

Life Lines to Life Stories

Some Publications about Women in Nineteenth-Century Australia

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ABSTRACT

This thesis consists of an introduction and six of my books, published between 1985 and 1999, on aspects of the history of women in nineteenth-century Australia. The books are *The Governesses: Letters from the Colonies 1862–1882* (1985); *A Colonial Woman: The Life and Times of Mary Braidwood Mowle 1827–1857* (1986); *Pen Portraits: Women Writers and Journalists in Nineteenth Century Australia* (1988); *Pioneer Writer: The Life of Louisa Atkinson, Novelist, Journalist, Naturalist* (1990); *Tasma: The Life of Jessie Couvreur* (1994); and *Rosa! Rosa! A Life of Rosa Praed, Novelist and Spiritualist* (1999).

At the time they were published each of these books either dealt with a new subject or presented a new approach to a subject. Collectively they represent a body of work that has expanded knowledge of women's lives and writing in nineteenth-century Australia. Although not consciously planned as a sequence at the outset, these books developed as a result of the influence on my thinking of the themes that emerged in Australian social and cultural historical writing during this period. The books also represent a development in my own work from the earlier more documentary-based books on letters and diaries to the interpretive challenge of biographical writing and the weaving of private lives with public achievements.

These books make up a cohesive, cumulative body of work. Individually and as a whole, they make an original contribution to knowledge of the lives and achievements of women in nineteenth-century Australia. They received critical praise at the time of publication and have led to renewed interest and further research on the subjects they cover. My own knowledge and expertise has developed as a result of researching and writing them.

The Governesses was not only the first full-length study of a particular group of letters but it also documented aspects of the lives of governesses in Australia, a little researched subject to that time. *A Colonial Woman*, based on a previously unpublished and virtually unknown diary, pointed to the importance of 'ordinary' lives in presenting an enriched view of the past.

Pen Portraits documented the early history of women journalists in Australia, a previously neglected subject. Three of the women I included in *Pen Portraits*, Louisa Atkinson, Tasma and Rosa Praed, the first two of whom were pioneer women journalists as well as novelists, became the subjects of my full-length biographies.

In my biographies of women writers, *Pioneer Writer*, *Tasma*, and *Rosa! Rosa!*, I recorded and interpreted the lives of these important writers placing them in the context of Australian cultural history as women who negotiated gender barriers and recorded this world in their fiction. My books on Louisa Atkinson and Tasma

were the first full-length biographies of these significant but largely forgotten nineteenth-century women writers, while my biography of Rosa Praed was the first for more than fifty years. Each introduced original research that changed perceptions of the women's lives and consequently of attitudes to their creative work. Each provided information essential for further research on their historical significance and literary achievements. Each involved extensive research that led to informed interpretation allowing insightful surmises essential to quality biography.

STATEMENT

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

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Copies of Published Books

- The Governesses: Letters from the Colonies 1862–1882*
- A Colonial Woman: The Life and Times of Mary Braidwood Mowle*
1827–1857
- Pen Portraits: Women Writers and Journalists in Nineteenth*
Century Australia
- Pioneer Writer: The Life of Louisa Atkinson, Novelist, Journalist,*
Naturalist
- Tasma: The Life of Jessie Couvreur*
- Rosa! Rosa! A Life of Rosa Praed, Novelist and Spiritualist*

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INTRODUCTION

Preamble

Since 1985 I have published eight books on aspects of women's lives in nineteenth-century Australia. My initial interest was in women's letters and diaries, a major but relatively untapped primary source on women's lives. To the researcher these 'life lines' provide a unique insight into private worlds and into the social and cultural milieu in which the women lived. To the writers they could be important as avenues of self-discovery and ways of writing their own stories. From this autobiographical aspect of women's letters and diaries my interest expanded to the 'life stories' of individual women and the writing of the biographies of important but largely forgotten Australian nineteenth-century women writers. Researching each of my books has been an absorbing journey of discovery through documentary sources and the physical environment in which the subjects lived to the interpretive challenge of weaving private lives with public achievements. In writing my books I have endeavoured to convey this sense of unfolding a new world to readers.

In the early 1980s when I began researching and writing books on women in nineteenth-century Australia (after a long career as a journalist and editor), my choice of subjects was influenced by the developing academic interest in the importance of the lives of women. As Teo and White observe in *Cultural History in Australia*, from the late 1950s there has been 'a gradual shift of attention from political and social elites to various social groups which had been disadvantaged in one way or another'. By the end of the 1970s, 'the three inescapable categories of historical analysis were posited as class, gender and race'.¹ Although I came to research and writing as an independent scholar, I was influenced by this serendipitous wave of interest in gender writing. I believed that researching and writing the hitherto largely unrecorded private world of women's lives would add a dimension often missing in previous historical writing and had the potential to

engage the interest of publishers and readers in this silence. My intention coincided with Susan Magarey's statement in her introduction to *Writing Lives: Feminist Biography and Autobiography* that the writers of women's lives aimed 'to recover the lives and work of individual women from the resounding silence in the established historical record, and in doing so to rewrite the histories of the culture in which those women lived'.²

My first books were based on women's letters and diaries, a major and largely untapped primary source on women's lives. These documents provided through their immediacy and directness a unique insight into private worlds but also into the social and cultural setting in which the women lived. To me they raised the possibility of writing 'ordinary' women into history, broadening and enriching interpretations of colonial life beyond those official and public records that had been the major sources for much historical writing. Apart from the richness of the information contained in them, letters and diaries were important to women as avenues of self-discovery and ways of writing their own stories. This autobiographical aspect of women's letters and diaries and their great value as a record of their lives against which other information could be measured led me to the next phase of my research and writing: the more complex challenge of writing the biographies of individual women writers. Letters and diaries were one source for these biographies but they had to be evaluated in a different way, not primarily as records from which social conclusions could be drawn but as an element in self-portrayal. They constituted just one ingredient in the intricate mass of material from which a biography could emerge.

Since I began researching my first book, I have followed two related strands in my writing about aspects of the history of women in nineteenth-century Australia. The first strand is women's life writing which led to the publication of *The Governesses: Letters from the Colonies 1862-82*; *A Colonial Woman: The Life and Times of Mary Braidwood Mowle 1827-1857*; *Life Lines: Women's Letters and Diaries 1788-1840* (with Dale Spender) and *Tasma's Diaries: The Diaries of Jessie Couvreur with Another by Her Young Sister, Edith Huybers*. The second strand comprises biographies of women writers. The publications that represent

this facet of my research are *Pen Portraits: Women Writers and Journalists in Nineteenth Century Australia*; *Pioneer Writer: The Life of Louisa Atkinson, Novelist, Journalist, Naturalist*; *Tasma: The Life of Jessie Couvreur* and *Rosa! Rosa! A Life of Rosa Praed, Novelist and Spiritualist*.

At the time each of these books was published, it either dealt with a new subject in a way that expanded knowledge and avenues of research or presented a new approach to a subject already seemingly familiar. When I began researching colonial women's letters and diaries, a number of books that became the basis of the academic field of Australian women's studies had been published. The first of these appeared at about the time of International Women's Year 1975. They included most notably Anne Summers' *Damned Whores and God's Police* (1975), Beverley Kingston's *My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Ann* (1975) and Miriam Dixson's *The Real Matilda* (1976). These initial works were followed by a number of collections of documents and bibliographies.³ A few books presenting women's letters and diaries, for example, *The Letters of Rachel Henning* (1979), *The Diaries of Ethel Turner* (1979), and *Annabelle Boswell's Journal* (1981), had been published but this was a field that had not been mined to any great extent.

My first book, *The Governesses*, based on the letters of governesses who migrated from Britain in the 1860s and 1870s under the auspices of the Female Middle Class Emigration Society, was the first and remains the only full-length book based on this particular group of letters. I centred it not only on the relatively untouched field of women's letters but on a little-researched subject – the life of governesses. It was also unusual in comparing the experiences of governesses who migrated to Australia with those who migrated to South Africa and New Zealand and a few who went to India or Russia. This transnational approach has been identified recently by Ann Curthoys as a desirable development for historical research.⁴

My next book, *A Colonial Woman*, based on the previously unpublished and almost unknown nineteenth-century diaries of Mary Braidwood Mowle, was an early example of what has been referred to as the 'democratisation of history ...

with attention widening to include the daily life of ordinary people'.⁵ Mary Mowle's recording of the mundane events that filled ordinary lives made it possible for me to re-create many aspects of colonial family life. Among these are the many responsibilities of women, from childcare and household tasks to teaching young children, as well as their roles, both those self-imposed and those dictated by social pressures, in setting and upholding class and community standards, in social interaction and entertainment, and in reinforcing intellectual and cultural standards particularly through reading and music. Mary Mowle's diaries alerted me to several other aspects of women's lives not only by what she writes but by what she does not include. These silences raise questions on aspects of women's lives sometimes beyond the reach of the researcher. They invite speculation and insightful surmises, for instance, on attitudes to frequent pregnancies and on the limited scope of women's education indicated, for instance, by the absence of any comment on political events.

