



Competing Discourses in *The Kangaroo Hunters*

Robin Pope

The restless, inquiring spirit of youth craves, from its first development, food for the imagination, and even the simplest nursery rhymes owe their principal charm to their wonderful improbability... [W]e are encouraged to continue to supply the young with books which do not profess to be true, though they are composed of truths.

Following a long tradition of earlier travellers' tales, Anne Bowman begins her adventure-settler tale *The Kangaroo Hunters; or, Adventures in the Bush* (1858) with a cautionary preface in which she alerts her young readers to the constructedness of her tale. Her fictive creation, like the nursery rhymes to which she alludes, makes no claims to strictly verifiable 'truth' or even to probability, even though its action occurs in the place known as Australia. Rather, hers is a story composed of moral truths, in which the action and location are merely convenient vehicles for their conveyance. She reminds readers of this again when she has a character observe, 'These lovely wilds of Nature, forests and mountains, are very charming; but they seem too romantic and unreal to be satisfactory. If we were to keep a journal and publish it hereafter, we should, I fear, be ridiculed for inventing fairy tales' (p.230).

Sara Mills suggests that many women writers chose to write in genres which carried a relatively low status so that the truth status of the work was less questioned. Women travel writers had found that the truth of their experiences was frequently questioned, apparently for no stronger reason than that conventional wisdom decreed that women were both frail and deceitful. Thus their accounts of travel which demonstrated women as confronting and overcoming difficult circumstances on their own were presumed to be lies or gross exaggerations (Mills 1993, pp.112-121). Bowman's choice of the adventure tale, which was not considered a serious genre, would have rendered her safe from charges of lying and even provided her opportunities for some creative manipulation of known facts. The epigraph which heads her work and is quoted at the beginning of this paper suggests she may have been aware of the relative freedom which the adventure genre provided. For readers who

resided in Australia, the often erroneous information must have provided amusement, even for city dwellers who had not experienced 'the bush'. Bowman apparently had access to sources which described the flora and fauna of Australia, but there are some entertaining errors, which might have been deliberate, or might have derived from a lack of other detail. The travellers encounter boa constrictors, see hundreds of possums sporting in the trees in full daylight, collect copious quantities of tree gum which seems to harden only after it has been used to seal canoes or make axes. Firelighting is achieved without difficulty at every point of their journey, and while the travellers see the smoke of marauding enemies theirs is apparently invisible to others. They plant potatoes and reap the harvest in a matter of weeks, and they boil their stews in giant mussel and oyster shells, which are also used as spades. Nevertheless, there are other difficulties for the reader in knowing how to read this text, apart from knowing how to accept the 'truth' of the physical details.

Perhaps what twentieth-century readers see as problematic aberrations of 'fact' were merely entertaining features for the nineteenth-century audience, for *The Kangaroo Hunters* has an impressive publishing history, which indicates the text's unusually high degree of popularity. It was reprinted in 1859, the year following its first publication, and a 'new edition' was printed in 1860. Routledge released it in both London and New York (1858, 1859, 1860); Crosby, Nichols, Lee & Co. in Boston (1860, 1861, 1864); and Porter and Coates in Philadelphia (1858); besides various other undated extant editions which include another release in Boston by Woolworth, Ainsworth & Co., a French translation in 1876 and an edition released by E. W. Cole in Melbourne. Few other nineteenth-century texts about Australia ran to so many printings.

By 1858 readers would have been well familiar with the pattern of the adventure novel, which had been established for English readers over a century earlier with Daniel Defoe's prototype *Robinson Crusoe*. Other adventure tales written for a younger audience, such as Sarah Porter's *Alfred Dudley* (1830) had already appeared in early colonial texts set in Australia and elsewhere. Nevertheless, Anne Bowman's decision to write adventure

stories for the young was unusual and probably risky. The great popularity of the empire adventure tale was not achieved for another twenty years, when the *Boys Own Paper* became influential, and when prolific writers such as W.H.G. Kingston, G. Henty and George Manville Fenn were producing their many tales. Bowman was venturing into territory dominated by male authors; and, in setting her stories in exotic locations (she also wrote *The Castaways*, 1857, *The Boy Voyagers*, 1859, and *Among the Tartar Tents*, 1861), she was expected to conform to the conventions of the adventure yarn and the discourses of empire which the Australian setting demanded.

However, a closer scrutiny reveals that *The Kangaroo Hunters* differs from the usual empire adventure. Reader expectations are frequently subverted and satirised and it becomes difficult for the reader to determine how the text should be read. It is also a curiously unsettling tale because of the difficulty in reconciling apparently conflicting ideals. This discussion attempts to show that the text's subversion arises from the tensions and intersections of competing discourses within the narrative, and that these tensions relate to an unresolved clash of ideals. I intend here to show how an understanding of discourse, drawing on the work of Michel Foucault, can be of assistance in reading this text.

