
UNIT 2 THE AUSTRALIAN NOVEL IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 The formation of modern Australian literary culture
 - 2.2.1 Australian colonies in the nineteenth century
 - 2.2.2 The beginnings of a modern literary culture
 - 2.2.3 Earliest writing in English
- 2.3 The novel in the nineteenth century
- 2.4 Let us sum up
- 2.5 Glossary
- 2.6 References

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you should be able to critically analyse:
the conditions that gave rise to a modern literary culture in nineteenth century Australia.
the rise and development of the novel as a genre in nineteenth century Australia.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit of this block, we discussed the beginnings of a modern literary culture in Australia, very briefly. In this unit, we will be discussing the various cultural forces that acted in the formation of such a literary culture, before we look at the development of the novel as a literary genre in nineteenth century Australia.

2.2 THE FORMATION OF MODERN AUSTRALIAN LITERARY CULTURE

2.2.1 Australian colonies in the nineteenth century

By 1851, there were six colonies centred on Sydney, Hobart, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth. While describing the rapid development of the English colonies in Australia during the nineteenth century, Delys Bird points out that around a thousand people had arrived in the country with the First Fleet in 1788, whereas, by 1850, the white population of the colonies was over four hundred thousand. By 1850, most parts of the continent had been mapped, and Sydney and Melbourne were highly populated cities. Banks, courts, educational institutions (including Sydney University), were established. All colonies had some legislative independence from England, and there was a flourishing pastoral industry (Bird, 1998, 24). It is in this context that the earliest literary works in English, were written in Australia.

2.2.2 The beginnings of a modern literary culture

In the essay “The beginnings of literature in colonial Australia”, Elizabeth Webby, analyses the complex interweaving of social and cultural factors that gave rise to nineteenth century Australian literature. Webby points out that books had arrived in Australia with the First Fleet in 1788. From the early days of settlement, items of print culture were used for utilitarian as well as recreational purposes. Among the early settlers, gentlemen and some convicts could read and write. The earliest settlers brought utilitarian as well as recreational reading material with them. Religious tracts and books, and copies of the Bible were distributed among convicts to encourage them to read. For several years, books were in short supply in Australia. Webby also emphasises the role of lending libraries in shaping nineteenth century literary culture in Australia. Missionaries were active in attempts to form lending libraries, as books were seen as crucial for moral improvement in a convict settlement. They took the initiative to publish the first Australian magazine in 1821, and in establishing the first truly public library in 1826 in Hobart, giving importance to moral and religious books (Webby, 2009: 34-40).

In the same essay, Webby underlines the role played by educational institutions in nineteenth century Australia. Universities were established in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide in the 1850s and 1870s, but initially no lectures on English literature were given, as the classics were held to be the foundation of education. It was only as late as 1882, that a Chair for English was established in Adelaide. In the first half of the nineteenth century Mechanics Institutes were established in major towns and cities, and in the second half, in smaller towns. Their book collections and reading rooms catered to the reading needs of thousands of people. Those who could not attend universities, could continue education through the Mechanics’ Institutes and the literary and debating societies that became prominent in the later decades of the nineteenth century. In the earlier decades book groups and societies mainly functioned to allow access to a communal library. After 1850, informal groups were formed by literary men, and in the last decade of the century, literary societies proliferated, mainly in the cities. These allowed people to discuss their reading and debate. In the nineteenth century, most fiction and non-fiction was published overseas, most poetry and drama in Australia. As there was no commercial book publishing, most literature appeared in newspapers and magazines (Webby, 2009: 34- 46). Thus Webby identifies the roles played by lending libraries, educational institutions, newspapers and magazines in nurturing a literary culture in nineteenth century Australia.

“Energetic argument”, is identified by Delys Bird, as a feature of the literary and social life of all the colonies, and much colonial literature. Bird acknowledges the role of independent colonial newspapers in fostering such argument. Independent colonial newspapers such as the *Australian* (1824 -48), *Sydney Monitor* (1826-41), and *Colonial Times* (1825-57) published poetry and encouraged other genres, and were therefore important in the literary and the socio-political life of the colonies (Bird, 29). The *Sydney Bulletin* (established in 1880) was one of the most influential magazines, published towards the end of the nineteenth century. As Elizabeth Perkins points out, the *Sydney Bulletin* had a major role in fostering a “modern” literature in Australia; it tried to discourage diffuseness and encouraged crisp, clear language, providing “a ‘modernising’ impulse which drew Australian writing further from the formal language and periodic sentence found in much Victorian literature” (Perkins, 57).