My other book in this genre, *Life Lines*, which I edited with Dale Spender, was unusual in concentrating on letters and diaries written in the early decades of European settlement. Its emphasis was on the work women contributed, but it also raised the importance of letter- and diary-writing as a literary form and as an element in the process of self-realisation.

I began my biographical writing with a book comprising biographies of nearly one hundred early Australian women writers and journalists. When this book, *Pen Portraits*, was published in 1988, the history of journalism in Australia and particularly the emergence of the first women journalists was recognised as an innovative field of research. My initial interest in this subject came from my own experience as a journalist, at a time when it was still difficult for women to enter the profession and many were restricted to work on the women's pages. Women journalists, however, were paid at the same rate as men on the same grading, this at a time when women teachers and public servants, for instance, were paid only a percentage of the comparable male wage. This unusual degree of financial equity combined with invisible but widely accepted gender restrictions, made me curious about the beginning of women's employment as journalists in this country.

Pen Portraits was a pioneering study of the first women journalists not only in revealing the routes and methods by which women first began writing for newspapers but in recording the impressive careers of many early women journalists whose work was unknown previously. The book proved to be an initial step towards my full-length biographies of three women writers, Louisa Atkinson, Tasma (Jessie Couvreur) and Rosa Praed, the first two of whom were pioneer women journalists as well as novelists. My books on Louisa Atkinson and Jessie Couvreur were the first full-length biographies of these significant but largely forgotten writers while Rosa Praed, although better known and the subject of more detailed analysis regarding the gender, racial, historical and social aspects of her writing, had not been the subject of a full-length biography since the publication of Colin Roderick's *In Mortal Bondage: The Strange Life of Rosa Praed*, more than fifty years before.

In each of my biographies, I introduced new material that changed previous perceptions of the lives of the subjects and consequently of attitudes to their creative work. For example, in my research on Louisa Atkinson I unearthed previously unknown facts regarding her family life which were necessary for a full appreciation of her novels. I discovered a previously unknown serial novel written by Tasma and my discovery of detailed records of Tasma's appointment and work as a London *Times* foreign correspondent in Brussels led me to reappraise the importance of this aspect of her achievements. My portrayal of Rosa Praed was informed by extensive research on several aspects of her life previously not well documented. As a result I was able to present a more balanced and accurate portrait of her complex psychological and spiritual journey. I regard recording the lives of these writers as intrinsically important to Australian cultural history but also important in providing information for further research on their historical significance and literary achievements.

At the time of publication, each of these biographies made new and important contributions to the recording of women's lives. They won considerable critical praise from reviewers expert in the subject. Several commented on the

development of my expertise culminating in the publication of *Rosa! Rosa!* Joy Hooton noted this development in my work:

[Patricia Clarke] has uncovered the lives and work of such previously little known writers as Louisa Atkinson and Tasma as well as those of women diarists, journalists and letter writers in general. There is no doubt that our knowledge of the culture of the [nineteenth] century and the early years of [the twentieth] has been immeasurably enriched by her previous research, but this present biography [*Rosa! Rosa!*] is, I suggest, her crowning achievement so far.⁶

Elizabeth Lawson commented that *Rosa! Rosa!* was ‘the latest and most ambitious of Clarke’s important books of Australian colonial biography’.⁷

The general problem, common to all biographers, is the voice the biographer adopts. Particularly since the publication of Brian Matthews’ *Louisa*, in 1987, many biographers have experimented with innovative approaches. Brian Matthews adopted an alternative voice that allowed him ‘to actively and explicitly engage with problems and processes associated with writing biography’.⁸ Other approaches included Julia Blackburn’s eventual identification of herself with Daisy Bates in her biography, *Daisy Bates in the Desert* (1995) and Anna Lanyon’s focus on her research journey in *Malinche’s Conquest* (1999). More recently Julie Marcus in *The Indomitable Miss Pink* (2001) introduced oral reminiscences to meld the myth that developed around Olive Pink with more prosaic sources. After using a conventional approach in *Pioneer Writer*, I experimented in *Tasma* by sharing research achievements with the reader. There was a mixed response from reviewers. Jenna Mead wrote: ‘Clarke writes herself and her practice into the narrative: this is no disembodied voice announcing the facts of history. In my view...this decision is a good one.’⁹ Michael Ackland, however, found the presence of the biographer ‘intrusive’.¹⁰ In my biography of Rosa Praed, although it was tempting to regard the search through the labyrinth of her spatial and psychic journey as an author’s odyssey, I reverted to the more conventional role of impersonal recorder and interpreter. While this may seem a superficially simple approach it requires an intricate meshing of facts, gathered from many sources and consistently evaluated. These facts must be enriched by an

interpretation of the subject's actions and attitudes, garnered through the evaluation and interlocking of evidence from sources that may range from the most elusive and obscure nuances to the most concrete details. In this way the character of the subject unfolds. Arguably writing the biography of an author is even more intricately complicated than that of other individuals, whose achievements are in other fields, as all aspects of an author's life flow into the creative process.

Publications Submitted

I am submitting six books written over a period of about fifteen years for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (by Publication). They are:

The Governesses: Letters from the Colonies 1862–1882, Hutchinson, Melbourne, Vic., 1985.

New edition, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, NSW, 1989.

A Colonial Woman: The Life and Times of Mary Braidwood Mowle 1827–1857, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, NSW, 1986.

Reprinted twice in 1987.

New edition, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, NSW, 1991.

New edition, Eden Killer Whale Museum, Eden, NSW, 2001.

Pen Portraits: Women Writers and Journalists in Nineteenth Century Australia, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, NSW, 1988.

Overseas edition, Pandora, London, 1988.

Pioneer Writer: The Life of Louisa Atkinson, Novelist, Journalist, Naturalist, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, NSW, 1990.

Tasma: The Life of Jessie Couvreur, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW, 1994.

Rosa! Rosa! A Life of Rosa Praed, Novelist and Spiritualist, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Vic., 1999.

I am not submitting two other books in the same genre as they are edited works. They are *Life Lines: Australian Women's Letters and Diaries 1788–1840*, edited by Patricia Clarke and Dale Spender (Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, 1992, new edition, 1996) and *Tasma's Diaries with Another by Her Young Sister Edith Huybers*, edited by Patricia Clarke (Mulini Press, Canberra, ACT, 1995).

At the time they were published each of the books submitted either dealt with a new subject or presented a new approach to a subject. Collectively they represent a body of work that has expanded knowledge of women's lives and writing in nineteenth-century Australia. The books also represent a development in my own work from the more documentary based books of letters and diaries to the interpretative challenge of biographical writing and the weaving of private lives with public achievements.

Although not planned as a sequence at the outset, these books developed as a result of the influence on my thinking of the themes that emerged in Australian social and cultural historical writing during this period. Apart from general reading, my interest in these themes was directed specifically in several ways. From 1987 to 2000 I was editor of the *Canberra Historical Journal* which involved responsibility for selecting books for review, approaching suitable reviewers and editing reviews. This intimate involvement with books on historical subjects as they were published extended my knowledge of the trends in Australian historical writing and, because of my own interests, specifically in social, cultural and women's history. Additionally from 1985 I reviewed hundreds of books for the literary pages of the *Canberra Times* and was regarded by successive literary editors, Peter Fuller and Robert Hefner, as a preferred reviewer of books in the fields of women's history and biography. I reviewed books of women's autobiographical writing and books on such subjects as convict women, women's letters and diaries, social themes such as colonial marriage, biographical anthologies and many biographies of women writers and activists from Ada

Cambridge and Henry Handel Richardson to Alice Henry, Rose Scott, Maybanke Anderson and Jean Devanny.

My books, apart from the first and last, were published by Allen & Unwin whose Australian publisher in the 1980s and early 1990s, John Iremonger, had an influence on the direction of my writing. While always aware of the need to engage the interest of non-specialist readers, he was conversant with the developing trends in academic scholarship, in which he was often involved as a commissioning editor and publisher. He was always eager to press authors to extend into new fields or new approaches and discussions with him enriched and enlightened my decisions on topics to research and on which to write. Underlying my decisions was the integrity of my choice of subject in the light of current themes and trends in historical and biographical writing, balanced by the challenge to engage a general readership in the subject and its presentation. As an indication of my judgment in this regard, Allen & Unwin commissioned me to write a number of readers' reports on authors' manuscripts in my field of expertise.

