much part of her youth. I demonstrate that, not only does the diary give an insight into a particular colonial woman’s growth, it reveals, from the inside out, something of the history of a particular region in the second half of the 1800s.

In Chapter 1.3, I noted that Lucy Gray’s handwritten journal is made up of a mixture of genres, including memoir, literary prose, poetry and extended letter. However, the general rules of epistolary discourse constrain the text at all times, as sections of the journal were sent off at regular intervals to the folk back home in England and elsewhere. Because of this, descriptions of violent encounters with, and ill treatment of, local Aborigines are somewhat understated. Unless the journal is read alongside other primary sources it fails to provide any conclusive evidence as to just how dangerous conditions were for the white settlers and, for that matter, the Aborigines. Otherwise, Lucy’s writing is experimental and enthusiastic, informed and inspired by the stimulating social and cultural milieu of her privileged background, and later cultural and intellectual influences in England and Europe. At the same time,
her texts are constrained by her reading audience – family and friends who were looking forward to news that would convince them of Lucy’s continued wellbeing. While presenting an evocative and informative account of ‘frontier’ life in north Queensland I concluded that, in Lucy’s journal and to a lesser extent in her ‘private’ diary, much of the harsh reality of colonial life is concealed, or at least ‘toned down’ for the benefit of the reader.

Discussion on the special characteristics of the journal was followed, in Chapter 1.4, by an examination of Lucy’s art works, both those embedded in the journal, and the paintings and drawings held in private collections which are independent of, yet sometimes linked with, the Queensland experience. I traced, through the journal illustrations and paintings, Lucy’s growing sense of place and increasing understanding of, and empathy with, the natural surroundings and inhabitants of far north Queensland. After discussing the pictorial texts from the journal in relation to the surrounding writing, I concluded that an interesting dialogue exists between the visual art and written text, thus resulting in a dual, yet complementary representation of colonial life. The play of these representations results in a sense of involvement with the bush environment that is seldom found in more ‘manly’ discourse, demonstrating how this particular woman, and women like her, adapted under extraordinary and seemingly alien conditions. Lucy’s sketches suggest a sense of immediacy, while her pen and ink washes provide a fluid sensitivity lacking in the more static and stylised black and white drawings favoured by her brother-in-law, Robert Gray. I concluded that Lucy’s pictures bring with them a certain authority as representations in their own right, while many add an extra dimension to the written text.

In Chapter 2.1, I explored ways in which women’s life writing has the potential to add extra texture and colour to the telling of Australia’s past, when used in conjunction with the colonial source material generated by male counterparts. While diaries by men and women, written under similar conditions and within the same time period, can be similar, in many cases Lucy and Addy include more personal and sensual details in their writings than do the men. This adds vitality to the more mundane, scientific approach found in much traditional source material – an approach that tends to be carried over into subsequent historical discourse. I also demonstrated how generalisations are less likely to be found in women’s writing, as
women tend to concentrate on individual circumstance and minute particulars, men on the wider picture.

I next explored ways in which Lucy Gray translates her involvement with the natural environment of north Queensland for the benefit of her reading audience. In a chapter entitled ‘Landscapes or Inscape? Representations of Space and Nature in the Lucy Gray Texts’ I adopted Gerard Manley Hopkins’s term ‘inscape’ as an appropriate way of describing how women like Lucy were able to immerse themselves, in an almost spiritual sense, in their bush surroundings, rather than describing the landscape in terms of possession and progress – a discursive style often adopted by colonial men, and some women. I described how Lucy, arriving in the colony as a married woman, observed and wrote imaginatively about a wide variety of natural phenomena, seeing things as she did with fresh enthusiasm. In doing this, she highlights the extraordinary impact the Australian bush and its inhabitants had on newcomers. Addy Bowler, I noted, is more inclined to describe only what she, as a native born woman, thought to be unusual or unexpected in the natural environment, taking for granted many of the sights and sensory perceptions that Lucy describes in detail. I suggested that historians must find a way to effectively consult and include the inscapes described by women like Lucy if they are to more realistically reconstruct the milieu that surrounded Australia’s colonial development.