2.2.3 Earliest writing in English

Printing technology was available in the Australian colonies from the early days of colonisation, and this made the production of reading matter easy. Scholars like Delys Bird and Elizabeth Webby point out that the earliest literary works produced from Australia, were the official and semi-official accounts of the newly established colony published by officers of the First Fleet. Captain Watkin Tench, officer of the First Fleet, wrote a detailed account of his experiences in *A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay* (1789), which was extremely popular. John White, surgeon in the first Fleet, adopted the language of natural science to describe the flora and fauna of the newly 'discovered' continent. Descriptive prose was found to be more favourable for colonial conditions and was therefore the favoured form of discourse rather than poetic discourse. Realism was dominant in Australian literature from the beginning. Governor Phillip's first despatches (published as *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay* in 1789) shows this trend. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, the accounts of the explorers who travelled into the interiors, such as Oxley, Sturt, and Leichhardt were also received eagerly (Webby 51 -52; Bird, 1998: 25). Bird notes that these explorers' journals, which contain records of the great inland explorations "tell a story of imperial expansion and land acquisition" and "constitute a major area of colonial literature" (Bird, 33). In the later years of the century, explorers began to venture further into the interior, and the "notion of the "real" Outback, or the "Never Never", was introduced into Australian literature." *Australia Twice Traversed* (1889) by Ernest Giles, was "one of the late classics of Australian exploration" (Webby, 2000: 53). Thus the descriptive accounts of the new colonies written by the earliest settlers and the accounts by explorers who ventured deep into the continent during the nineteenth century, constituted the beginnings of written literature in English in Australia.

Colonial women also provided accounts of life in Australia for the readership in Britain. A good example is *Notes and Sketches of New South Wales During a Residence in that Colony from 1839 to 1844* written by Louisa Ann Meredith, and published in London in 1844. Early settlers regularly wrote letters to relatives and friends back "home" in England, and like the official accounts, these were eagerly awaited, since they offered details of life in the new colony. Delys Bird points out that just as the metropolitan centre in London controlled the Australian colonies in legal and economic aspects, they also controlled colonial literary production, and Australian writers "were subject to these forms of cultural hegemony, which affected the whole literary culture," even up to the twentieth century (Bird, 1998, 25). Notable nineteenth century letter writers and diarists include Annie Baxter Dawbin, G. T. W. B. Boyes, Rachel Henning, Louisa Clifton, Elizabeth Macarthur and Annabella Boswell (Webby, 2000: 53-54).

The first book of poetry published in the colonies was Barron Field's *First Fruits of Australian Poetry* (1819). Frederick Sinnett's "The fiction fields of Australia" (1856), was the first attempt to critically study Australian literature. Delys Bird, while defining the field of early colonial literature in Australia, points out that comic and satiric verse, popular drama, all types of fiction, and letters and diaries, which would have been excluded from the category of "literature" in late eighteenth century Britain, "are precisely the kind of writing that mark the beginnings of an Australian literature." Delys Bird also remarks that the informal modes of poetry, which were less traditional and conventional were freer to convey the colonial condition). The ballad is one such

form, which proved to be a significant genre for nineteenth century Australian literature. “An Australian literary tradition is often thought of as having its beginnings in the ballad... Most early ballads, from Britain and Ireland deal with transportation; a few with political persecution; many lament their separation from home and loved ones” (Bird, 24 -27).

The earliest specimens of modern Australian writing were packed with place descriptions of the newly ‘discovered’ land, its inhabitants and the ‘exotic’ flora and fauna. The descriptions, as pointed out by Delys Bird in the essay ‘The Settling of English’, often swung from one extreme to the other – from visions of an untouched Paradise to those of a harsh and brutal landscape. Bird remarks how the early explorers’ reports were influential in setting the tone of the writings of the Australian land in the colonial period: “Dampier’s version of the land as degraded and barren, and Cook’s as offering a fertile future, establish the terms of a dialectical paradigm variously described by critical commentators as moving between, for example, prison and paradise, gloom and optimism that shapes much colonial writing” (1998: 23).

Most of the early Australian writings of travel and exploration and early essays in narrative and poetry represent attempts to make sense of an alien and bewilderingly strange natural environment – Elizabeth Webby remarks how for a European of the 18th or early 19th century, Australia quite literally represented the Antipodes. The “new” creatures of the continent, the black swans for instance, conformed to the notion of Australia as the ‘Antipodes’, the ‘upside down country’ (Webby, 2000: 51). Marcus Clarke wrote that in “Australia alone is to be found the Grottesque, the Weird, - the strange scribblings of Nature learning how to write. Some see beauty in our trees without shade, our flowers without perfume, our birds who cannot fly, and our beasts who have not yet learned to walk on all fours”. This oft quoted remark tellingly reveals the response of a settler generation to the natural life and landscape of the continent.