Discussion of Individual Books

The Governesses: Letters from the Colonies 1862–1882 (1985)

The Governesses was the first full-length book on the letters written by governesses who migrated from Britain in the 1860s and 1870s under the auspices of the Female Middle Class Emigration Society and remains the only such full-length study. Apart from the significance of the letters, governesses themselves were little researched, more familiar as fictional characters than as documented women. They have been described as one of the 'most elusive figures in the whole of Australian history'.¹¹ Previous work was largely confined to a chapter, 'Feminism and Female Emigration 1861-1886', in A. James Hammerton's *Emigrant Gentlewomen: Genteel Poverty and Female Emigration 1830-1914*, published in 1979, and a chapter, 'Ladies and Mushrooms 1867-72', in Lucy

Frost's *No Place for a Nervous Lady: Voices from the Australian Bush*, published in 1984. I became aware of the letters while researching the work available in nineteenth-century Australia to women who through financial necessity or from a desire to develop a career needed to earn a living. This was a subject of academic interest at that time, for example, Katrina Alford's *Production or Reproduction?: An Economic History of Women in Australia 1788-1850* (1984) and *Double Time: Women in Victoria, 150 Years*, edited by Marilyn Lake and Farley Kelly (1985). After considering a more general book, I realised that a work based on these particular letters would be more innovative and at the same time could illuminate some aspects of the employment of women in an interesting and informative way.

The letters existed because the educated, genteel women, whose migration was arranged by the Female Middle Class Emigration Society, were so conscious of their class status they were prepared to borrow money for their fares rather than travel free under government-sponsored migration schemes, available to those classified in such occupations as servants or seamstresses. When they repaid the money lent to them, they wrote to the Society, some little more than polite notes, others letters that were informative about colonial conditions and their personal circumstances, including work opportunities and, implicitly, the realities of marriage opportunities. Their letters were preserved in letter-books in the Fawcett Library, London, and became available in the National Library of Australia under the Australian Joint Copying Project. Reading them, I believed that they had the potential to unfold some aspects of the migrant experience and the lives of working women in the nineteenth century, for example, the opportunities open to women seeking employment and the conditions under which they were employed. In addition their letters were valuable social documents containing comments on colonial characteristics and attitudes. The best of the letters contained immediate impressions of people, places and society, seen through the eyes of a particular type and class of British woman of the era who experienced migration at a time when knowledge of life in the colonies was often superficial.

Setting the letters in their social and economic context and documenting the lives of the women required considerable research in such sources as government

reports on immigration, education and employment conditions, in some cases covering not only the Australian colonies but South Africa and New Zealand, as well as contemporary newspapers, local histories, directories and gazetteers, shipping records and birth, marriage and death records. Through these records I also succeeded in tracing the lives of several governesses after their letters to the Society ceased. Information on subsequent employment, for instance, was an indicator of the opportunities available and of individual levels of adjustment while information on marriages was a pointer to marriage opportunities and subsequent socio-economic status.

The Governesses was reviewed in most major Australian newspapers, periodicals and historical journals and in several English newspapers and periodicals and was also the subject of newspaper features and radio and television programs. It was adapted for radio and broadcast on ABC National.¹² A script was prepared for a television series and a British film company took a film option, although neither the TV series nor the film eventuated.¹³ I believe this widespread popular attention indicated there was a previously unsatisfied demand among general readers with an interest in history for documented but accessible historical writing and on new kinds of subjects.

Reviewers regarded *The Governesses* as an important contribution both to general historical knowledge of the period and to the history of a little written-about subject. The overall tenor of reviews in general readership outlets is typified by Nancy Keesing's comment that '[i]t is a rare pleasure to read a book that is excellent in every way: research, writing, balance, interpretation'.¹⁴ Several reviewers noted that it dealt with 'hitherto invisible women' (*Advertiser*, 31 August 1985), and 'a group previously unrecorded' (*Sunday Times*, 7 January 1990). English reviewers tended to emphasise the exotic aspects of the book, as indicated by these headings:

'The cruel fate of those genteel girls', (*Standard*, 27 March 1985)

'Stiff upper lips in the outback', Mary Warnock, (*Sunday Telegraph*, 7 April 1985)

'Promised Lands', Jeremy Lewis, (*New Society*, 11 April 1985)

‘Mild colonial girls’, (*Manchester Guardian*, 10 April 1985)

‘Unfortunate spinsters down under’, Margaret FitzHerbert, (*The Spectator*, 22 June 1985)

Reviews in Australian scholarly journals noted the extensive research in documenting social and economic conditions. A. James Hammerton wrote in *Historical Studies*:

In each case the women’s letters are reproduced in context with some pertinent social and political colonial trends. For example, the evaporation of Australian opportunities for governesses in the cities, which led to personal hardships and forced the majority to seek positions in the country, is presented against a background of economic depression and the growth of government schools. Clarke has been assiduous in attempting to trace the life histories of the emigrants beyond the few letters sent back to the society. ... Clarke’s research adds a useful dimension to the letters which other scholars will appreciate. There is also a helpful listing of all correspondents, with destinations and dates of writing, in the appendix.¹⁵

In the *Canberra Historical Journal*, where *The Governesses* was reviewed with *Ella Norman: or, A Woman’s Perils*, a reprint of a nineteenth-century novel about a woman who becomes a governess,¹⁶ Stephen Payne wrote:

The book is valuable for two reasons. First, it corrects the lack of attention given to governesses by Australian historians ... Second, their letters provide observations, from a fresh perspective, on many of the day-to-day details of life, dress and customs of the time.¹⁷

Marion Amies wrote in the *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*: ‘Clarke has meshed these [letters] with other contemporary sources to place the women’s lives in their economic and social contexts’.¹⁸

Since its publication, *The Governesses* has been cited in works on education, social history and female migration. Examples include: Marjorie Theobald’s *Knowing Women: Origins of Women’s Education in Nineteenth-Century Australia* (1995); Penny Russell’s *A Wish of Distinction: Colonial Gentility and Femininity* (1994); Noelene Kyle’s *We Should’ve Listened to Grandma: Women and Family*

History (1988) and Jan Gothard's *Blue China: Single Female Migration to Colonial Australia* (2001). It has been cited also in articles that explore particular aspects of the experience of governesses, for example: 'The Victorian Governess and Colonial Ideals of Womanhood' by Marion Amies¹⁹ and 'The Space of Spinsterhood: Letters to the Female Middle Class Emigration Society 1862-1882' by Kerryn Goldsworthy.²⁰ *The Governesses* was used as a text in a course on 'Women Travellers and Settlers in the Nineteenth Century'²¹ and in 2001 the United States Gale Group purchased the first chapter, 'Genteel Emigrants', with its overview of the migration of female, educated migrants, for publication in their series, *Nineteenth Century Literature Criticism* (Vol. 104, 2001).

Several works published recently, although confined to the experiences of governesses in Britain, have included material from *The Governesses*. The authors of *The Governess: An Anthology* state that how the women fared in the colonies is 'ably addressed by Patricia Clarke in *The Governesses*'.²² Kathryn Hughes in *The Victorian Governess* wrote that the fate of FMCES governesses had been told 'in two excellent books, Patricia Clarke's *The Governesses* and A. James Hammerton's *Emigrant Gentlewomen*'.²³

A Colonial Woman: The Life and Times of Mary Braidwood Mowle 1827–1857 (1986)

I based *A Colonial Woman*, published in 1986, on the previously unpublished and virtually unknown diaries of Mary Braidwood Mowle, written at the Limestone Plains (Canberra) in 1850-51 and at Eden, New South Wales, between 1853 and 1855. It was described then as 'part of that vital process of writing women into the pages of Australian history' and a 'valuable addition' to records of Australian women in colonial times.²⁴ The book illuminated several aspects of life in mid-nineteenth-century Australia, not only by what Mary Mowle wrote in her diaries but by what Teo and White describe as 'the absences in a text: what it doesn't say, the absent figures'.²⁵ As well as these silences, such as those imposed by restrictions in the social upbringing and education of colonial women, the diaries

reveal the sheer volume and scope of women's domestic and other work such as teaching, the social role they assumed in maintaining standards of behavior, the threat to children of epidemic illnesses and the disasters of farming and its meagre returns. They provide evidence of social interaction and the growth of communities as well as records of such activities as church-going, reading, piano playing, horse racing, balls and dances. As Katie Holmes wrote of women's diaries: '[they] bring into focus the dailiness of life and challenge the usual criteria of historical significance'.²⁶ Mary Mowle's diaries have the added interest of being written by a woman in an ambivalent social position, brought up to wealth but fallen on hard times.