In Chapter 2.3, concerned that the homogeneous grouping of middleclass ‘Victorian women’ was problematic, I looked further at the formative years of Lucy and Addy, and explored ways in which a woman’s particular background might inform her later textual representations. After travelling to Ireland and England, and visiting the places where Lucy lived with her family, I became more acutely aware of the extraordinary change in social, cultural, climatic and geographical environment this young woman, and women like her, experienced when first arriving in outback Australia. I suspected, also, possible connections between Lucy’s ready acceptance of her new surroundings, as demonstrated in her writing and her art, and the popular acceptance of the very different Japanese culture that was developing in England when she lived there. Although essentially controlled by common Victorian ideals, Lucy’s formative years were exceptional, and appear to have impacted on her attitudes and representations in later life. Through this exercise, I was alerted to ways in which the texts of Lucy and Addy, and others like them, may have been informed
and constrained, not only by Victorian ideals and imperial dictates, but also by individual circumstance.

I then moved on, in Chapter 2.4, to investigate ways in which the ideals behind a strict Victorian upbringing could be challenged in the colonial situation where the ideal and the real were often very different. Blurring of boundaries between the traditional dichotomies of, for example, public and private and male and female, came to light through a careful study of my primary sources. Of particular interest were the dangers women faced when having to adhere to traditional dress standards and the use of ‘suitable’ equipment, by no means suitable or safe for life in the Australian bush. Such difficulties and dangers are not emphasised in mainstream colonial discourse, where male exploits and accomplishments usually predominate. I concluded that the texts of women like Lucy and Addy help us better understand some of the complexities and hazards of the colonial situation, where women often had to behave like men, while still being ‘officially’ regarded as ‘delicate’ and ‘fragile’. As part of this discussion I also revisited some of the constraints and silences that I had already noted, and suggested ways in which discursive irregularities might point to truths that, once recognised, have the potential to improve our understanding of colonial life.

Peter Hulme stresses that, when examining colonial discourse, ‘no smooth history emerges, but rather a series of fragments which read speculatively hint at a story that can never be fully recovered’.4 While trying to recover a semblance of the truth it is the fragmentary alternative readings of women’s writing that Grimshaw and Evans have found particularly interesting.5 They see such readings as having the ability to contest aspects of the dominant colonial discourse. I suggest also that, by juxtaposing texts generated by both men and women, various matters are revealed which serve to both complement and contradict simplistic readings, even within the framework of common themes. When the latter occurs, the smooth cause and effect

structure, preferred by the creators of traditional historical discourse, becomes problematic.

Even when considered on its own merit, women’s life-writing can reveal multilayered narratives and contradictory ‘truths’ which are not always compatible with easy conclusions. Alternative readings of women’s life writing – especially diary writing – are possible, and sometimes an overview involving several genres, and early and later writings, reveals a gradual change in attitude and emphasis, and even subtle rebellion against the status quo. I demonstrated this in the last chapter, where I speculated about possible questioning by Addy Bowler as to the real value of the domestic work she was expected to do. There are also racial issues that are not resolved satisfactorily, especially in Lucy Gray’s writings.

Sara Mills has noticed that female writers often display a tension between an ‘assertive opinionated masculine persona and an apologetic, lady-like female voice’. She suggests that it is within this tension that we can sense a rebellion against the dominant views of the period. While instability in texts might be seen as an indication of unreliability by some historians on the lookout for clear-cut ‘objective’ evidence to support a particular argument, Grimshaw and Evans see some women writers as ‘enshrining viewpoints that remain of interest as contributions to colonial history’. Mills, too, recognises advantages inherent in what have been traditionally regarded as ‘limitations’ on women’s writing. Such constraints, she suggests, ‘enable a form of writing whose contours both disclose the nature of the dominant discourse and constitute a critique from its margin’.

After an enthusiastic start, the opportunity to include a white female perspective on colonisation was overtaken, at least for historians in Australia, by a growing interest in the ‘stolen generation’, Aboriginal land rights, history from an Aboriginal perspective, and discussions about frontier conflict. It has been

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imperative, of course, to examine all these issues. However, there are still many
questions to be answered concerning certain aspects of colonial life and colonial
behaviour. For some of these answers we must turn, as Geertz says in the epigraph at
the beginning of this thesis, to those who ‘guard sheep in other valleys’. I have
demonstrated that both questions and answers emerge from the texts left behind by
the middle-class European women who lived in this extraordinary period of
Australia’s past – a period when for some time convicts, or ex-convicts, made up a
large part of the work force in the bush, and when two very different cultures,
Aboriginal and European, came together. To this could be added, in the mid-
to late-1800s, the Chinese and South Sea Islanders, of which the former were to make quite a
significant impact after gold was discovered, and the latter, like the Gray’s servant
Nungita, for a short period proved invaluable as servants, shepherds and even
companions. This racial interaction resulted in complex forms of accommodation and
acculturation in what was, to both new arrivals and old inhabitants, often an
unfriendly and hostile environment.