Webby demonstrates in the essay ‘Colonial Writers and Readers’ how, as explorers and travellers advanced further into the interior and as larger areas of the continent came to be mapped and settlements established, new myths of the land and of human relationships with it began to take shape. The myths of the outback, the ‘never-never’ and the ‘city and the bush’ reflect the awareness of new physical spaces and the challenges involved in establishing new relationships with them (Webby, 2000: 53). The writers of the later nineteenth century began to write about the land not only because they came up against something new and unfamiliar, but also in an attempt to free themselves from the concerns and conventions of the metropolitan centres in Europe and create an “authentic” Australian literature.

2.3 THE NOVEL IN NINETEENTH CENTURY AUSTRALIA

The Australian novel took shape in the early nineteenth century; the first novel was written by a convict and was based on the convict experience, which was not surprising, considering the fact that most of Australian colonies had their beginnings as penal settlements. In a study of ‘The Novel in English in Australasia to 1950’, K. Moffat focuses on “five broadly chronological and overlapping literary themes: encounters; settlement; social, moral and political agendas; cultural nationalism; interior lives” (1). According to Moffat, encounters between colonists and the Indigenous peoples of Australia are typical features of the pre-1950 Australian novel. Although depictions of Aboriginal life and culture are peripheral to much nineteenth- century Australian

fiction, some novelists like James Tucker (*Ralph Rashleigh*, 1850) and W. H. Leigh (*The Emigrant: A Tale of Australia*, 1847) and Charles De Boos (*Fifty Years Ago: An Australian Tale* (1867), did include Aboriginal characters in their fiction (2-3). Some Australian novels of the nineteenth century occasionally touch upon “the damaging impact of European colonization on the Aboriginal peoples”. Rosa Praed’s novels, for instance, express “a deep regret for the wrongs done to the Aboriginal people” (5).

“Settlement”, says Moffat, is the dominant theme of pre-1950 Australian fiction. Many novels focus on the reaction of migrants to the Australian environment and their attempts to build a home in the new land (6), while “Aborigines are written out of many settlement stories” (6). Moffat identifies the preoccupations generally shared by Australian settlement novelists: the physical realities of the land, the qualities of character that best suit the frontier environment, and the tension between the pull of the Old World and the need to establish a sense of identification with the new homeland (6).

Myths of the frontier and the pioneering experience celebrated the triumph of the human spirit pitted against a relentlessly harsh environment. According to critics like Heseltine, even the celebrated theme of mateship around which many early fictional works were written, reflects the confrontation between humans and their environment and is seen as being a refuge from the horrors of bush life (1985:306). The novels that write the settler experience, like other literary texts of the period, employ metaphors of mastering, controlling, owning, possessing and manipulating a hostile environment.

An important form of nineteenth century Australian fiction was the convict novel. Moffat points out that it is a distinctively Australian narrative reflecting the origins of the colony as a penal settlement. The first novel to be written and published in Australia was a convict narrative, Henry Savery’s *Quintus Servinton: A Tale Founded Upon Incidents of Real Occurrence* (1830), which set the pattern that many later convict fictions followed. Written in the first person, *Quintus Servinton* begins with a nostalgic overview of Quintus’s early life in England, the details of his crime, conviction, and transportation, and focuses on the frequently harsh treatment Quintus experiences, his attempts at escape, and his eventual death. (Moffat 6-7). Delys Bird underlines the importance of writings about convict life, by convicts or ex-convicts in a culture that developed from penal beginnings. Henry Savery was transported for forgery to Hobart, and wrote a series of essays about social life in colonial Tasmania, published as *The Hermit in Van Diemen’s Land* in 1830. Thus he published both the first book of colonial essays, and the first novel both written and published in the colonies. *Quintus Servinton: a Tale founded Upon Incidents of Real Occurrence* is “a transportation novel with a happy ending, disguised as a fictional autobiography.” (Bird, 32).

