

Tracking Reading in Nineteenth-Century Melbourne Diaries

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THIS ARTICLE CONSIDERS SOME COLONIAL RESPONSES TO THE WIDER FIELD OF 'BRITISH' Victorian literary reading by following the reading traces left in the diaries of three middle-class women in Melbourne in the 1860s, 70s and 80s: Henrietta Jennings (1887–89), Thomas Anne Cole (1867–82) and Joyce Sincock (1862). Cole's and Jennings' diaries offer the most detail but, for both, the record of reading tends to be random, partial and sometimes illegible. Sincock's diary is brief, and more youthful. It offers a slice of one moment in her life, with considerable detail about some of her reading at that moment. Jennings' and Cole's' diaries map regular visits to town. Jennings visits circulating libraries in Melbourne, such as 'Mullen's Select Library' in Bourke Street, to acquire the latest novels and, as Cole's early diaries show similar fashionable reading, it is likely she borrowed, or possibly bought, from the same sources. All three diaries reveal wider patterns of reading across a range of genres (and sources), particularly Cole and Jennings; newspaper reading, which may have included the reading of local, as well as British, serial fiction alongside attention to 'serious' news items. The reading which Jennings records is eclectic, in terms of genre, and international-Anglophone, including a substantial amount of American writing as well as British and Australian. The reading of Cole, in her early records, tends more to British writing, and travel writing while Sincock reads whatever she can get. All three women also engage in religious reading; the Bible and sermons, but also a variety of other works that might be designated spiritual.

It is notoriously difficult to establish many details about private reading. Robert Darnton's comment that 'the experience of the great mass of readers lies beyond the range of historical research' (Darnton 177) has become almost a catchphrase. Nevertheless, in Australia as elsewhere, there is growing interest in the community of readers and the culture of reading. Diaries are an obvious source of reading records but, while diaries offer insight into reading, cryptic diary entries can compound the elusiveness of the act of reading—an issue that underlies the following study. By exploring what these diarists read, their responses and the records of responses of others, this article gestures at the complexity of literary consumption and circulation in the colonial context, and the extent to which even such a small study can disrupt assumptions about gendered reading, Imperial imposition, and acculturation.

The use of private diaries as a source for evidence of reading practices—and instances of reading and response—presents a number of problems. Firstly, there is the question of which diaries survive, the diaries of which families and individuals; but also, in the case of an individual like Henrietta Jennings, since there was clearly a sequence of diaries, which diary. This is a class-driven issue, as has been noted, but one inflected by other influences—random and specific (Zboray and Zboray 101, n. 3). Diaries are valuable as records of reading practices because they record a 'series of moments in time' (Roy Pascal, qtd. in Bunkers and Huff 4)—'renderings of "dailiness"' (Holmes x)—that 'do not privilege "amazing" over "ordinary" events, in terms of scope, space or selection' (Bunkers and Huff 5). Diaries are also not shaped retrospectively although, as many commentators point out, they can have distinctive narrative rhythms and shapes (Bunkers and Huff 4; Heilbrun 130; Hampsten 11). In general, diaries are characterised by repetitions, gaps and silences, which may be as important as the information they include (Hampsten 4). Philippe Lejeune (in a discussion of bourgeois women's diaries of the nineteenth century) has suggested that the opaqueness of the diaries—both in their codes and their physical handwriting—enforces 'valuable time ... to read between the lines' (41). As Rebecca Steinitz has more recently pointed out, while the diary was 'a uniquely effective vehicle for the dominant discourses of the [nineteenth] century'—Imperialism, 'Enlightenment observation and organization, Romantic interiority, Evangelical and secular self-improvement, Victorian domesticity'—it was also a form which, in the popular imagination, across the nineteenth-century became inextricably associated with the feminine and with feminine associations of privacy, domesticity and emotion (2).

What did these women read, and why?