A Colonial Woman included extensive background material on people, places, social customs and natural events requiring much investigation in official and private sources. I researched in official records in the archives offices and manuscripts libraries of several states, in shipping records and reports of voyages, bench books of Courts of Petty Sessions, Colonial Secretary's correspondence, New South Wales and Tasmanian land grants, birth, death and marriage records, wills, Government Gazettes and the Blue Books of several colonies. I sought information through local historical societies and private records including correspondence and other records of the Mowle family and letters and documents in the papers of the Maddrell, Bunn, Whittakers, Rawson, Archer and Walker families and of Reverend J. D. Lang and the records of the Twofold Bay Pastoral Association. I also searched in many newspapers, parish registers and other local records to identify people and places and in nineteenth-century books of reference to trace obscure books and pieces of music mentioned in the diaries. As a result of this research *A Colonial Woman* is regarded as an important local history resource.²⁷

Patricia Grimshaw in *Australian Society*, after noting that women's records were 'critical for understanding the traditions of our past, and their survival in our present', wrote:

[Mary Mowle's] diary, along with many other sources, constitutes an entry into the analysis of the history of sentiment and manners, of childhood and marriage, of family networks and neighbourly ties. Through assiduous detective work on pioneering family records, Patricia Clarke has made a very good job out of presenting Mary Mowle's somewhat slender diary, in a format which enriches our understanding of the woman's social world.²⁸

Other reviewers included Farley Kelly who wrote in the *Victorian Historical Journal* that the research was 'impressive': 'A gallery of characters unfold in [Patricia Clarke's] narrative, and she writes with admirable clarity and ease.'²⁹ Lucy Frost wrote in the *Journal of Australian Studies*: 'The research has been carried out with admirable thoroughness, and is used to fill in the details of Mary Mowle's life beyond the three surviving diaries.'³⁰

A Colonial Woman has been cited in numerous local histories of south-eastern New South Wales and the ACT, for example, *Braidwood, Dear Braidwood: A History of Braidwood and District* (Netta Ellis, 1989); *A History of Australia's Capital, Canberra* (Esther Davies et al., 1990); *A Social and Cultural History of Medicine in New South Wales: The Southern Tablelands and Cooma Monaro* (A. J. Proust, 1999) and *The Lonely Pioneer: William Bunn, Diarist, 1830-1901* (Mary Anne Bunn, 2002). Since *A Colonial Woman* was first published I have been asked to speak frequently on this topic, for example, to launch Heritage Week at Braidwood on 2 May 1992, to speak at a Centenary of Federation celebration at Eden on 1 January 2001 and recently to speak at a National Women's History Month Seminar (22 March 2003) on 'Writing an "Ordinary" Woman into History'. In exploring this topic I used Mary Mowle's diaries to illustrate the importance of 'ordinary' lives in presenting an enriched view of life in the past. Diaries such as that of Mary Braidwood Mowle enable writing about the past to embrace such topics as the impact of social conventions, the subtle perceptions of class, the routine of household work, standards of dress, the rearing of children and the treatment of illness. They also open up other fields of inquiry through what is unwritten. These silences may indicate subjects that women of conventional upbringing regarded as taboo subjects, such as the incidence of frequent pregnancies and marital relationships, as well as those that might be

ignored as a result of educational and social conditioning, such as political questions.

Pen Portraits: Women Writers and Journalists in Nineteenth-Century Australia (1988)

When I began researching *Pen Portraits* the history of journalism in Australia was a neglected subject. There were a few books of journalists' reminiscences underpinned by R. B. Walker's *The Newspaper Press in New South Wales 1803-1920* (1976), Rod Kirkpatrick's history of Queensland regional newspapers, *Sworn to no Master* (1984) and Clem Lloyd's history of the Australian Journalists' Association, *Profession Journalist* (1985). Nothing had appeared on the history of women journalists in general although there had been a few biographies of women who were journalists: Susan Magarey's *Unbridling the Tongues of Women* (1986), a biography of Catherine Helen Spence, electoral reformer and feminist but also a pioneer woman journalist, and Brian Matthews' *Louisa* (1987), a biography of pioneer woman journalist and proprietor of *The Dawn*, Louisa Lawson. A few theses had touched on related subjects, for example, Farley Kelly's 'The woman question in Melbourne 1880-1914'³¹ and Maya Tucker's 'The emergence and character of women's magazines in Australia 1880-1944'.³² In general, however, the history of Australian women's journalism was correctly described as a 'shamefully neglected'³³ subject.

Pen Portraits was published during the 1988 bi-centenary, one of a great number of books in what was described by Susan Sheridan in *Australian Literary Studies* as 'an unprecedented burst' of publication on Australian women, particularly the writing of nineteenth-century women. She noted Dale Spender's initiation of the Penguin Australian Women's Library and the Pandora Australian Literary Heritage series and speculated whether the 'onset of interest in this long-neglected field' could be attributed to 'publishers' participation in the bicentennial patriotic delirium, feminist entrepreneurship or enlightened demand on the part of readers who have so far seemed complacently or aggressively satisfied with a male

separatist tradition of Ozlit'.³⁴ *Pen Portraits* was part of this publishing phenomenon complementing and adding to the range of such publications as Debra Adelaide's *A Bright and Fiery Troop: Australian Women Writers of the Nineteenth Century*; Dale Spender's *Writing a New World: Two Centuries of Australian Women Writers*; Kay Schaffer's *Women and the Bush: Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition*; and Heather Radi's *200 Australian Women: A Redress Anthology*.

Although I initially planned *Pen Portraits* as a book on women journalists in the nineteenth century, the practice of many women in writing both factual articles and fiction made it inevitable that it would develop into a book about women writers as well as journalists. The route by which several women writers of fiction moved into writing non-fiction pieces, sometimes long-running series, as in the case of Louisa Atkinson's 'A Voice from the Country' (1860-70), published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Sydney Mail*, and Jessie Lloyd's 'The Silverleaf Papers' (1881-83), published in the *Illustrated Sydney News*, became an important theme. *Pen Portraits* includes chapters on these forerunners of women journalists and on the beginning of permanent journalistic employment for women as women's pages became more common with the growth of advertising. It also describes the restrictive effect of the proliferation of these 'social' pages on the scope of writing by women journalists, and it discusses pioneering women's publications, for example, Louisa Lawson's *The Dawn* and Maybanke Wolstenholme's *Woman's Voice*.

Several reviewers of *Pen Portraits* remarked on the detective work involved in discovering the existence and work of women journalists and writers for newspapers particularly as many women wrote anonymously or under pseudonyms. Apart from the sources indicated in research for previous books, *Pen Portraits* involved me in considerable research in nineteenth-century newspapers and periodicals. I also searched the administrative files of newspapers, where they still existed, for instance, archives held by the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and the remaining records of the Melbourne *Age* and *Argus* held in the La Trobe Library. I contacted editors and management of many country newspapers and located and

contacted descendants of many early women journalists. Through this personal contact with descendants I was able, in some cases, to expand a passing reference to a name in a newspaper or periodical, often the sole indication of the existence of a woman freelance contributor or journalist, into a documented and often illustrated report of the career of a previously unknown early female journalist.

Reviewers noted the pioneering nature of *Pen Portraits* and its value as a source for future studies. For example, Susan Sheridan wrote in *Australian Literary Studies*:

A crucial and still under-used source of such historical detail is journalism. Patricia Clarke's study of women writers and journalists in nineteenth-century Australia, *Pen Portraits*, provides a valuable guide to such sources. But this is only a sideline to its principal achievement of introducing a small army of women writers, many of whom, as journalists, have never shown up in strictly literary surveys. Journalism in that period was a major site of cultural debate and social regulation, and one of the few public spaces in which women could speak (though it was often anonymously or under pseudonyms). Clarke's book contains a wealth of information about the industry and the culture it served, as well as portraits of individuals promised by its title: it should prove a valuable guide to further studies in nineteenth-century Australian culture.³⁵

Elizabeth Webby wrote in *Australian Book Review*:

Fittingly, the chapters, dealing with women journalists are the real strength of this book, throwing up dozens of fascinating and until now, largely unknown characters. One of the highlights, for me, was Chapter 5 'Eccentric Entrepreneurs', dealing with women who were the first to publish magazines in Australia...