Several notable ‘convict novels’ were written during the nineteenth century. James Tucker’s *Ralph Rashleigh* written in 1844 -45 is, according to Bird, “the most significant literary work in this field. A long fictional autobiography that posed as a memoir, *Ralph Rashleigh*, is a convincing contemporary depiction of convict life which insists on the brutality and inhumanity of those within the system, as well as the system. The novel traces Tucker’s despairing search for a spiritual home, which is nowhere to be found in the colonies” (Bird, 32-33). Moffat also comments on the way this novel questions the convict system: “Based on personal experience, Tucker’s *Ralph Rashleigh* (1845) is a scathing indictment of the brutality of the convict system,

providing a graphic account of the cruelty of the penal colonies in which life is reduced to a degrading struggle for survival” (7). Elizabeth Webby remarks on the literary qualities that marked out this novel: Tucker, Webby says, was “interested in telling an entertaining tale, replete with all the elements readers might have expected to find in a story set in convict days” (Webby, 61). Mary Vidal’s *The Convict Laundress* (1852), Caroline Leakey’s *The Broad Arrow* (1859); Eliza Winstanley’s *Her Natural Life: A Tale of the 1830s* (1876), all deal with the brutalities of the convict system.

Perhaps the most outstanding of the nineteenth century convict novels is Marcus Clarke’s *For the Term of His Natural Life* (1874), which “Clarke meticulously researched, consulting convict records, letters, and official reports.” (Moffat 7). Though Marcus Clarke (1846- 1881), is remembered today for his most famous novel, “he was amazingly versatile and made significant contributions to colonial literary culture as novelist, short story writer, historian, critic, journalist, dramatist, poet and editor” (*Oxford Companion to Australian literature* 170).

Andrew Mccann locates the origins of the novel *For the Term of His Natural Life* in Clarke’s travels in Tasmania in 1870 to research a series of articles on the convict system. “The trip gave him the settings he would need for a novel that must have already been welling up from his fascination with the literature of crime and punishment: Charles Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* (1838), Charles Reade’s *It’s Never too Late to Mend* (1856), Alexander Dumas’ *The Count of Monte Christo* (1844), Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables* (1862)” (Mccann 5). The novel, which has the alternative title *His Natural Life*, tells the story of the unfortunate Rufus Dawes, his transportation from England, his sufferings at various punishment centres such as Port Arthur and Norfolk Islands, and his death by drowning.

“*His Natural Life* is the most significant and most famous nineteenth century Australian novel, the major contribution of colonial fiction to the English novel. Profoundly pessimistic, it has been criticised for its melodramatic scenes and unrealistic coincidences ... but its power continues to move modern readers. Although it moves beyond a documentary treatment of the convict system to explore fundamental questions concerning man’s capacity for evil, its treatment of transportation played a significant part In consolidating the legend that the convicts were more ‘sinned against than sinning’” (371, *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*).

Clarke’s novel has a decidedly pessimistic tone; however, as Moffat points out John Boyle O’Reilly’s convict fiction *Moondyne* (1879) is a “far more hopeful narrative” (7), even though it is somewhat poorly structured as a novel.



Marcus Clarke in 1866. (source: Wikipedia.org)

While the ‘convict novel’ was one of the major types of “settlement fiction” written in nineteenth century Australia, another major narrative of settlement was that of migration. “Migration has been a significant feature of Australia’s European history (indeed it is a history of migration) and has marked its literature” (Bird, 35). Such novels anticipated the later ‘pioneer’ novels such as Katherine Susannah Prichard’s *The Pioneers* (1915). Elizabeth Webby points out how Charles Rowcroft’s *Tales of the Colonies* (1843), was extremely popular, and contained helpful hints to prospective colonists. Its portrait of the English settler Crab, forever complaining about the new land, forever threatening to return home, but never actually leaving, “introduces one of the most common nineteenth century Australian comic types, the unhappy new chum” (Webby, 2000: 52). A major writer of emigrant fiction, Alexander Harris, published *Settlers and Convicts, or Recollections of Sixteen Years’ Labour in the Australian Backwoods* (1847), and the novel *The Emigrant Family or the Story of an Australian Settler* (1849).

Delys Bird observes that the realism of these novels and the use in *Settlers and Convicts* of the narrative perspective of an ordinary working man would become a dominant strain of social realism in Australian literature. The narrator’s democratic ideology would also become familiar in the political orientation of later writing, of Joseph Furphy, Henry Lawson, and Miles Franklin. “*Settlers and Convicts* depicts the Australian character as honest, manly and hospitable. The ideal emigrant is a yeoman farmer, and the narrative is always engaged with social issues” (Bird, 36). Elizabeth Webby in her assessment of Harris’s fiction, points out that Harris was also one of the first to introduce the ‘white Australian-born bushman hero’. She also reminds us that by assuming a working-class persona in *Settlers and Convicts* (1847), Harris appeared to strongly endorse the

“Australian” legend; and that *Settlers and Convicts* was, “an early endorsement of Australia as the “working -man’s paradise” (Webby, 2000: 52-53).