In *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1972) Foucault discusses the relation between discourse and the real. Understanding discourse as 'an individualizable group of statements' which seem to share a coherence and force and an internal regulation, Foucault explains how we apprehend the real by means of the constructs of discourse: 'We must not imagine that the world turns towards us a legible face which we would only have to decipher. The world is not the accomplice of our knowledge; there is no prediscursive providence which disposes the world in our favour,' he wrote, reminding us that the order we perceive in the world and how we interpret objects and events is imposed on it through the various discourses we use to describe it (1981, p. 67 in Mills 1997, p. 52). The connection between discourse and the realities we construct for ourselves is summarised in Foucault's notion of discourse as 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (1972, p. 49, in Mills 1997, p. 17).

Drawing on Foucault's ideas, Mills sees discourses as identifiable by the 'systematicity of the ideas, opinions, concepts, ways of thinking and behaving which are formed within a particular context' (1997, p. 17). It is possible in this text to recognise particular types of discourse, such as the discourse of empire, which could be defined as those acts of speech or writing which share a systematic group of ideas and opinions about the supremacy of the imperial power, as compared to the places and peoples conquered or colonised. The discourse of empire, or colonial discourse, is essentially masculine: the business of conquering and colonising is seen as man's work, as adventurous work, requiring a man's capacity for action, so that the adventure hero (almost always a male) is the expected colonial subject of such writing. Thus, within imperial discourse other discourses circulate with their own systematic sets of ideas. Apart from masculine discourse, *The Kangaroo Hunters* draws on other discourses such as: race, and the beliefs of white racial superiority; religion, in the ideas of Christianity about a single supreme being and of a pressing Christian duty to bear the light to the dark places of the world; science, in the labelling and categorising of new species and resources according to European scientific formulae; class, and the acceptance that people are ordained to occupy a particular level in society, each level necessary to the others; and of philanthropy, in easing the plight of those less fortunate.

Discourses contain statements, or truth claims, which are constructs of particular societies at particular times, and are accepted as true, so that they set the limits and conventions of what can and cannot be said; they exclude those discourses which carry no power or authority, for they are the successful outcome of a socio-cultural struggle with other competing discourses. Bowman's text questions some accepted truth claims of her time which assert that imperialism is natural, and right, and that white males are active heroes best fitted to the pioneering endeavour, while women are powerless, frail and peripheral to it. Additionally, in *The Kangaroo Hunters*, the 'limits and conventions of what can be said' are frequently exceeded or transgressed, because views which 'carry no power or authority' are also given a voice. An examination of the text will demonstrate that

the masculinist discourses of empire and patriarchy are frequently unsettled by a feminine discourse which asserts itself by questioning some accepted truths of masculine discourse, and by focusing interest on spirituality and morality, and on philanthropic ideals. As is common with feminine discourse, Bowman works from within the accepted framework of the known dominant masculine and colonial discourses, disrupting and unsettling conventional beliefs through the use of humorous devices such as parody and satire.

The Kangaroo Hunters bears the superficial hallmarks of most colonial adventure tales, which deployed the standard plot of an English middle class family (or more frequently an individual) who are forced by some calamity to seek their future in a colony, their migration bringing about a series of adventures which constitute the main part of the narrative, and culminate in successful settlement, or occasionally a return to Britain with a regained fortune. In the course of the narrative a series of exciting incidents provide an opportunity to describe the customs of the indigenous people, and to examine the exotic landscape and its flora and fauna. *The Kangaroo Hunters* faithfully follows this pattern: Mr Mayburn, an indecisive rector, loses his practical wife through illness and decides upon a life as a missionary in India, setting out with his three children: Margaret, 16; Arthur, 15; Hugh 13; and Gerald O'Brien, 12, the orphaned son of a deceased friend. They are accompanied by their old nurse Jenny, and Jack, a carpenter and his sister Ruth whom the Mayburns had sponsored when found as babies in a hedge. On their journey to India via Australia the Mayburns befriend a wealthy young gentleman, Mr Edward Deverell, who is planning to settle his large party far inland from the east coast. Deverell offers Mayburn a position as chaplain but Mayburn feels obliged to fulfil his missionary undertaking and continues on from Melbourne for India. When the ship catches fire, the convict crew abandon them and with the help of Wilkins, a convict, they are cast up on the north west coast. They determine to walk across Australia to find Edward Deverell, accompanied by the well-disposed Wilkins but harrassed by Black Peter, another convict who constantly urges various Aborigines to attack them. Three quarters of the 444 pages deal with their adventures over fifteen months as they cross Australia

from the north-west to the south-east, looking for Deverell's property. They encounter the expected difficulties of unfriendly Aborigines, fierce bushrangers, lack of water and food, fire, fatigue and injury but miraculously survive to complete the journey, having headed unerringly to Deverell himself, and they settle and blend the two patriarchies by intermarriage.