The diaries of Jennings and Cole, like so many others, constantly repeat the words 'read', 'reading', and (more expansive, but no more illuminating) phrases, such as 'spent the morning reading', with no explanation of what was read. These words and phrases register reading as regular, but not totally ordinary. In women's diaries these statements parallel and accompany other activities which are habitual, daily, and carry an apparently equivalent value; like sewing or visiting. Such activities are somewhere between leisure and work, useful and time-passing, improving and frivolous. Reading sometimes edges further in either direction—religious reading, such as that recorded by Sincock, Cole, Jennings, and in the diaries of previous generations of Jennings' family, is more clearly morally improving, and positioned as proper spiritual work, while other forms of reading, such as adventure books for Jennings, novels for Sincock, travel books for Cole, or books about religious doubt like Robert Elsmere, are more clearly dangerous and morally imperilling than any form of sewing might hope to be (Flint, especially 221-5).

A contemporary discussion of the fine details of individual reading practices inevitably also sits in the context of efforts to adapt Franco Moretti's expansive studies to Australian book history. I both applaud and dislike these adaptations and their model. For Franco Moretti individual novels are 'tiny dots in the graph ... indistinguishable' and insignificant in his search for the 'collective system', the 'literary field' (8, 4). For Moretti, a study of a few diaries cannot indicate the 'field' in these terms, even if they are treated as symptomatic of diaries generally. However, while Moretti's literary history is a 'sum of individual cases', a wider movement or field, I find that the individual cases are inevitably the most compelling, as well as essentially constitutive: '[I]n order to do distant reading one must be an excellent close reader', as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues (Spivak 105; see also Hack 730). Alternative methods of tracking reading habits include Tim Dolin's studies of settler-Australian reading, using borrowing records to map clusters of reading for settler communities (*Australian Common Reader*) and Lydia Wevers and Pat Buckridge's studies of remnant private libraries. Where borrowing records and book ownership may or may not match reading habits, the diaries, which may not offer the same depth or breadth of data, do offer the grain of reading detail.

These three women come from comparable backgrounds in that they are from British stock (Scots and English), and from the middling classes. The men who define their status work in the professions — the law and banking. The Jennings family is downwardly mobile at the time covered by the diary. Thomas Anne Cole, by far the most prosperous, is living very comfortably, but across the course of years covered by the diary she loses the immediate male providers in the

family and her income is reduced. Joyce Sincock's family is closer to the edges of gentility, having recently immigrated with her banker father, William Sincock, under a shadow. Joyce Sincock is writing in her late teens (she turns eighteen in July 1862), Henrietta Jennings in her forties, and Cole's extant diary starts when she is fifty-six. Sincock is unmarried, but still of marriageable age, Jennings is an established maiden aunt, and Cole is a wife and mother of almost-grown children in the earlier diaries; a widow with surviving daughters by the later ones.

Henrietta Jennings, like Sincock, was born in 1844, but their extant diaries are separated by over twenty years. Jennings' father Henry was a solicitor, who emigrated to Tasmania from England as a young man, and married Alicia Legge, a fellow emigrant. They moved to Melbourne and settled in St. Kilda in 1849. Of their eleven children, seven survived into adulthood—five daughters, and two sons. The two eldest daughters, Blanche and Philippa, married in the 1850s.¹ The elder surviving son, Robert, died in 1870, aged thirty-three. By the time covered by Henrietta's diaries, and that of her sister Sophia, there was only one son remaining alive, the second Henry living with his wife Louisa, perhaps in the family home, and the three spinster daughters who were living together in St Kilda. Henry junior was a solicitor, like his father. Some of the family claims to higher gentility were based on friendships and intermarriages—they were related to the more select level of upper-middle class Melbourne society (Russell 220) including the Dumaresq family. Jennings' mother, Alicia, had been a close friend of [Eliza] Jane a'Beckett, a friendship which had carried on to the daughters of both families. Sir William a'Beckett was first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Victoria. Through such connections, the Jennings daughters were visitors at Government House, and moved in genteel circles. Although their father had been a Methodist in Tasmania, the first Anglican service in St. Kilda was allegedly conducted in his house, and Philippa married an Anglican priest who became rector of St James Cathedral [sic] in Melbourne (Cooper 323). The religious observance recorded in their diaries was evangelical, but orthodox.