Such novels, says K. Moffat, were “parables of success about migration and settlement in which hard-working heroes ‘make good’. Charles Rowcroft’s *Tales of the Colonies, or the Adventures of an Emigrant, Edited by a Late Colonial Magistrate* (1843), and Henry Kingsley’s *The Recollections of Geoffrey Hamlyn* (1859) are other examples of stories of migrants who realise their aspirations through hard work ((Moffat 8). *The Recollections of Geoffrey Hamlyn* (1859), by Henry Kingsley (brother of the English novelist Charles Kingsley), also tells the story of ‘successful emigrants’, and “inaugurated the colonial romance continued by Rolf Boldrewood and others” (435, *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*). Such early novels, thus introduced some of the enduring character types of Australian fiction and some of its major preoccupations, which continued to be significant till well into the twentieth century. They also reinforce popular legends of Australia as a land of promise for the hard working new emigrants.

Thomas (Alexander) Browne who wrote under the pseudonym ‘**Rolf Boldrewood**’, was another popular nineteenth century Australian novelist. His pseudonym was taken from his favourite author, Sir Walter Scott. According to the *Oxford Companion to Australian literature*, “from Scott, he inherited not only a pseudonym, but also a literary form. Most of his seventeen novels are romances, some with a pastoral setting” (102). Boldrewood’s *Robbery Under Arms* (1888), was a very popular novel that made its author famous not just in Australia, but also abroad. It tells the story of Dick Marston’s life as a bushranger. Critics praise the novel on several counts: according to Moffat, “Boldrewood’s *Robbery Under Arms* (1888) establishes a key trope in Australian fiction, the outlawed bushranger (Captain Starlight) as a dashing, romantic hero... In Dick Marston—straight-talking, colloquial, down-to-earth, loyal, courageous, and always ready for a ‘lark’—Boldrewood also captures the key attributes of a particular kind of Australian literary hero: the goodhearted larrikin” (Moffat 6-8). Elizabeth Webby remarks on the significance of this novel:

“While *Robbery Under Arms* no doubt became a bestseller largely because it is an exciting novel to read, its wider significance for Australian literature lay in Boldrewood’s pioneering use of a colloquial first person narrator, and hence of the Australian vernacular as a literary style. ... he did this a year or two before Mark Twain published *Huckleberry Finn* (1884). Because of its influence on Lawson, and through him on all those writers seen as following in the Lawson tradition, *Robbery Under Arms* must be seen as one of the seminal works of nineteenth century Australian literature” (Webby, 2000: 63-64).

Thus, these nineteenth novels not only narrated the story of the occupation, colonisation and settlement of Australia, but also created colonial character types and themes that are now seen as distinctively Australian.

2.4 Nineteenth Century Australian Novels by Women

From the earliest days of Australian settlement, women wrote about their experiences of life in the colony. Letters and journals recording their experiences were eagerly awaited in England. Delys Bird notes that though women colonists wrote sometimes of their increased sense of energy and

freedom in colonial environments where social expectations were often more relaxed than in England, their role in the colonies, however, remained defined in domestic terms, and women were “distanced both from the politically active centre of colonial life as well as from their former lives” (Bird, 40). Generally women wrote about the domestic issues that they faced as settlers.

Elizabeth Webby points out that while women writers’ contribution to nineteenth century Australian fiction was for many years, disregarded or dismissed as “colonial – inauthentic, imitative and overly concerned with romance” it is now established that the second novel to appear in Australia, *The Guardian* (1838), was written by a woman, Anna Maria Bunn. The novel was privately printed, but never offered for sale (Webby, 2000: 68).

Catherine Helen Spence, migrated to Australia from Scotland in 1839. Long believed to be Australia’s first woman novelist, she anonymously published her first two novels *Clara Morison* (1854) and *Tender and True: a Colonial Tale* (1856). Frederick Sinnett declared in 1856 that *Clara Morison* was “decidedly the best Australian novel we have met with”. It is definitely significant in the history of the Australian novel, being one of the earliest novels to be written by a woman. Spence herself described the novel as “more domestic than exciting” adding that “the domestic life represented in my tale is the sort of life I have led – the people are such as I have come in contact with” (*Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* 167). Elizabeth Webby remarks that the plot of this novel might suggest “an Antipodean rewriting of *Jane Eyre*”, but is actually more radical than Charlotte Bronte’s novel. While reflecting concerns over the class positions of the colonial lady, the novel “also endorses women’s capacity for both practical and intellectual work” (Webby, 2000: 69).