Of course, projects concerning European women and their writing about
colonial situations have not been completely abandoned. As I indicated in the
Introduction, Canadian and British literary theorists continue to be active in this
regard, and there has also been research into the impact of imperialism on women’s
writing (particularly travel writing) involving India, Africa and South America.
There has been work done by Australian historians as well, sometimes combining
Australian and Canadian experiences. Meanwhile PhD student Rebekah Crow has
investigated the unique position certain white women occupied within colonialism

8 For example, see Janice Wilton, Golden Threads. The Chinese in Regional New South Wales 1850–
9 Mary Louise Pratt, Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturalization (London and New York:
Routledge, 1992); Helen M. Buss, ‘Constructing Female Subjects in the Archive: A Reading of Three
Versions of One Woman’s Subjectivity’, in Worring in Women’s Archives: Researching Women’s
Private Literature and Archival Documents, ed. Helen M. Buss and Marlene Kadar (Waterloo, Ontario:
10 Maggie Pickering, ‘Looking through the Fawn-Skin Window: White Women’s Sense of Place in the
New Worlds of Australia and Canada’, Australian Historical Studies. Special Issue: Challenging
and the imperial project. And, as I have said, Australian historians such as Henry Reynolds, Peter Read, Alan Atkinson and Maurice French have attempted to rectify an earlier emphasis on such matters as conflict and exploitation by examining accommodation and acculturation, and by looking at the ‘smaller truths’ that emerge through examination of less traditional source material, such as oral histories and personal accounts.

However, what appears to be lacking is an on-going interdisciplinary examination by historians of primary source material generated by women in colonial Australia with a view to using it more in historical discourse. This I have attempted, in a small way, to rectify. Such work, I argue, has the potential to add much to our understanding of the colonial image. In many cases it may confirm existing ‘truths’, but it also enables a better understanding of the complexities and the ‘smaller truths’ that were an important part of the colonial circumstance.

During any research there are times when the researcher doubts the actual strength of their particular argument. It was at such a time that I purchased a copy of the excellent little book Black Kettle and Full Moon by Geoffrey Blainey. In this evocative and well-researched publication Blainey writes about some of the important changes and improvements that affected day-to-day life from colonial times until the onset of the First World War. This is a work that was long overdue as it brings into focus matters that have not generally been included in history books. A great deal of what is written is essentially ‘women’s business’, or at least has impacted strongly upon the life of women. By including such matters, Blainey begins to acknowledge

the participation of a group of people who have, until fairly recently, been largely marginalised.

In spite of this, women’s voices are noticeably absent from Blainey’s book – voices that might have added extra energy, immediacy and interest to his account. Although brief quotes from both men and women occasionally infiltrate the text, they are edited in a way so as not to interfere with the forward flow and tone of the discourse. Thus some of the character and spontaneity is lost, as is the context in which the quotes occurred. When Blainey does use individual voices, he favours extracts from male accounts, or from Mary Gilmore’s *Old Days: Old Ways*.14 Gilmore, as I said in Chapter 1.2, attempted to write in a ‘manly’ voice, concentrating more on generalities than particulars, a style that fits more easily with Blainey’s style of writing. A quick count of primary sources listed at the back of the book reveals approximately one hundred male sources and only about twelve female sources. This speaks for itself.

One noticeable exception is a page containing extracts from the diary of Annabella Boswell, who lived near Port Macquarie in New South Wales. Writing in 1848, Boswell describes picking fruit for the kitchen.15 Although the introduction of a female voice in this way is, in my opinion, very successful, it is not repeated elsewhere. Because of this, I suggest Blainey has missed an ideal opportunity to add a personal dimension to his narrative.