Thomas Anne Cole was a member of early Melbourne society. Although located in the city, and financially dependent on business, the Cole family cemented their gentility through landed interests (Russell 8). Cole's extant diaries cover the period from 1867 to 1882. Thomas Anne had come to Melbourne with her brother Farquhar McCrae, her sister Margaret, and her elderly mother. Other members of the family were in, or came to the colonies. Her marriage at 32, in 1842, to Captain George Ward Cole extended the McCrae family connections in business, politics and the professions. George Cole had property interests, a bonded store, and financial and shipping interests. He became increasingly

¹ Philippa married Michael Henry Becher in St Kilda 1856; Blanche married John Wemyss Manley in 1859.

involved in colonial politics. The family lived on the foreshore in Brighton at 'St Ninian's', a house built for George Ward Cole, partly from prefabricated teak, on at least 24 acres of land (Russell 26-8; Bate). Thomas Anne Cole's diary chronicles social maintenance and family relations (which are entwined, as Russell points out). The McCraes were an educated family, and a family of readers and writers. Thomas Anne's rather more flamboyant sister-in-law, Georgiana McCrae, also kept a diary that, like Cole's, chronicled reading and gardening, amongst other things. These are not uncommon topics for genteel women of the time. What makes these diaries distinctive, different as they are from each other, is their level of detail about what is actually read.

Joyce Sincock's family emigrated from Andover, in Hampshire, in 1861, and Joyce's father, William, held a position with the Trust and Agency Company of Australasia, a position which he lost soon after arriving in Australia. Across the course of the diary, William is seeking other work, including considering starting another company, and the family are anxious about money. Joyce is assisting her mother, and helping with the younger children, but also considering going out as a daily, or full-time governess. By the end of the decade William Sincock was more securely established as Acting Manager for the comfortably-profitable Land Mortgage Bank of Victoria, and looking to buy a cottage on an acre in Kew, Hawthorn, or South Yarra, but at the time of writing the family were renting a house in Prahran, which was being renovated and sold out from under them.

Women, reading and class

Reading and the possession of books were central indicators of class, leisure and taste (Askew and Hubber 113). All of these women are poised at that period of the 'early years of European settlement in Australia [which] coincide with the emergence and development of a western cultural phenomenon which has been described as the rise of the reading public' (111). The specific books read and owned revealed and often also influenced all of these. Henrietta Jennings' mother may have relied on informal forms of book circulation in the 1850s. The diaries of Georgiana McCrae, and Eliza Pohlman—the fledgling elite of 1840s Melbourne—show that books were brought from 'home' and lent amongst a select group of friends. Cultural capital and class solidarity were reinforced by this exchange (McCrae 1864; Pohlman 1844). However, in this earlier period books could also be bought cheaply in lots at auction as members of the Colonial elite went bankrupt, so the role of books as items of cultural display was not assured. From mid-century on, and certainly by the 1880s, Melbourne had an extensive selection of retail booksellers and a variety of circulating libraries (Askew and Hubber 117, Slade). Like the diaries of her contemporaries, Henrietta Jennings' diary records frequent trips to Mullen's, which was on the 'Block' in Collins Street, the pivot of the middle-class circuit. Cole probably

acquired at least some of her books from the same source. Her 1880 diary shows regular visits to Mullen's and the bookshop district. Cole apparently used Mullen's for post. Mullen's moved into a bigger store in 1879, consolidating its dominance (Askew and Hubber 120; Slade 101). However dominance does not mean monopoly, even with the 'respectable ... female clientele' to which Mullen's specifically catered. The Jennings' diaries, like those of other unblemished middle-class women of the period, including Thomas Anne Cole, indicate that women of this class also frequented the much more downmarket, 'popular' and tasteless Coles' Book Arcade (e.g. Jennings 12 August 1888). Thomas Anne Cole's visits suggests that she was not above sourcing cheaper goods from Coles, and other items from Mullen's in the same day: 'to the mutual store then for paper from Coles Arcade & then to Mullens for a Diary book then to Walshes to get him as a magistrate to sign my pension then posted the papers containing it at Mullens' (Cole 5 July 1881).