Louisa Atkinson (1834-1872), considered to be the first Australian-born woman novelist, gives detailed accounts of colonial life in novels such as *Gertrude the Emigrant: a Tale of Colonial Life* (1857) and *Cowanda, the Veteran’s Grant* (1859).



Louisa Atkinson (source: Wikimedia.org)

Caroline Leakey (1827-81), published *The Broad Arrow* in 1859, under the pseudonym ‘Oline Keese’. This is one of the few convict novels to have “a female convict as its hero, and is one of the first to be based on first-hand experience of a convict settlement” (*Oxford Companion to*

Australian Literature, 458). Elizabeth Webby notes about this novel: “*The Broad Arrow* has recently been re-read by feminist scholars in terms of its portrayal of a strong and passionate woman trapped within patriarchal social structures, which the penal system makes even more punitive and brutal than usual” (Webby, 2000: 62).

Among the women novelists writing towards the end of the nineteenth century, the most notable were Ada Cambridge, Jessie Couvreur (Tasma) and Rosa Praed. Cambridge’s novels such as *A Marked Man* (1890) and *The Three Miss Kings* (1891), are remarkable for the realistic and sometimes satirical views of colonial society, and her informed and often radical treatment of romantic love, marriage and parenting (*Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* 144). Elizabeth Webby points out how Ada Cambridge, in novels such as *A Marked Man* (1890), uses the “romance” form “to question and ironise the position of women, the institution of marriage, and frequently the conventions of romance itself” (Webby, 2000: 70).



Ada Cambridge (source: Wikipedia.org)

Tasma’s novels include *Uncle Piper of Piper’s Hill* (1889), believed to be her finest novel, *In her Earliest Youth* (1890), and *A Fiery Ordeal* (1897). Robert Dixon points out how in her novels of the 1890s, Tasma was increasingly drawn to melodrama as a vehicle for exploring contemporary sexual politics” (82). Novels such as *Policy and Passion* (1881) by Rosa Praed , *The Penance of Portia James* by Tasma (1891), and *An Australian Girl* (1890) by Catherine Martin , raise issues related to the position of women in colonial Australia, especially in married relationships. Praed also explores the occult through her novels such as *Affinities: a Romance of Today* (1885), *The Brother of the Shadow* (1886), and *The Soul of Countess Adrian* (1891).



Rosa Praed (Source:

Robert Dixon identifies a tradition of ‘domestic realism’ in nineteenth century Australian women’s fiction: Mary Theresa Vidal’s last novel *Bengala: or Some Time Ago* (1860), Catherine Helen Spence’s early novels including *Clara Morrison* (1854), *Tender and True* (1856) and *Mr. Hogarth’s Will* (1865) all belong to this tradition of domestic realism inspired by the writing of Jane Austen. While some Australian women writers such as Ada Cambridge continued to favour domestic realism, others such as Rosa Praed and Tasma, turned towards adventure / romance and melodrama (Dixon, 80-81).

It is clear that though women played very confined roles in colonial society in the nineteenth century, they created a space for themselves within the literary world through writing about the colonial world from a specifically female point of view. Elizabeth Webby writes: “As one sees from Desmond Byrne’s *Australian Writers* (1896), one of the earliest critical studies, in the 1890s, the Australian fiction canon was made up of equal numbers of male and female writers: Ada Cambridge, Rosa Pread, and “Tasma”, as well as Henry Kingsley, Marcus Clarke and Rolf Boldrewood “(Webby, 2000” 71). We will be studying the writing of nineteenth century women Australian novelists in detail, in the next unit.

2.4 LET US SUM UP

We began this unit, by considering the various factors such as the availability of reading material, the establishment of universities and lending libraries, the easy availability of newspapers and the creation of reading groups and literary societies that helped in the creation of a modern literary culture in nineteenth century Australia. We also looked at the beginnings of literary production in English, the rise and development of the novel, and specifically Australian forms of the novel such as the convict novel and emigrant fiction. We also took a brief look at the achievement of nineteenth century Australian women novelists.

2.5 GLOSSARY

1. Antipodes: the parts of the earth diametrically opposite, often used of Australia and New Zealand as contrasted to the western world.

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