Patricia Clarke has provided many valuable leads to be followed up, though I doubt that future workers will be able to discover many more pictures. The plentiful illustrations are another striking feature of this book.³⁶

Pen Portraits was also reviewed in England, Ireland and the United States (*Antipodes: A North American Journal of Australian Literature*, Winter 1989) and in specialist media publications in Australia. Dorothy Braxton described the book

in *The Journalist* as ‘an extraordinary documentation of women who not only had the talent and the desire to write for monetary gain as well as personal satisfaction but also had the courage to try to compete in a male-dominated profession’.³⁷ In *Media Information Australia* Henry Mayer described it as ‘a generously illustrated, fascinating work based on endless detective work...The book is based on primary sources and is very well researched.’³⁸

Pen Portraits has been cited in books published in this field, for example, in Susan Sheridan’s *Along the Faultlines: Sex, Race and Nation in Australian Women’s Writing 1880s–1930s* (1995); Sharyn Pearce’s *Shameless Scribblers: Australian Women’s Journalism 1880-1995* (1998); her article “‘The Best Career is Matrimony’: First Wave Journalism and the “Australian Girl””, *Hecate*, (1992); Rod Kirkpatrick’s *Country Conscience: A History of the New South Wales Provincial Press, 1841-1995* (2000) and Patrick Morgan’s *Folie à deux: William and Caroline Dexter in Colonial Australia* (1999). I have been contacted by post-graduate students researching Caroline Dexter, joint founder of a pioneer periodical, and Mrs Carl Fischer, music critic and early journalist, regarding information that I discovered for *Pen Portraits*.³⁹

Pioneer Writer: The Life of Louisa Atkinson, Novelist, Journalist, Naturalist (1990)

My biography of Louisa Atkinson, *Pioneer Writer*, contained a great deal of new material on Atkinson’s life and achievements in her roles as the first Australian-born woman novelist, a noted naturalist and as a writer for the press on nature and the environment. It also contains the first complete list of her articles on nature subjects. When I began researching Louisa Atkinson for *Pen Portraits*, the material about her was scanty. She was mentioned in Miller and Macartney (1956)⁴⁰ but not in Green (1984)⁴¹ and the 1988 *The New Literary History of Australia* contained only a six-word phrase about her.⁴² The most extensive information about her life and achievements was in an article by Margaret Swann, ‘Mrs Meredith and Miss Atkinson’, published sixty years before.⁴³ Other material

included a few pages in Winifrid Birkett's chapter in *The Peaceful Army: A Memorial to the Pioneer Women of Australia 1788-1935*, published in 1938, Miles Franklin's appraisal, 'First Novel by a Native Born' in *Laughter, Not for a Cage* (1956), and a short foreword by Lionel Gilbert in a selection of Louisa Atkinson's articles, *Excursions from Berrima and a trip to Manaro [sic] and Molonglo in the 1870s*, published in 1980.

In 1978 Mulini Press re-published a selection of Louisa Atkinson's nature articles as *A Voice from the Country* and in 1983 published her serial, *Tom Hellicar's Children*, in book form. In 1980 Marcie Muir published a small book on Louisa's mother Charlotte Barton, *A Mother's Offering to her Children*, establishing that Barton was the author of the first children's book published in Australia.⁴⁴ In the popular writing field, Louisa Atkinson was one of twelve women Susanna de Vries-Evans featured in *Pioneer Women, Pioneer Land: Yesterday's Tall Poppies* published in 1987.⁴⁵ This account claimed to be the 'most complete biography yet written' but contained statements and assumptions that proved incorrect when I researched her life more fully. Between my limited research for *Pen Portraits* and my biography, *Pioneer Writer*, published in 1990, Elizabeth Lawson's chapter, 'Louisa Atkinson, Naturalist and Novelist', appeared in Debra Adelaide's *A Bright and Fiery Troop* (1988) and she published an occasional paper on Louisa Atkinson's writing on Aboriginal people, *Louisa Atkinson: The Distant Sound of Native Voices*.⁴⁶ Elizabeth Webby included two of Louisa Atkinson's nature articles in her 'Travelling' section of *Colonial Voices*, published in 1989.⁴⁷ When my biography was published, however, Elizabeth Morrison wrote that Louisa Atkinson was 'until now and outside specialised research circles barely known'.⁴⁸

In a broader sense *Pioneer Writer* was an integral contribution to the ongoing surge of interest in women writers that followed publication of such books as the previously mentioned *A Bright and Fiery Troop* (Debra Adelaide), *Writing a New World* (Dale Spender), *Her Selection: Writings by Nineteenth-Century Australian Women* (Lynne Spender) and *The Penguin Anthology of Australian Women's Writing* (Dale Spender).

Several of my discoveries about Louisa Atkinson's life story were significant to the reading of her novels. For example, in the Archives Office of New South Wales I discovered previously unresearched records of her mother's six-year long legal battles with the executors of her late husband's estate, Alexander Berry and John Coghill, who were men of power and standing in the Colony. She was forced to take this legal action to gain custody of, and financial support for her children at a time when women's property and custodial rights were largely non-existent. I documented the social conditions, including the breakdown of authority and the endemic lawlessness, particularly among escaped convicts, in the Sutton Forest district where the Atkinson family lived, which led Louisa's widowed mother to find it necessary to remarry for protection. I discovered previously unknown facts on the life and character of her step-father, George Bruce Barton, in particular that he was a violent alcoholic from whom Charlotte Barton had to flee with her young children and that he was later tried for murder and found guilty of manslaughter. This new information about Louisa Atkinson's childhood and the circumstances of her family life made it possible to read her novels with greater understanding and insight, for example, her portrayal of several of her major female characters as strong and independent women and her understanding and portrayal of the Dickensian coils of the legal system and the custodial rights over children. Her novels could not be fully appreciated and understood without this new knowledge of the life events and forces that moulded her.

Similarly my discovery that her mother had been taught drawing in England as a young student by the famous landscape painter, John Glover, made it possible to evaluate the influences on Louisa Atkinson's ability to illustrate birds, plants, animals and country scenes, an important aspect of her recording of nature. Research on the life of her husband James Calvert, a member of Leichhardt's 1844-45 expedition across the north-east of the Continent to the site of present-day Darwin, elucidated aspects of Louisa Atkinson's writing particularly the basis for the location of a section of her last novel, *Tressa's Resolve*, in north-western Queensland.

Apart from extensive research on material held in libraries and archives, I also searched for and interviewed Louisa Atkinson's only descendant, Janet Cosh, shortly before she died, and descendants of a sister, brother and uncle. Through these relatives I gained unique insights into aspects of Louisa Atkinson's family life, considerable quantities of photographic material and clues that informed further research. Elizabeth Lawson commented in the *Canberra Times* on how this aspect of my research had enhanced the biography:

Clarke's book reconstructs the "life" as she searched it out in the green paddocks of Sutton Forest, at the now restored family homestead, Oldbury, in many an archive and through many a descendant, following as well relevant stretches of the lives of Atkinson's family, friends and professional contacts.⁴⁹

Pioneer Writer contained a complete bibliography, published for the first time, of all Louisa Atkinson's articles in the *Illustrated Sydney News*, 1853-5 and 1864-5, in the *Horticultural Magazine*, 1864, and her long-running series of nature articles, published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and sometimes reprinted in the *Sydney Mail* between 1860 and 1870 under the title 'A Voice from the Country'. It also listed her other articles published in these papers independently of this title and her 'New Bush Home' series published in 1871-72. This discovery and documenting of the complete range and content of her articles made possible subsequent work on her importance as a naturalist and environmentalist.

Pioneer Writer was reviewed in major Australian newspapers and in several scholarly journals, including *Australian Literary Studies* (Shirley Walker), *Australian Historical Studies* (Elizabeth Morrison) and *Journal of Australian Studies* (Frances Devlin-Glass). Shirley Walker wrote in *Australian Literary Studies*:

Pioneer Writer is an excellent biography, well informed and well researched, full of illuminating excerpts from letters and diaries, and beautifully illustrated with Louisa's own work. ... Above all Clarke avoids the traps of sentiment and melodrama (despite her Dickensian material). The ironic perspective (as shown by amusing chapter headings ...) heightens the authenticity of this biography.⁵⁰

Elizabeth Morrison (*Australian Historical Studies*) commented on the ‘intensive bibliographic research ...the scouring of archives far and wide...the tracing and interviewing of descendants, and travelling to places lived in, visited and written about’. This required ‘a deal of scholarship, persistence, imagination, initiative and diplomacy before the life-writing could begin’ contributing to ‘historical knowledge of the colonial period, providing a new strand for the fabric of our cultural history and replacing monolithic androcentrism with a more complex and richer pattern.’ She concluded: ‘Clarke’s biography invites and provides a sound foundation for the further study of Atkinson’s role in early Australian journalistic and literary culture...’⁵¹

There was much increased interest in the publication and study of Louisa Atkinson’s work following publication of *Pioneer Writer*. This was described in a 1996 thesis as ‘a recent surge in writing about her’.⁵² There have been reprints of several of her novels making them readily available for the first time. In 1992, *Debatable Ground or The Carlillawarra Claimants*, previously published only in serial form in the *Sydney Mail* in 1861, was published in book form by Mulini Press. In 1995, Mulini Press also re-published *Cowanda, the Veteran’s Grant: An Australian Story*, previously available only in a few libraries in its original 1859 edition. A scholarly edition of *Gertrude, The Emigrant: A Tale of Colonial Life*, also previously available only in a few libraries in the original edition published in 1857, was published in 1998 in the Colonial Text Series by the School of English and Australian Scholarly Editions Centre, University College, University of New South Wales. Elizabeth Lawson, who edited this edition, acknowledged in the introduction to this book and also in her introduction to *Cowanda*, my research published in *Pioneer Writer* and my sharing of source material.⁵³ I launched the new edition of *Gertrude, The Emigrant* on 11 June 1998 at ADFA, Canberra.⁵⁴ Mulini Press also plans to re-publish Louisa Atkinson’s last novel, *Tressa’s Resolve*, previously published posthumously only in serial form in 1872.