Melbourne was the largest colonial market for books in this period, connected with an extensive global commodity market. The colonies and their consumers were not just passive recipients of colonial goods, but active participants in the consumption, circulation and recirculation of goods, including literature and the cultural capital it carried. A varied consumption of local and international Anglophone literature interpellated the Jennings, Cole and Sincock into this market, in which they were passive and active; consumers and critics.

Most nineteenth-century diaries contain very little trace of actual reading practices, and searching for these traces is frustrating. Individuals seldom kept track of their reading, or reading habits, systematically. This is hardly surprising. Until relatively recently diarists did not tend to keep lists of their own reading or their responses to what they read.² In some contexts the Victorians kept meticulous accounts of particular aspects of their lives. However this detailed account-keeping tends to be directed toward a course of study, or religious observance, where an individual has embarked upon a specific program of reading. Such lists, by definition, are excluded from the realm of the 'ordinary' or everyday. Michael Suarez has argued that any record of a reading event is by definition atypical (161), or, as Simon Eliot puts it: 'any reading documented in

² Anna Jackson comments on Katherine Mansfield's neat notebook projects which set up reading records and abandon them after a few entries (Jackson 84). As one of my excellent readers pointed out, the entire nature of tracking reading practices has been transformed by the electronic and internet age, with apps and sites such as *Goodreads* and *LibraryThing* dedicated exactly to tracking reading. One might argue that a site like *Goodreads* or in a very different way *Wattpad*, is not tracking reading within the context of a diary, but it is more credible to argue that a reading site such as a *Goodreads* profile constitutes an online diary via reading, particularly when linked to Facebook, blogs, twitter, and various friend networks.

an historically recoverable way is, almost by definition, an exceptional recording of an uncharacteristic event by an untypical person' (qtd. Buckridge 62).

Improving reading

The surviving collection of Jennings family diaries includes diaries from Henrietta's parents, Alicia and Henry Jennings, and a diary of Henry's sister. The remnant diaries kept by Henry and Alicia's unmarried daughters, Henrietta and Sophia, over forty years later, are in a very different vein. Henrietta Jennings (1844-1928) does record her reading, as did her aunt and father. In accord with the family tradition, she kept some track of her Sunday reading, as did Thomas Anne Cole and Joyce Sincock. Like other readers of their class and education of the period, the diarists usually make some distinction between Sunday reading and weekday reading. As well as, or instead of, attending Church, all three women read specifically religious material—the Bible [presumably] but also sermons and holy lives, or 'good' lives. Sincock sets herself a Bible chapter to read every day, which she frequently fails to manage. Much of the discursive space in a diary of previous generations would have been taken up with self-examination, self-reflection, and the recording of further improving reading. In all three diaries, but particularly those of Jennings and Sincock (who were of the same generation) self-reflection is replaced with the practical recording of good works (for Henrietta) and the frank account of daily secular entertainments, including secular reading (for Henrietta and Thomas Anne). Sincock, sees her religious duty as intersecting with her familial obligations, and agonises over this, while also recording her reading. Some of the secular reading might have been classified as improving by its reader—and the language of emotional and moral improvement might be discerned bleeding in from Sunday reading.