This story summary appears to follow the conventional pattern of an adventure story, and its title also assists in creating a set of expectations for the reader: 'kangaroo' locates the narrative in Australia, at that time still under colonial rule from Britain; 'hunters' are men who actively pursue and kill their prey (the kangaroos); the expected excitement of an adventure is confirmed by the alternative title 'Adventures in the Bush'. Adventure tales of the nineteenth century were overwhelmingly shaped by masculine discourses. Martin Green implicitly acknowledges this when he claims, 'The fundamental fact about adventure, for its enemies but also (though more implicitly) for its admirers, is that it is about violence. More than that, one can say that adventure tales prepare their readers, via their their identification with the protagonist, to inflict violence, to kill...' (1991, p.55). Adventure stories generate excitement for the reader, as the protagonists face a range of apparently insuperable difficulties. Green's study shows that the heroes of adventures were valued for their courage, their perseverance, their cunning and ingenuity and their leadership — values which are associated with masculinity. Possession of these qualities ultimately results in achieving a stated goal, although there are always setbacks to sustain suspense. Thus the title of this text creates an immediate expectation of an adventure story, with a male hero, in whom readers can invest their interest and loyalty, and whose adventures are located in a distant part of the British Empire. Our hero would be expected to encounter and overcome a standard range of difficulties which ensure his rite of passage into manhood, so that he emerges triumphant, a fitting inheritor of the Empire's fruits and responsibilities. Thus, from the title, readers are able to make certain deductions which anticipate certain kinds of discourse in the narrative. In this case the intersecting discourses of empire and masculinity are invoked, with their assumptions about the value of the

colonising project, and the characteristics of successful colonists which stand in opposition to those of the original inhabitants.

The reader's first difficulty is in determining the identity of the hero. As the first character introduced, Mr Mayburn seems to be a candidate for the position but readers are warned 'it was his pleasure to communicate to his children the rich treasures of learning that he possessed; but the lessons of life, the useful preparation for the battle of the world, he had not the skill or energy to teach' (p.5). As the most senior member of the party, by right of class, age and gender, he would be expected to have certain qualities and command a certain respect, but he seems to head his family group only in name. Although the children respectfully defer to his judgment for major decisions he inevitably depends on Margaret or Arthur, who have both profited from their mother's practical instruction. Margaret organises their departure and encourages her father, who bemoans the fact that 'He is totally deficient in the qualities of application and perseverance' (p.6).

Mayburn develops into the antithesis of the hero figure, possessing none of the qualities usually ascribed to heroes and, more surprisingly, even lacking the expected qualities of the male head of a family. His indolence and selfishness soon become apparent when they are shipwrecked. They glimpse some islands and Mr Mayburn becomes enthusiastic about the possibility of exploring them. Despite advice from Wilkins against attempting a dangerous landing through the reefs, he persists, and all the males of the party except Mr Mayburn and the antagonistic Black Peter work hard to strengthen their raft for the attempt. They land, but at the cost of losing the raft and some possessions. Arthur sees a belt of trees which would make a useful encampment, but it is Mr Mayburn (who has contributed no labour to their attempt) who says he is unable to exert himself any further, and since '[t]he word of the father was the law of the children' (p.65) they abandon that idea and instead seek shade amongst some mangroves nearby. However, the mosquitoes so bother Mr Mayburn that Margaret feels obliged to say they must move back to the open beach they have left. Next morning, seeing the murderous Black Peter hauling up the raft timbers on to the beach, Mayburn

demonstrates his inexperience of the world when he observes, 'I am glad he is so usefully employed. ... I trust he feels ashamed of his ingratitude and means to build us a hut with these planks' (p.66). Thus Mayburn is quickly constructed as a selfish and impotent, if benevolent, patriarch who is utterly unacquainted with the possibilities of human nature, but who, by right of class, age and gender, is used to having his way.

Another expectation of masculine discourse in tales of empire is a certainty about the need to open up the land and make it available to those who know best how to use it. On a number of occasions the party traverses beautiful Edenic hidden valleys, but Mayburn's response shows none of the expected determination and enthusiasm of the heroic coloniser to exploit the land. Instead, he discloses a very unmasculine desire to retreat from the world: 'I am almost afraid to suggest it,' said Mr Mayburn; 'but why should we leave this lovely tranquil valley? Why should we not erect a simple hut, and dwell here in peace, abundance and contentment, without toil and without care?' (p.191).