Since the publication of *Pioneer Writer*, there have been two interpretative studies on aspects of Louisa Atkinson’s work: a publication on her drawings and paintings by Elizabeth Lawson, *The Natural Art of Louisa Atkinson* (1995) and a

book on Atkinson's novels, *Louisa Atkinson and Her Novels*, by Victor Crittenden (1997). My original work is acknowledged in both of these. Elizabeth Lawson wrote at the beginning of *The Natural Art of Louisa Atkinson*:

My first thanks are to Patricia Clarke for her generous sharing of time and research materials, and whose book *Pioneer Writer: The Life of Louisa Atkinson: novelist, journalist, naturalist* (1990), informs my work throughout.⁵⁵

Victor Crittenden acknowledged his use of 'new information' on Louisa Atkinson's life from my 'excellent' biography that had 'added so much to our knowledge of the life of our first native born Australian woman writer'.⁵⁶ In 2001, my article (12,000 words) on Louisa Atkinson was published in the *American Dictionary of Literary Biography*.⁵⁷

Several plants collected by Louisa Atkinson were named after her by Ferdinand von Mueller and her plant specimens were acknowledged more than a hundred times in George Bentham's classic seven-volume *Flora Australiensis* (1863-78). This was very unusual recognition. Both Judy Skene and Susan Martin have argued that the 'power' of naming has been historically withheld from 'amateur' women botanists who remained obscure by being excluded from the naming of plants.⁵⁸ Despite having plants named after her, however, Louisa Atkinson's significant contribution to plant discovery and her popularising of the study of nature through her newspaper articles were achievements that, subsequently, were ignored or noted very briefly. In 'Collectors and Illustrators: Women Botanists of the Nineteenth Century', Ann Moyal noted that women collectors and illustrators were 'often little recognised' and were 'largely ignored by Australian historians'.⁵⁹ Since the publication of my biography, Louisa Atkinson has been noted in this context by several authors who acknowledge *Pioneer Writer* as their source. These include Tim Bonyhady in *The Colonial Earth*,⁶⁰ Sara Maroske in her "'The Whole Great Continent as a Present": Nineteenth Century Australian Women Workers in Science'⁶¹ and Susan Martin in 'Gender, Genra, Genre, and Geography: Colonial Women's Writing and Uses of Botany'.⁶²

In 2003, Dr Marika Ainley, Adjunct Professor of History, University of Northern British Columbia, Canada, visited Australia to research the comparative history of Canadian and Australian nineteenth-century women who wrote on nature subjects. In a talk at the Humanities Research Centre, Australian National University, she referred to the evaluation of a number of these women including my study of Louisa Atkinson⁶³ and she also researched my papers on Louisa Atkinson in the National Library's manuscript collection.⁶⁴ As a further indication of the escalating interest in Louisa Atkinson, I was invited to speak on her life in the Kurrajong district, where she made many of her plant discoveries, at a commemorative event at the Mt Tomah Botanic Gardens, on 23 November 2003, and at a similar event at Fitzroy Falls commemorating her life in the Sutton Forest district, on 28 February 2004.

Louisa Atkinson's importance in the popularising of nature as a pioneer woman journalist is still very much under-appreciated but it is noted in Sharyn Pearce's *Shameless Scribblers: Australian Women's Journalism 1880-1995*,⁶⁵ although Pearce's book deals with a later era of women journalists. In a recent thesis, 'Louisa Atkinson and Female Transgression', Megan Brown argues that each of Louisa Atkinson's achievements, her scientific pursuit of botany, her publicising of her botanical researches, and her creation of independent female characters, were transgressions that helped to broaden the avenues open to woman. She cites *Pioneer Writer* and *Pen Portraits*, my article 'A Visitor in the District: Louisa Atkinson at the Murrumbidgee, Monaro and Molonglo',⁶⁶ and my research papers in the National Library's Manuscript collection as sources for her research. In the field of popular writing, articles on Louisa Atkinson's life are included in Susanna de Vries-Evans's *Strength of Spirit*⁶⁷ and Susan Geason's *Great Australian Girls*.⁶⁸ Both rely extensively on *Pioneer Writer*.

Tasma: The Life of Jessie Couvreur (1994)

When my book, *Tasma*, the first biography of this important nineteenth-century Australian novelist, short story writer, journalist and lecturer, was published in 1994 it was described by Catherine Pratt in the *Canberra Times* as filling ‘a yawning gap’.⁶⁹ It was recognised by scholars as an important contribution to Australian literary history and was a joint winner of the Society of Women Writers (NSW) 1994 Non-Fiction Award.

Like *Pioneer Writer*, my biography of Tasma was a significant contribution to the wave of interest in women writers that accelerated following the 1988 bi-centennial publications. In 1991, for example, two biographies of Ada Cambridge were published: *Ada Cambridge: Her Life and Work 1844-1926* (Audrey Tate) and *Rattling the Orthodoxies: A Life of Ada Cambridge* (Margaret Bradstock and Louise Wakeling). Other biographies included Diane Kirkby’s *Alice Henry, The Power of Pen and Voice: The Life of an Australian-American Labor Reformer* (1991), and Jan Roberts’s *Maybanke Anderson: Sex Suffering and Social Reform* (1993). Patricia Grimshaw attributed this ‘reinvention of women’s history’ to the ‘energy and initiative of women’s historians, influenced by the contemporary women’s movement, in recovering ways to speak interestingly about women in the past ...’⁷⁰

Despite the fame Tasma achieved with the publication of her first novel, *Uncle Piper of Piper’s Hill* in 1889, her other remarkable achievements as a lecturer in Europe and as foreign correspondent for the *London Times*, and her unconventional attitudes and lifestyle, she quickly became an obscure, neglected figure after her death in 1897. In a similar way to some other nineteenth-century Australian women writers, she virtually disappeared from Australian consciousness as the *Bulletin* school of writers created what came to be accepted as the authentic, almost exclusively male, nationalistic picture of Australia. In Tasma’s case the change in status from her brief fame as an acclaimed writer to obscurity was compounded by the fact that she died at a comparatively young age,

that she lived for the second half of her life in Europe and that she left few personal records.

Researching Tasma's life presented many problems due to the paucity of material and the fact that she had no descendants. I overcame these obstacles to some extent by locating collateral descendants in several Australian states and in England and descendants or other relatives of her first and second husbands in Australia and Belgium respectively. This painstaking and time-consuming search – initially I wrote to everyone named Huybers (her maiden name) in Australia – resulted in several important discoveries including the existence of a previously unknown shipboard diary. This proved invaluable in writing part of her earlier life and I published it later in my edited book, *Tasma's Diaries*. I also discovered a great deal of information about the lives of her parents and siblings, several of whom were connected to European artistic or journalistic circles. This enabled me to write in a much more informed way than had been possible previously about her family circumstances and their effect on her life. Through relatives of her two husbands I gained information that enabled me to write in some depth about her marriages, subjects that previously had been covered only superficially.