For example, concerning the arrival of the first telegraph line, Blainey writes rather impersonally: ‘The first electric telegraph line in Australia was laid between Melbourne and its port in 1854’.16 Continuing in much the same style for several pages Blainey describes the development of the new telegraph and its benefits. However, had she been given the chance, Addy Bowler could have added a nice personal touch, introducing manners, moments of confusion, and a sense of shock when the new electric wire first touched bare skin – all in one short anecdote that would not, I suggest, have interfered too much with Blainey’s narrative style. On 23 January 1860 Addy wrote:

15 Blainey, *Black Kettle and Full Moon* 271.
[Today] I saw the Electric Telegraph for the first time and feel more puzzled
than ever about it and yet it seemed so provokingly simple – I had not the
physical courage to have an electric shock which the man politely offered
me. Mary had and says her fingers are tingling still. 17

Also, although Blainey writes convincingly that ‘when the wide, bell-shaped dress,
the crinoline, was in fashion mid-century, it could too easily brush against a candle or
an open fire’, 18 Addy Bowler could have informed him that a crinoline was not a
dress but an undergarment that replaced the many petticoats women had previously
worn. By attempting to make one herself she was well aware of the intricacies of its
construction. 19 Meanwhile, Lucy Gray could have added a visual dimension. Blainey
describes a camp oven as ‘a small, portable cast-iron oven’, which had ‘three short
legs’, and a ‘flat base’. 20 Lucy’s little sketch in Fig. 1 brings this description more
clearly into focus.

Fig. 1 Lucy’s sketch of
camp cooking utensils. A
traditional camp oven, as
described by Blainey, is on
the right. (Image enlarged.)

(Lucy Gray, ‘Journal’,
‘Journal, Diaries,
Correspondence and
Fragments’, Lucy Gray
Papers (JOL OM 75–123)
XXXVI.)

Like Addy Bowler’s crinoline, historical discourse can only really come to life
when the human element is inserted. Blainey’s otherwise useful and well-written book
proved my argument to be sound. Women’s life writing must be utilized more often if
a comprehensive understanding of, and feel for, Australia’s past is to be achieved.

17 Adelaide Bowler, ‘Bowler (Sutter) Diaries and Memoirs 1840–1890’, (private collection, Sydney),
18 Blainey, Black Kettle and Full Moon 46.
19 AB, book 1: 22, entry dated 29 November 1859.
20 Blainey, Black Kettle and Full Moon 218.
But how can subjective and spatial multiplicities, including anecdotes and drawings, be incorporated successfully into historical narrative? The traditional preference for evidence that supports a linear cause-and-effect narrative style that reaches positive conclusions has been questioned by scholars like Paul Carter, Bain Attwood, Alan Atkinson, Simon Ryan, and others.²¹ They see it as limiting, as it mirrors the male-dominated colonial discourse of the 1800s from which the majority of historical evidence is drawn – a discourse in which, as Leonore Davidoff says, ‘the practical rationalization of space as well as time … formed the context in which enlightenment thinkers formulated their projects.’²²

In my chapter on memoir and in the examples directly above, I touched on ways in which spatial descriptions, pictures and anecdotes might be slotted into linear discourse to provide, not only a window onto the past, but also a sense of immediacy and credibility to otherwise seemingly remote, and somewhat unbelievable, events. I noted that Atkinson and other historians were already using this discursive style with some success. Further experimentation is taking place, as historians attempt to involve spatial and subjective aspects that do not marry easily with the traditional narrative structure of much historical discourse. One method being adopted is the combination of historical fact and narrative fiction, such as in Joy Hooton’s recent book Leave Taking in which she attempts to ‘explain’ certain aspects of the Canadian uprisings in the 1830s through the juxtaposition of fictitious personalities with well-known historical events.²³ However, in my opinion, there is an uneasy tension between the author’s historic purpose and her desire to produce an appealing love story, both of which vie for importance. In the end neither is entirely successful. Other experimental historians are self-consciously introducing different voices, sometimes multiple voices, while struggling at the same time to find an appropriate form with which to explain, and even evoke, a ‘suitable’ representation of the past. The historical genre of biography has also become a favoured experimental history form.²⁴

²⁴ Alun Munslow and Robert A. Rosenstone, eds, Experiments in Rethinking History (New York and London: Routledge, 2004). In particular, see pages 85 to 88, a section entitled ‘New Voices’.
At the same time, the ‘fine-lined and faint webs of significance’ in the silences, constraints and marginal aspects of texts are being examined more closely, as imagination becomes a more acceptable word when used in association with the historical reconstruction of the past. As Greg Dening says, and as I discovered when examining the texts of Lucy Gray and Addy Bowler, ‘imagination is hearing the silence because we have heard some of the sounds’. 25 With experimentation comes realisation that the past can only be explored more fully by occasionally abandoning the traditional style of historical narrative in order to re-capture a wider range of events and experiences. Women’s life writing presents us with many opportunities in this regard.