One of Mayburn's main contributions to his party's fortunes is his learning. Here he might have been constructed as a wise and gentle old sage, but this opportunity is overlooked in preference to constructing his learning as comprising mostly useless quotations which comment on the plight of the group but do nothing to alleviate it. Having attempted another difficult landing at the mouth of a river, where they lose more of their treasured possessions and where they surmise they are likely to meet unfriendly Aborigines, Mr Mayburn contributes a quotation from Byron 'who apostrophized the ocean' (p.127). He is equally generous with Biblical quotations to encourage others to greater endeavour.

Mayburn knows a great deal about the flora and fauna of Australia, but he uses his knowledge to identify the plants they see and the animals and birds they kill, *after* the event, being unable to suggest they seek a particular edible plant or tasty animal in advance. He becomes a parody of the imperial man of learning claiming the land for the empire by his assimilation of the land's products into European scientific knowledge and structures. On one occasion Mayburn's learning does provide a useful

suggestion for the Xanthorrhoea arborea, the tea-tree scrub, which they find. He says it would make a 'wholesome and probably an agreeable beverage', so Jenny the nurse duly collects some and makes some tea, which fulfils his prediction. The usefulness of his knowledge is undercut by a sly dig at the pompous learned register which characterises his speech. 'The plant is certainly saccharine,' pronounced Mr Mayburn. 'If it had only been lacteal too,' said Hugh, 'we might have had a perfect cup of tea' (p.195). His speech is satirised on another occasion when he tries to reassure the uneducated servant girl Ruth that Gerald was only joking when he suggested tying her up and gagging her to prevent her giving away their location by her squealing.

'Gerald is not in earnest, my poor girl,' said Mr Mayburn; 'but it is nevertheless important — nay, it is even imperative — that you should preserve absolute silence and immobility.'
'That is, Ruth,' said Margaret interpreting the order, 'you must sit quite still and hold your tongue, whatever may happen.'
(p.198)

Mr Mayburn's most serious shortcoming as male and as hero is that he appears cowardly. Whenever a confrontation with unfriendly Aborigines seems imminent, he suggests flight rather than an assertion of his white masculine power. The usual colonial assumptions about the ethical validity of the whole colonial project, frequently voiced in other settler tales of the period, are severely undermined in his advice to Arthur:

'Shed no blood, I beseech you, my son,' said Mr Mayburn. 'We are intruders; do not let us become invaders. If we can obtain immunity for ourselves, let us be satisfied. Even if we should be attacked, we have no right to retaliate, but should rather take to flight.'
(p.75)

Here Bowman's deviation from the standard arguments found in adventure-settler literature is quite explicit, although being placed in the mouth of a character who does not command respect, weakens its force. There is a tension here between the discourses of philanthropy and

the assumptions of imperial discourse. On a later occasion the narrative voice adopts an ironic tone to reinforce this transgressive idea that Europeans have no right to be displacing Aborigines or to justify killing them in an ambush after being attacked.

'Ye're a real soft 'un, master,' said Wilkins. 'What's a few savages? Bless ye, t'country round about teams with 'em; they'll niver be missed.' Nevertheless, Arthur could not be persuaded that it was expedient or excusable to destroy the surplus population of savages; and he preferred to reserve his charges for absolute defence.'
(p.281)

While Mayburn fails to fulfil the role of hero, he is a conduit for the dissemination of ideas which subvert a great many of the truth claims of colonial discourse. Through him, Bowman is able to create doubts for her readers regarding the rights of appropriating Aboriginal lands, and to contest the morals of those who engage in genocide and exploitation or destruction of natural resources. These are feminine concerns, but they sit easily on the shoulders of a frail unmasculine character, whose voice, because it is masculine, carries more weight than that of a woman. Bowman's desire seems to be for a modified but sympathetic settlement by white people. Mr Mayburn articulates the utopian vision: 'This is truly a country of rich and abundant resources; wanting but the light of civilization and religion to render it a paradise' (p.296).

Readers are obliged to cast a line elsewhere in search of the character with whom they can identify. The next most likely subject is Margaret, Mayburn's eldest child. After the first few pages, the story is focalised through Margaret, whose practical competence attends to the business of getting their affairs in order, provides support to the younger members of the family and gives reassurance to the servants. On the journey to Australia events are viewed largely through her eyes and when the party transfers to another ship in Melbourne, Margaret looks on the departure with 'foreboding', not liking the gloomy ship which is to take them to India, for 'she shrunk (sic) from the prospect of unknown difficulties and dangers,

when all decision and responsibility would be thrown upon her, from the helpless character of her beloved but irresolute parent' (p.36). Up to the point where they are shipwrecked, Margaret provides the leadership they need, and the reader, having been privy to her private concerns, has been encouraged to develop empathy for her. Credibility is only slightly strained for the nineteenth-century reader, for her role as centre of the family group is acceptably domestic and within the province of feminine responsibilities, as she demonstrates skills of household management and provides moral strength.