When I began researching Tasma, the main sources of information, apart from entries in reference works and nineteenth-century publications such as Desmond Byrne, *Australian Writers* (1896); A. Patchett Martin, *The Beginnings of an Australian Literature* (1898) and H. G. Turner and A. Sutherland, *The Development of Australian Literature* (1898), were a section of Cecil Hadgraft and Ray Beilby's *Ada Cambridge, Tasma and Rosa Praed: Australian Writers and their Works*, published in 1979, a chapter on Tasma's writing by Margaret Harris in Debra Adelaide's *A Bright and Fiery Troop*, published in 1988, an introduction by Margaret Harris to a 1987 edition of *Uncle Piper of Piper's Hill* and biographical material in *Tasmanian Literary Landmarks*, published in 1984.⁷¹ A few of Tasma's short stories appeared occasionally in anthologies, for example the popular 'Monsieur Caloche', but apart from *Uncle Piper of Piper's Hill*, re-issued in 1969 and 1987, her books remained out of print during the twentieth

century until the appearance in 1993 of her collection of short stories, *A Sydney Sovereign*, edited and introduced by Michael Ackland.⁷²

The difficulty of researching a full-length biography of Tasma is illustrated by the fact that even after exhaustive research I located only four of her letters of any length. During research in Australia, England, France and Belgium, however, I did unearth some previously unknown published writing by Tasma, as well as the previously mentioned, unknown diary and many facts about her life and that of her family that have flowed into subsequent research and writing on her work. As an example, I discovered the episodes of her serial novel, 'L'amour aux antipodes', published in French and Belgian papers in 1880.⁷³ I deposited photocopies of the episodes, published in *L'indépendance belge*, in the National Library of Australia. As a result this novel has been translated and will be published.⁷⁴

I also discovered new material on Tasma's appointment as Brussels correspondent for the London *Times*, following the death of her second husband, Auguste Couvreur, a distinguished Belgian statesman, a former Vice President of the Belgian Chamber of Representatives and London *Times* foreign correspondent in Brussels. In accounts of her life, her position on the London *Times* was usually noted only very briefly. Through research at the *Times* Archive in Wapping, I discovered that she obtained this extremely demanding position, an almost unknown appointment for a woman, not by default but only after a rigorous initiation. By searching old letter-books kept by the *Times* editorial manager and by the foreign editor I discovered the difficulties she had in being appointed to this position and the stream of instructions sent to her. These letter-books also revealed the responsibility imposed on her when Holland was added to her territory so that she could be placed at The Hague to report Dutch reaction to the Jameson Raid. The *Times* was implicated in this action which was aimed at the overthrow of the Boer Government in the Transvaal. My discoveries in the *Times* Archive opened a new perspective on Tasma's life and enabled me to write a chapter about this important and unusual journalistic achievement.

Tasma was reviewed widely in newspapers and scholarly journals. Several reviewers acknowledged the importance of the book and the depth of research. It was described by Joy Hooton in *Australian Book Review* as ‘a model of historical reconstruction from a diverse range of sources’ following ‘assiduous research’,⁷⁵ and by Catherine Pratt in the *Canberra Times* as ‘a quite extraordinary’ achievement in research, ‘given the obscurity of many original documents’.⁷⁶ Jill Roe wrote in the *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*: ‘Clarke is an experienced researcher who is not afraid to get her hands dirty, on old copies of the *Times* and other newsprint, for example, and she has visited all the main sites of Tasma’s life.’⁷⁷ Several reviewers noted the value of my comprehensive research in providing a basis for future work on Tasma. Jenna Mead, for example, wrote that *Tasma* was ‘a very useful biography that will enable much more and different kinds of work on Jessie Couvreur’.⁷⁸ Michael Ackland wrote in *Australian Literary Studies*:

Clarke’s *Tasma* ... fills a real gap and represents a huge advance on previous studies... Clarke through perseverance and some inspired research, has been able to flesh out Beilby’s ‘Tasma’, and presents Jessie Couvreur/ Fraser/ Huybers as a figure of international stature, and as one who constitutes a crucial chapter in the long history of expatriate writing. Moreover, in spite of the avowedly feminist slant of the biographer, there is little attempt to read ‘Tasma’ against the grain. The men in her life, for instance, are not studiously suppressed or ridiculed... Nor are undue or exaggerated claims made for the feminist context of her writings...

Clarke’s *Tasma* ... provides a wealth of insights and outlines fascinating areas for future inquiry.⁷⁹

An indication that the biography had contributed to a change, albeit minor, in perceptions came a few months after its publication in an article in which Rosemary Sorensen, then editor of *Australian Book Review*, published a reappraisal by readers, writers and critics of ‘Australia’s literary canon’. She reported that Joseph Furphy was ‘out’ and Tasma ‘in’. Couvreur, Ada Cambridge and Rosa Praed were judged ‘far more radical for their time, and still pertinent’.⁸⁰

Since the publication of *Tasma* a new edition of her most praised novel, *The Pipers of Piper's Hill* (the original serial version) has been published in the Australian Scholarly Editions series. The editor, Margaret Bradstock, attributed much of the information in her 'Introduction' to *The Pipers of Piper's Hill* to my biography of Tasma which she described as 'an invaluable resource'.⁸¹ Margaret Harris also acknowledges my biography as the source of her biographical information on Tasma in a recent article.⁸² Bruce Bennett in his *Australian Short Fiction* (2002), after speculating that Couvreur's non-Anglo-Saxon background and largely expatriate life had contributed to her neglect, states that this had been 'rectified in part by Patricia Clarke's biography'.⁸³

Although Tasma's European background and expatriate life contributed to her neglect in the past, some of the research proceeding at present relates to the multicultural aspects of her life. Examples include Patricia Clancy's article, 'Tasma, A Woman Novelist of Colonial Australia and "Continental" Men', published in 2001 in a journal devoted to links between France and Australia⁸⁴ and Rosemary Lancaster's paper, 'Women Travellers in France in the Novels of Jessie Couvreur (1891-1897)', given at a conference at Leeds in 2002.⁸⁵ Both Clancy and Lancaster cite my biography as a source of information and both have accessed my research papers on Tasma in the National Library of Australia's manuscript collection. These include my extensive collection of copies of her previously unknown writing and of her lectures and reviews of her books published in French and Belgian newspapers and periodicals. Another researcher, Sandra Peixoto, who is researching the paintings of Arthur Loureiro, Tasma's brother-in-law, as a postgraduate student at the University of Lisbon and for a retrospective exhibition to be held in Portugal in 2005, has approached me for information on various aspects of the lives of members of the Huybers and Loureiro families.⁸⁶ In 2001 my article on Tasma was published in the *American Dictionary of Literary Biography*.⁸⁷ In November 2003 I gave a paper at the Third Australian Media Traditions Conference in Melbourne, in which I compared the employment of Tasma and Englishwoman, Flora Shaw, on the

London *Times* and the difficulties and discrimination they encountered as early women journalists.⁸⁸

My edited publication, *Tasma's Diaries: The Diaries of Jessie Couvreur with Another by Her Young Sister Edith Huybers* (1995), supplements my biography by making available the only substantial direct autobiographical material by Tasma.⁸⁹

Rosa! Rosa! A Life of Rosa Praed, Novelist and Spiritualist (1999)

When I began researching the life of novelist Rosa Praed she was a much better-known figure than either Louisa Atkinson or Tasma. Much more had been written about her life and much more critical work had appeared on her writing. A full-length biography, *In Mortal Bondage: The Strange Life of Rosa Praed* by Colin Roderick, had been published in 1948 and there were concise biographical accounts in Cecil Hadgraft and Ray Beilby's *Ada Cambridge, Tasma and Rosa Praed: Australian Writers and their Works*, published in 1979, and in Chris Tiffin's 'Introduction' to his *Rosa Praed (Mrs Campbell Praed) 1851-1935: A Bibliography*, published in 1989. There were many articles concerning her writing, including Michael Sharkey's 'Rosa Praed's Colonial Heroines'⁹⁰ and Kay Ferres's 'Rewriting Desire: Rosa Praed, Theosophy and the Sex Problem',⁹¹ and extended discussion in some books including Robert Dixon's *Writing the Colonial Adventure*.⁹² Her 48 books, however, had been out of print for many years, apart from the re-issue of her novel, *The Brother of the Shadow*, in New York in 1976⁹³ and the re-publication of *The Bond of Wedlock* and *Lady Bridget in the Never-Never Land* in 1987 and *Outlaw and Lawmaker* in 1988, by Pandora, London.⁹⁴

Researching and writing a biography of Rosa Praed was a continuation of my previous work of recording and interpreting the lives of women and placing them in the context of Australian cultural history as women who negotiated gender barriers and also recorded this world in their writing. Rosa Praed was an important subject in this sequence and presented me with a particular challenge because of

the complexity of her life. An acclaimed, even famous, novelist in the 1880s and early 1890s, her fiction reflected the immense social and geographical changes that influenced her life ranging from the harshness of Australian pioneering bush life to the sophistication of English society drawing rooms, through moves for the freeing of women from restrictive marriage laws and conventions to the intellectual movements centred around theosophy.