Peripatetic reading

Although it might be said of many women diarists of the period, Henrietta's diary, in particular, suggests some mnemonic relationship between the activities she describes and her reading. The historical description of her life in John Butler Cooper's *History of St Kilda* suggests a life circumscribed by duty and expectation:

Miss Henrietta Eliza Jennings ... lived at 'Wynamo'. She was born in Tasmania, and died on Christmas Day, 1928, aged 84 years. For 50 years she was a member of the St. Kilda Ladies' Benevolent Society, and for a long time she occupied the position of president. She was one of the founders of the Queen's Fund, and she helped to establish the Girls' Friendly Society, Church of England in Melbourne, as well as being engaged in other church activities. For 60 years Miss Jennings walked once a week to the Brighton Road State

School where she gave a scripture lesson. For some time she was a member of the Women's Hospital Committee and during the war she did much sewing for the Red Cross. When she died the last link with Anglicism in St. Kilda of the year 1849 was broken, and a long life of fine service ended. (331)

However, to read the diary is to encounter an energetic account of a sequence of activities which belies this circumscription—a freedom of movement and attention. This contrast may arise from reader projection, or perhaps as a product of what Anna Jackson describes as the tension between the 'autonomy of the individual entry' and the 'unifying effects of sequence' in a diary (83). The sense of peripatetic freedom is most evident across a sequence of entries, but even one gives some sense:

went to Hawksburn & missed my train & walked to S[outh]. Yarra. got in late for the meeting. home to change my dress & then off to Rebecca's for the 'silver wedding' Blanche Fan Phoebe & I dined there. a magnificent turkey from Bessie & a great display of gifts. saw May's presents after tea. (13 May 1888)

Entries such as this epitomise the diary as Anaïs Nin's 'organic text', full of perpetual change and motion (Lensink 42-43). The reading that is mentioned in these diaries is presented as taking place in this moment, in context, but seldom with reflection or hindsight; reading is part of the everyday, embedded within lived experience, among other texts and narratives and critical relations.

Kylie Mirmohamadi's study, 'Melbourne Sites of Reading', examines the circulation of women as readers in Melbourne, their range, visibility, and their colonial specificity (Mirmohamadi 1-18). Jennings' diary recounts two quite similar forms of activity, and the same can be traced in Cole's. The forms of ranging and roaming, the freedom of looking and picking and commenting, which are evident in Henrietta and her sisters' movement through the streets of Melbourne and St Kilda as they shop, visit and examine gardens, train up their school pupils and Girls' Friendly Society members. The same kind of roaming and freedom and looking and picking and commenting occurs in Henrietta's reading patterns. Henrietta wanders from street to street, venue to activity, in much the same way as she moves from text to text—her attention is caught by new books—she is the reading *flâneur*, the idly-curious stroller, loungeur. Her visits to Mrs. Buckley for dress fittings are matched by her reading of fashionable new books. She is not unconstrained by convention in either sphere. However as an independent woman in the 1880s she has a level of freedom that is inscribed in the diary and on the city and read across books and streets. It is also a created, written, compromised freedom—her freedom of reading and movement is a freedom she writes herself. It is an imaginary freedom in various senses.

Henrietta's ranging the city seems unlimited, but is delimited by social and cultural practices, the conventions of visiting and good taste (Russell 7), as her reading follows patterns—possibly discernible in recurring themes of the colonial, exile, religious doubt and affirmation—and the reading often interpellates and affirms her as a good middle-class colonial subject.

Andrew McCann suggests that the Australian colonial identity of the 1860s and 1870s 'consists exactly in the dislocatedness of modernity', and Thomas Anne Cole's and Henrietta's peripatetic shuttling might be read in these terms (14). Diaries record spatial freedom, as they record space. McCann draws a contrast between a masculinised city and 'respectably domestic suburbs', but diarist Thomas Anne Cole and her daughters, like Henrietta and her sisters, travel seamlessly between suburbs and city, urban shops and churches, middle-class suburban homes and the homes of the poor—their traversal of these supposedly oppositional spaces brings this dichotomy into question, in the same way that their reading practices belie assumptions about gendered respectability and production (McCann 32).

The surviving diaries of Sophia and Henrietta Jennings are those that cover the years 1887 to 1889, which overlap with their trip to Great Britain and the 1888 international Centennial Exhibition in Melbourne. It might be assumed that this trip, and this period, count as a milestone in the women's lives—the trip 'home'. The different status of a 'travel diary' may have affected both the nature of the diary kept, and the status of the resulting narrative. Thomas Anne Cole's diaries cover a much longer period, from just after the death of her 17-year-old son, in 1867, through to 1882. Joyce Sincock's diary barely covers three months from June to September in 1862.