At the point at which they are shipwrecked, however, Bowman was faced with the difficulty of having constructed a heroine who had been removed from her domestic sphere into the outdoor world of the masculine. It would have strained credibility for her heroine to continue leadership under these circumstances, and it is quietly ceded to her brother Arthur in an incident on their raft. Black Peter, the mutinous crew member they have rescued, is threatening and insolent, but Arthur tells him he is commander here, 'and the first man on the raft that shows any signs of subordination, I shall certainly shoot dead' (p.56). So leadership changes hands, but although Arthur remains undisputed commander of their group, in the background Margaret continues to assert her ability to cope under extraordinary circumstances. Her unfailingly cheerful and positive disposition is an example to the other weaker female servants in the group and to her father, for whom she provides an aim in suggesting they find the Deverells (p.40). She is even able to gently suggest to her father that his reading has bred in him some impractical notions, but that what they are now facing is life itself: 'Yes, dear papa,' said Margaret, 'we must bid adieu to the fallacious dreams of poetry, the romance of that golden age when men were virtuous because they were ignorant.' (p.304).

The reader sees that her barb has hit its mark when Mr Mayburn, in a reference to Robin Hood's Rangers, says, 'I fear the halo of chivalry and romance blinds us as to the real character of those outlaws' (p.352).

In accordance with the accepted notions of what constituted appropriate concerns in feminine discourse, Margaret also offers leadership in her concern for the

spiritual welfare of Wilkins, for whose salvation she prays. Her practical domestic skills also continue to be of use, when she weaves bags of grass for them to carry their goods (p.159). When they are besieged by Black Peter and threatening Aborigines, she acts as a lookout, showing no signs of the fear or hysteria attributed to her sex and so quietly transgressing a number of the contemporary beliefs of conventional wisdom about females and their frailty. When the group finally arrives at Deverell's station after fifteen months of adventure she resumes her recognised role as marriageable female, displaying a becoming modesty at Edward Deverell's attentions and allowing her father and Edward to agree on their marriage. She assumes her role as mistress of the station with dignity, and makes plans for the future disposition of its inhabitants. Her particular proposal to establish a school for the children of the station, including the child of Baldabella, the native woman whom they have rescued en route, gives her a modicum of power and fits in with feminine discourse and its 'proper' concerns of caring for others. Margaret not only conforms to expectations of femininity in her intercourse with society but also transgresses them in demonstrating that under duress, and even when removed from the comfort and security of a home, she is quite as reliable as any of the males. Her presence in the narrative unsettles the conventional belief that women's contribution to the colonial enterprise was at best marginal.

When Arthur assumes the mantle of leadership there is a marked distancing of the narrative voice from him, as though there is a reluctance to affirm his heroic qualities. While the narrator has divulged many of Margaret's inner concerns, Arthur is only observed externally. Perhaps his finest hour is when they are attacked by bushrangers. He turns his father's humane and self-sacrificing attitude to his own strategic advantage when Mr Mayburn objects to 'picking off' the convict-bushrangers in an ambush. 'The ambush is always fair in the strategy of war ... These men are invaders, papa, and we have a right to drive them off.' After failing to drive off the assailants, the group is called on to surrender to them or they would 'twist all yer necks while yer living'. In the best tradition of Muscular Christianity Arthur assures their enemies that they 'are mistaken if you think us cowards. We have brave men among us who will not submit to any treaty with convicts'

(p.351).

Arthur is, in many respects, a braver version of Mr Mayburn, since he adheres to most of his father's beliefs. In response to Wilkins' inferences that the natives are cannibals who should be shot on sight, Arthur responds, 'I should not feel that I had the same right to shoot a native that I had to shoot a kangaroo' (p.164). However, it has been made clear that Arthur has benefited from the practicality of the mother's knowledge and teaching, which is thus valorised and set above Mr Mayburn's 'rich treasures of learning' (p.5). Although Arthur constantly defers respectfully to his father's judgment he assumes the command in his own right, his pragmatism modifying the idealised and impractical position held by his father. He proves to be a thoughtful and brave leader, but he remains a largely unknown personality to the reader, except perhaps for his irritating likeness to his father in having read a great deal and being able to offer explanations about the practices of the indigenous inhabitants, or of curious discoveries they make. Indeed, Bowman's refusal to construct the hero along the usual masculinist lines can only be construed as having been deliberate, especially when one sees how the masculine hero is parodied by the two younger boys.