Rather than a scarcity of biographical material, as I had faced with my biographies of Louisa Atkinson and Tasma, the material about Rosa Praed was overwhelming in quantity. Some of the major sources included 25 boxes of Praed material in the John Oxley Library, seven boxes of Murray-Prior material in the National Library of Australia and further Murray-Prior material in the Mitchell Library, as well as considerable private and official records located in New South Wales, Queensland, England, Ireland and Northern Ireland. Although extensive, much of this material was fragmentary and subjective and required further detailed research. I researched at important sites in Rosa Praed's life including, in Queensland, at Bromelton near Beaudesert; Hawkood in the Burnett District; Maroon and Rathdowney near Boonah; Curtis Island off Gladstone and houses on Kangaroo Point, Brisbane. Overseas I visited Rushden, Wellingborough and Irchester in Northamptonshire; houses in Bayswater and Kensington in London, and locations in Poole and Torquay in England, on the French Riviera and in Rome. I also followed many other avenues of research, for example, in County Tyrone regarding her mother's education; at the Theosophical Society in London for background on her involvement with the theosophical and occult movements and at the Carmelite Monastery, Kensington regarding her conversion to Catholicism. I also researched many people, some mentioned only in passing in reference material. This led to many dead ends but also to several finds. These included locating the papers of Praed's friend and correspondent, American poet, Louise Chandler Moulton, in the United States Library of Congress and establishing the importance of Queensland mining magnate, William Knox D'Arcy, in the life of the Praed family. Much of this type of research may lead only to a phrase or a sentence in a book but it adds immeasurably to the

knowledge and confidence of the writer. As usual in my research, I also established extensive and valuable contacts with Murray-Prior descendants who provided many insights into Rosa Praed's family life. I have deposited the material I collected in researching Rosa Praed in the National Library of Australia where it is available for other researchers.

Although I adopted a basically chronological structure for *Rosa! Rosa!*, within this framework I used a thematic approach to several aspects of Rosa Praed's life. This allowed me to draw together and interpret several themes including the importance of her friendship with her step-mother Nora and of their correspondence in maintaining Praed's links with Australian life, and her later correspondence with her half-sisters, Dorothea and Ruth Murray-Prior; speculation about the nature of her friendships with several women including the American poet, Louise Chandler Moulton and the English writer, Eliza Lynn Linton; her long and intimate association with Nancy Harward; her personal and professional association with Justin McCarthy; her spiritual journey through belief in reincarnation to an overwhelming interest in theosophy and the occult and the ramifications of her unhappy marital situation, her at times precarious financial position, her fluctuating social standing, her health problems and her literary fame. Simultaneously I maintained the momentum of her story, integrating the strands of her public and private life in an overall depiction of her long and complex life subject to many internal and external influences.

Rosa! Rosa! contained much new research and also corrected some pervasive misconceptions regarding the facts and interpretation of her life that had developed from Colin Roderick's semi-fictionalised approach in his biography. The influence of Roderick's work lingers. David Malouf, for instance, used incorrect information from this source as the basis for part of his criticism of *Rosa! Rosa!* in his review published in the *Australian's Review of Books*. My letter challenging this aspect of his review was published the following month.⁹⁵ In a broader sense, this episode demonstrates that my new biography of Praed, based on scholarly research, filled a conspicuous gap in our knowledge of one of

Australia's most important early writers. Robert Dixon commented on this aspect in his review of my biography in *Coppertales*:

Patricia Clarke has now written just the sort of thorough, balanced and judicious biography required to support the current revival of critical interest in Rosa Praed's work. Beautifully crafted by an experienced author and written in a style that will appeal to academic and general readers alike, Clarke's biography is the rich fruit of years of systematic research, drawing comprehensively on sources such as the Praed papers in the John Oxley library, the Murray-Prior papers in the Mitchell Library and the National Library of Australia, the correspondence of Praed's friends such as British novelist Eliza Lynn Linton and American poet Louise Chandler Moulton, and supplemented by further research in England, Ireland, France and Italy. Rich in biographical and social detail, it is a book that I already look forward to re-reading, and which I know will be consulted as a standard reference source for many years to come by students of nineteenth-century literary culture.⁹⁶

Rosa! Rosa! was reviewed widely in the metropolitan press and in most scholarly journals. Most reviewers praised the biography. Chris Tiffin wrote in *Australian Literary Studies*:

This splendid new biography by Patricia Clarke draws together the work of the last half century and adds meticulous new research to provide a far richer understanding of the familial, psychological, financial, and health circumstances in which Praed's fiction was created. ...

Patricia Clarke's *Rosa! Rosa!* is a richly detailed, impeccably documented, and carefully balanced account of the life of an early Australian writer whose works remain surprisingly resilient.⁹⁷

Reviewers noted the book's usefulness for future research. Julie Evans wrote in *Lilith* that it should 'inspire scholars to see Praed's life as a unique point of entry into Australian colonial history, the social history of lesbianism, and the western fascination with mysticism and theosophy at the turn of the century'.⁹⁸

Some reviewers remarked on the lack of material on Rosa Praed's novels in *Rosa! Rosa!*. Robert Dixon wrote that he regretted that 'the biography of a novelist can

be written using the principles of historical research but not the tools of contemporary literary criticism, deeply informed as it is by the themes of feminist, cultural and postcolonial studies'.⁹⁹ Sue Martin (*Australian Book Review*) made a similar point that while the biography gave 'very useful and interesting information about Praed's process of writing, revising, and her difficulties with publishers and editors, as well as vital information about the general topic areas covered', the work would have been 'enriched by a closer consideration and reading of Praed's fiction'.¹⁰⁰ My original plan for the biography included integrating more detailed material about Rosa Praed's novels but this changed following the publisher's requirement that the manuscript be reduced in length and concentrate on her life story.¹⁰¹ Subsequent to the publication of *Rosa! Rosa!*, I began a new work in which I am re-creating the unique colonial world portrayed in Rosa Praed's Queensland-based novels by interweaving appropriate extracts from her writing with the sources of her vision in her family background, her social conditioning and her observations of social mores, political events and the Australian landscape. I am revising this work concurrently with my other writing, including the editing of Judith Wright's letters for publication.

Conclusion

The six books I am submitting for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (by Publication) represent my research and writing over a period of fifteen years on the lives of women in nineteenth-century Australia. My work developed through my earlier books on women's life writing to biographies of important, although previously neglected, women writers. Each publication contributed new knowledge at the time of publication complementing academic research proceeding at the time in writing women into Australian history.

My books on women's life writing engaged with the hitherto unrecorded private world of particular women placing them in a historical context, expanding knowledge not only of these individual lives but of the social and cultural world in which the women lived. *The Governesses* dealt not only with the relatively

untouched field of women's letters but its subject, the lives, work and social position of governesses, had been little researched to that time. *A Colonial Woman*, which recorded the daily life of an 'ordinary' woman in the context of mid-nineteenth-century rural and seaport life, was a very early example of the interpretation of such a life and its wider significance in illuminating aspects of colonial life and the role of, and restrictions on, women. *Pen Portraits*, the forerunner of my biographies of women writers, was a unique exploration of the beginning of women's journalism, a field previously untouched by historians, documenting the routes by which individual women gradually moved into journalistic employment and recording the individual achievements of many previously unknown women journalists.

Pioneer Writer and *Tasma* were the first biographies of these important but neglected women writers revealing new facts and interpretations of their lives. The publication of these biographies opened new fields of research, enabled a reappraisal of their writing and led to the re-publication of several of their works. *Rosa! Rosa!* included extensive research on aspects of novelist Rosa Praed's life previously either not known or not well documented. The result was a balanced exposition of her physical and psychological journey through her long life.

Collectively these books represent a considerable body of work that has expanded knowledge of women's lives and writing in nineteenth-century Australia. They also represent a development in my own work from the relatively uncomplicated study of interpreting women's letters and diaries in their historical context, an important element in writing the lives of 'ordinary' women, to the more complex recording and interpretation of the lives of writers embracing the intimacy of their psychological development, their achievement of public success and the setting of their lives in particular social worlds at particular times in history.

My subjects were chosen within the compass of the development of historical thought at the time particularly the recognition of the importance of the lives of women and the contribution a study of their lives could make to a widening of historical perspectives. At the same time they achieved the goal of attracting

general readers with an interest in history to an appreciation of the importance of women's lives. I have found researching and writing these books, each in its own way innovative and new, an absorbing journey of discovery not only through documentary sources but also the physical environment in which the subjects lived and the social and cultural milieu of the era. Each has added to or complemented themes that emerged in Australian social and cultural historical writing during this period.

My published works have made significant contributions to the history of women in Australia and to Australian biography, and, more broadly, they have enhanced our understanding of life in colonial Australia.

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