In this thesis I have not attempted a linear telling of the lives of Addy Bowler and Lucy Gray. Or, in the words of Joy Hooton, I have been ‘tolerant of discontinuous forms and unsettled closures’. 26 Nor have I attempted to create, through the writings of Addy and Lucy, comprehensive microhistories of the regions in which they lived. Instead, my purpose has been to articulate some of the ways in which the life writing of women might be read alongside more traditional source material so that together they might produce a more complete understanding of colonial life. Readers persuaded by my argument for the historical interest and significance of the lives and texts of these two women will want to know how their life-stories ended.

According to Jane Putt, Lucy’s poor health was the reason Charles finally sold Glendower. After a brief visit to Tasmania (see Tasmanian paintings, Figs 24–27, Appendix 1) Lucy left Queensland in 1875, and was soon followed by Charles. The couple travelled to England and then toured the continent, where Lucy apparently did some of the more sophisticated watercolours in Appendix 2. Then, in early 1878, the couple settled at Waiohika, near Gisborne in the north island of New Zealand, in the

hope that the cooler climate might provide a cure for Lucy’s tuberculosis. However, she died childless on December 2, 1879. She was buried at Dunedin’s South Cemetery, after being taken to Dunedin for treatment.

Fig. 2 Waiohika, near Gisborne in New Zealand where Lucy and Charles lived in the months leading up to Lucy’s death in 1879. The family on the far right is unidentified, but is almost certainly Emily Gray, Charles’ second wife, and some of their grandchildren. (Photograph courtesy Bryony Hollinrake, Canada. See Fig. 32, Appendix 2, for a painting by Robert Gray of Waiohika.)

By late 1882 Charles had married again, a New Zealander, Emily Jane Williams. They brought up a large family together at Waiohika. It is the descendants of that marriage that have kindly assisted me in obtaining copies of Lucy’s paintings, along with other details concerning the family. A map and description of Lucy Gray’s gravesite at Dunedin, and a photograph of the graves supplied by Robin Ormerod, reveal that Charles is buried beside Lucy, not beside his second wife. He died in 1918 of a brain tumour, thirty-nine years after Lucy passed away. In spite of marrying again, family legend has it that Lucy was always the ‘love of his life’. In his letters

28 Burial details courtesy Jean Strachan, Dunedin Public Libraries.
29 Email correspondence, Jane Putt.
he refers to her as his ‘old darling’ or as ‘op’ (old precious). It seems fitting that he should lie beside her at Dunedin.

But what of native-born Addy Bowler? After a relatively carefree childhood, and a life of parties and hard work as a young adult, Addy’s life was to change dramatically when she married Willie Suttor and the couple moved out to isolated Borambil to start a family. Then, after returning to Bathurst, the couple enjoyed prosperity and happiness for a period. However, although owning several large properties, the bank closures and adverse climatic conditions of the 1880s and 90s proved too much for the overextended Sutters and they were forced to sell out and move to Sydney. In book 3 of her diary and memoirs Addy reports that her husband, Willie, devastated by his financial failure, deteriorated in mind and body. He died in Sydney in 1905. Tenacious to the last, Addy ran a boarding house in Sydney with the help of one of her daughters to keep a roof over their heads and food on the table. In spite of a sad and difficult end to an otherwise happy life, Addy lived to the age of eighty-three. She passed away on 23 May 1920 in Sydney. Addy and Willie are buried in the grounds of the old Anglican Church at Kelso, where they were married.

Addy Bowler and Lucy Gray were both remarkable women. Because they took time to write, sketch or paint they have offered an insight into something more than the traditional fixation on linear progress, growth of colonial enterprise and, in later years, emphasis on exploitation and conflict. Due to gender-specific ideals that dictated ways in which culture and society were structured, most Victorian middle-class women’s lives developed along vastly different lines than those of their male counterparts. Because of this, women not only noticed things that escaped the attention of their male counterparts, they also represented them differently. Their interpretations and representations must not be overlooked.

30 AB, book 2.