Hugh and Gerald are imbued with fanciful notions about their potential as young British heroes. When there is speculation about their capacity to cross Australia to find the Deverells, Hugh typically proclaims, 'We are all strong fellows, in sound health and I flatter myself tolerably ingenious. I feel full of resources ... I do not see why we should not traverse the whole continent of Australia, with our stout frames and bold hearts' (p.114). The two young boys are desirous of a confrontation with the Aborigines in order that they might have an opportunity to show their superior skill and bravery: 'What jolly fun if we had an invasion! Wouldn't we drub them like British heroes as we are?' (p.73). They are occasionally allowed a moment of improbable glory, such as when Gerald 'sent an arrow, which he had barbed with skill, into the shoulder of the warrior on the rock, with such force, that he was hurled to the ground' (p.174). Gerald's imperial assumptions are contrasted with Mr Mayburn's ideas. Thinking he will be praised for his action, he

thoughtlessly kills an eagle for Mr Mayburn's ornithological collection. Mr Mayburn's reproach is a covert criticism of the common colonial practice of collecting trophies and specimens:

*I saw and admired the magnificent creatures,
Gerald ... and I deeply grieved to see one fall by
your hand. It was no victory, but a wanton cruelty.
You have destroyed the noble bird for no useful
purpose, and my heart is afflicted to observe the
distress of the attached mate'*

- and he predictably quotes a verse of 'one of our modern classical poets' (p.252-3).

Gerald and Hugh's attempts to be heroic are the source of much trouble for their companions. On one occasion when the boys set out to catch a kangaroo, Gerald is injured by it and they have to be rescued by Arthur. While they are holed up in a secret cave giving Gerald time to heal, he and Hugh get permission to investigate their mountain fastness. Gerald climbs to the summit,

*and stood there, an Australian Mercury on the
'heaven-kissing hill'.
'What a wonderful sight!' he cried out. 'Do come
up, Hugh, to see these heights and hollows, and
windings — a rocky chaos! It is like the beginning
of a new world!'*
(p.343)

Gerald's enthusiasm for the sublime is rendered absurd when he is spotted in his eyrie by bushrangers, and the travellers are subsequently attacked. Even then he continues to act out his misplaced ideas, which are made ridiculous by the pragmatism of their convict friend:

*'Ay, man the walls!' cried Gerald, -
'Hold hard the breath, and bend up every spirit
To his full height! On, on ye noble English!''
'Quieter ye are, t'better, Mr Gerald,' said Wilkins.
(p.349)*

Incorporated within the discourse of empire in the text, are discourses of race. Bowman clearly has reservations about the appropriation of Aboriginal land, and she uses Mayburn as the voice for misgivings about colonial practices. I have already noted how Mr Mayburn prefers

to flee rather than fight the indigenous people, recognising the presence of Europeans as legally untenable. Notwithstanding the official British sympathy for indigenous land rights, British settlers came to Australia with an expectation of being able to purchase and occupy land. Another controversial attack on the disregard for Aboriginal rights occurs when Mayburn later reminds Wilkins that 'the true proprietors of the soil should participate in its fruits. I fear it is we who are, in fact, the rogues, robbing the wretched aborigines of their game, and grudging them even a settlement in their own land' (p.370). Bowman is also careful to provide Arthur with moral justification for shooting at the Aborigines since most of these attacks occur at the urging of villainous convict bushrangers.

Nevertheless, Bowman's position is not so radical that it argues for equality of the races. Aborigines are valued as humans, capable of suffering like all people, but they are demonstrably inferior, denoted by their 'savage' state. The civilized enlightened European is contrasted with the savage Aborigine through the character of Baldabella, whose husband has been slain by the fierce Black Peter. It is implied that Black Peter has slain Baldabella's husband in order to kidnap her, but 'the angry yells of savages in their fury' reminds the readers that Aborigines do not conduct their warfare in a controlled way following agreed rules, but that they are subject to the instinctive responses of animals. Baldabella is constructed sympathetically as human but as Other, because of her outlandish savage customs: 'she was young, and her features were not unpleasant; her eyes were brilliant and her voice soft and musical; nor was she disfigured in any way, except that through the gristle of her nose she wore a fish-bone' (p.208). Her Otherness is emphasised by her hooking out of the riverbank some small grey reptiles resembling slugs which she eats raw and 'with great relish' (p.209). However, Baldabella shows that she is teachable, and that she has finer feelings which lead her to adopt the superior practices of her protectors. She is delighted with one of Margaret's old dresses which she is given to cover her nakedness, and she voluntarily discards her nose ornament. Soon she is bathing herself and her daughter Nakinna daily, and eating the same food and

imitating the manners of her friends, although Mr Mayburn is grieved by the 'perfect indifference' with which she regards the religious worship of the family, and speculates whether these 'wretched natives' do not not even acknowledge a Supreme Being. Wilkins' assertion that the Aboriginal women 'just get all their sense knocked out on their heads' reminds the readers of uncivilized treatment by Aboriginal men of their women, but Margaret hopes that 'by kind treatment, the dormant intellect of [Baldabella] might be developed' (p.211). Her daughter Nakinna proves more amenable to Christian teaching, however, demonstrating that over generations they have potential to improve. Baldabella eventually acknowledges the superiority of the white god when she says, 'Black fellows look for *Bayl-yas* bad spirit; they not know good white man pray, send *Bayl-yas* away' (p.288).

There is some acknowledgement of the usefulness of Aboriginal skills, in the context of their natural state, for Baldabella kills a kangaroo for their consumption, and later her fish-catching keeps them alive when there is nothing else to eat. But European knowledge is always represented as superior. The 'rude, coloured' cave paintings they find are regarded with amusement and astonishment by the boys, for they are 'imperfect in execution, somewhat resembling the ambitious child's first (sic) attempt at art' (p.167). This is a familiar picture, drawn through imperial eyes which see the Aborigines as representing an earlier form of human development, a position they can only improve with European assistance. Baldabella's assistance when they are captured by the bushrangers and held for ransom shows her newly acquired loyalties: she escapes and returns at night to feed them the cakes made of pounded oats, and tea, which she has been taught to make by Jenny the nurse. In so doing, she is acknowledging their 'superior knowledge and power', a state she arrived at when they saved her from some 'bad blackfellows'. On that occasion she made the final gesture of obeisance by prostrating herself before Arthur 'and plac[ing] his foot on her neck' (p.239). When they eventually settle with Mr Deverell, Baldabella acquires a new status as a co-coloniser as her reward. She 'is very glad to meet with the native women, who are not *jins* here, but wives; she certainly holds herself a little above them,

but she condescends to teach them decorum and the manners of society' (p.443). Margaret predicts that her daughter Nakinna will 'soon be a little English girl in all but complexion' (p.440), although the story is silent about what role it sees Nakinna as filling in the future. It is doubtful if the readers envisaged Nakinna assuming the responsibilities or marriage potential of a young English woman in a colonial environment.

Mayburn's earlier statements about dispossession of the Aborigines are conveniently forgotten in the closure, when the Mayburns accept an invitation to settle on Deverell's land. Bowman appears to have difficulty in the idea of appropriating land belonging to others, so she is careful to have Deverell occupy 'waste land' (p. 34), but a basic belief in the role her race has to play in enlightening 'uncivilised' peoples results in a contradictory conclusion. There is silence on whether the Aborigines are displaced by Deverell's large land holdings, and a total acceptance of imperial ideology in the emphasis on the paternal care and assistance Deverell offers to help them become civilised:

Our black neighbours are all tame ... We employ those who can be taught to work, clothe the women, and teach the children; and in times of scarcity or sickness, we feed and attend them. As far as their ignorant and dull nature will allow, we have reason to think that gratitude or policy would prevent them from injuring us or our property.
(p.426)

The same kindness is not extended to those who fail to show gratitude and who transgress by stealing Deverell's cattle and horse. The powerlessness of the colonised here becomes apparent. In what seems now to be a travesty of British justice they are arraigned to appear in a court in which Deverell tries them for a crime committed against his own property. 'The worst criminal has a right to trial by jury,' as Hugh reminds Gerald, and Deverell says regretfully:

With these ignorant natives, in their present condition, intimidation is the only mode of subjection. I hope the time is not very distant

when milder measures may be used to win them to civilization. We are commencing the work by educating the children.
(p.416)

His words also demonstrate how discourses of childhood are annexed to those of the imperial project.

Deverell is constructed as the model settler, having 'acquired some facility in speaking [the Aborigines'] language'. His superior intelligence has presumably made this possible. His paternalism apparently justifies his presence as a coloniser, and his establishment of a 'handsome village ... a regular English village, with a green for sports, and pleasant gardens to the cottages' (p.427) promises the kind of benefits that all right-minded Aborigines would want for their land. While Bowman is ambivalent in her attitudes to the discourses of empire, showing a concern for dispossession, she is ultimately constrained by her belief in British racial and cultural superiority.

There are no such tensions in her work concerning class. Deverell jokingly calls his village 'feudal' and his home his 'castle'. Its class structure certainly reproduces the British class system, with the wealthy land-owning gentry at the summit and the working classes beneath. Mr Mayburn reminds one of the convicts 'that it is God's will that all men should obey His commandments, and do their duty in the station where He has placed them' (p.380). There are some additions to the strata, though, because of the presence of the convicts and Aborigines. The convicts, including Wilkins, display their baser feelings and fitness for occupying the lower stratum by their willingness to kill the Aborigines; these attitudes are contrasted with the finer feelings of the Mayburns and Deverells. Convicts like Wilkins and David, who (like Baldabella) open themselves to Christian teaching are saved for an honest life as artisans or labourers. They are able to take their place with the other worthy workers: Jack, the carpenter whose boat building often saved them from danger on their journey; Jenny the nurse/cook whose culinary skill turned unpromising materials into palatable meals; Ruth, whose care of her chickens showed that despite her ignorance and hysteria, she had a role to

play. Only those unwilling to accept the position allotted to them are abandoned. Black Peter's unremitting savagery is written out of the story when he falls from a cliff, although Margaret's compassion extends to praying for mercy for him as he faces his Maker (p.422). Bill, one of the bushrangers holding the Mayburns to ransom, is dealt with more mildly. He is a self-educated Mrs Malaprop, a comic figure who utters the following speech for the amusement of the readers:

*No Sir, your oratorio makes no depression on me.
If you haven't got money, you're worth money.
You must march in the arrear of your captivators
to our quarters. You shall then write a letter,
which I shall dedicate to you. I never travel
without my writing impediments...*
(p. 374)

But Bill does not know his place, for he has the effrontery to propose marriage to Margaret, who is his superior in every way. So his fate has an inevitability to it: Deverell dispatches him to gaol under the care of the mounted police.

Apart from class, the only discourse within the text which stands unchallenged by Bowman is that of religion. Bowman either does not dare or does not want, to challenge a discourse held in such esteem by her society. The doctrines of Christianity are inextricably intertwined here with ideas about civilisation and at no point is there any suggestion by event, dialogue or tone that the religious values Mr Mayburn represents are less than fully accepted. Mr Mayburn is saved from becoming an absurd figure by the strength of his belief, and its operation in his life. When they embark on their first ship bound for Australia Mr Mayburn 'daily read the morning and evening service publicly' at the request of the captain, 'a right minded man' (p.19). Throughout their journey overland he faithfully offers up prayers of supplication for their protection (pp.138, 214, 283), and then remembers to offer prayers of thanksgiving when they have met with success in their endeavours (for example, pp. 50, 240, 306, 431). He is able, on some occasions, to draw on his belief to overcome his 'weak nerves', and to exhort the others to be cheerful, for 'He who feeds the fowls of the

air will not forget his children on earth' (p.128). When it seems inevitable that Black Peter should capture them, he 'recovered his firmness and faith in God; and he summoned around him his agitated family, to join him in prayer for help and protection in this hour of extreme need' (p.283).

As both the Aborigines and the convicts demonstrate within the ideologies of the text, civilising values are not possible without an acceptance of Christianity, and the changes are visible on the disappearance of the 'lowering countenance', as typified by Wilkins and Baldabella in their unreformed state. Mr Mayburn's and Margaret's earnest prayers for the spiritual welfare of the wretched sinners they meet are followed by counselling and encouragement, and an unshakeable belief that while every human is redeemable, it is 'only when we walk in truth and honesty that we can hope for the protection of God' (p.73). This adds urgency to their zeal in recuperating apparently lost souls, and is present in Mayburn's warning to Wilkins early in their wanderings: 'Your life here is but the beginning of eternity; the hour of death is close at hand to all, when those who have done evil shall receive their punishment, and those who have listened to God shall find a blessed home in a new and glorious world' (p.92). Mr Mayburn even refuses to abandon the callous Black Peter, telling Wilkins that 'God sent no man into the world marked for perdition. There is ever a door open that the vilest may enter' (p.105). When he hears the 'oaths and defiant words of hardened infidels' he kneels and prays for a 'ray of grace for these lost sinners' (p.348). Part of Mr Mayburn's religious scruples include a strict policy of honesty. He does not allow members of his party to take abandoned weapons of the Aborigines, on the grounds that this would constitute a poor example of the benefits of civilisation to set another race. When they are desperate for ammunition for their gun they find a cache buried at the foot of a tree, and Mr Mayburn insists they can take it only if they intend to notify the government later of their appropriation (p.247).

It is fitting then, that the novel concludes with a picture of benign order, with Edward Deverell telling Margaret 'all his plans for extending the population of his colony, and regulating it according to the laws of England and the commands of God' (p.441). While Bowman has permitted

herself to cock a snook at notions of the male hero, and to cast doubt on the legitimacy of the colonial enterprise, in the end she affirms that it is for the good of the Aborigine to be civilised and Christianised, and that women are at their best in the home. Although Bowman makes her protest about received ideas regarding masculinity and empire, it is a modified statement which is itself subverted by the power of the dominant discourses which construct imperial discourse. Hodge and Mishra have reminded their readers that the prescriptions dictated by imperial discourse regarding 'who can speak about what in what way' have enormous power to 'reinforce particular pictures and give them currency' (1991, p.25). Bowman has been obliged to acknowledge that as a female, she is limited in what she can achieve in challenging those fixed pictures. She has to work from within the very discursive frameworks she is challenging; but ultimately they demand and receive her obeisance.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Robin Pope is a lecturer in literary studies at Deakin University who has edited several volumes of conference proceedings from children's literature conferences held at that institution. Her current research is in the field of nineteenth-century Australian children's settler texts and nineteenth-century representations of Australia in children's texts.