Writing readers

The survival of diaries in the case of these women situates them as chroniclers, women who narrated their lives, were 'writers' in one sense. The three spinster sisters (Fanny, Henrietta and Sophia Jennings) were often together on excursions which involved the acquisition of books—and their recording of these excursions confirms them as readers as well as writers. The fact that Sophia does not record her reading, and Henrietta does, cannot be taken as concrete evidence that Sophia was less of a reader than Henrietta.³ It is evidence only of itself—that Henrietta recorded, and/or commented on her reading, or elements of it.

³ As with so many life narratives the most commonplace and most frequently undertaken tasks are often not recorded at all. Potentially trips to the library and the bookshop, and the actual activity of reading are amongst these.

Henrietta does record running into her sister-in-law, Louie—Louisa Jennings—at Mullen's, in the course of a standard daily round:

Off to meet Mrs Currie called at Mrs Buckleys & left my dress. had a pleasant trip to Coburn & Woodlands.—got back at 1-30 went to the Hospital. saw Louisa at Mullen's— heard they were not going up for a week. pouring rain in the morning. (Thursday 29 March 1888)

On other occasions she meets friends in Mullen's: 'Went round Carlisle St. After lunch went to town with Lizzie. Phoebe and Ella joined us at Mullens & we went to tea with Jim at Ormond' (Thursday 8 November 1888).

Interestingly, Louisa is the one she mentions by name as reading—after an exhausting day of wedding preparations, and the actual wedding of a relative, in April 1888. Henrietta comments, 'Louisa and I subsided into novels' (Thursday 19 April 1888). Again, this may be coincidental, or may mean that Louisa was the one who most shared her reading habit—but Louisa's marriage and the number of children she produced very likely severely curtailed her ability to pursue this interest. Nevertheless, from the accounts within Henrietta's diaries, I speculate that the middle-class sisters and sister-in-law formed a 'reading community' or shared reading tastes or volumes to some extent.

Who reads to whom? Private reading and reading aloud

A number of questions are raised by the 'reading' entries in diaries of this period. In both Thomas Anne Cole's diaries, and Henrietta Jennings' reading is referred to in such a way that it may involve group, or private reading or both. Joyce Sincock's reading experiences were certainly collective, in that any reading matter that came into the house seems to have been read by the entire family, but it is similarly not always clear whether this was collective or sequential reading. In most cases, Henrietta Jennings' references to reading have no personal pronoun attached, as in this entry: 'Tuesday [9 August 1887] At home all the morning did a little painting & some reading'. This is quite a common entry pattern.

On the boat trip home from Europe she writes, 'Tuesday 8th [November 1887] quite a cool breeze played some backgammon & read novels. played the tournament match with Miss Taylor & Mrs Beatie'. The latter entry—in that novels are plural—suggests that a group of individuals were separately reading their own novels, despite the fact—or because of it—that other activities such as the backgammon tournament were conducted together.

In some of these days it is likely that the sisters, and in the latter case friends as well, were working and reading together. That is, that one or two were sewing while one was reading aloud. Thomas Anne Cole has similar entries: For 21 February 1867 Cole writes, 'read & talked the rest of the Eveng/', which could encompass various scenarios in which family members read separately and joined in conversation intermittently, or that reading aloud was replaced by conversation. Soon after, on 1 March, Cole's entry says, 'I read nearly all the Eveng. with Capn Cole', which suggests that she and her husband were reading together—one, probably Thomas Anne—reading aloud to the other. In the next line she says, 'The book I am reading is called Up Country by the Honble Emily Edins' [sic, for Edens], which reinforces the likelihood that she was the reader. Other records are perfectly clear: on 5 May 1867, the anniversary of her son's death, Thomas Anne notes, 'I read aloud to the Girls & then we all retired for the night'.

In Henrietta Jennings' diary some entries imply this sort of group reading, while in others it seems evident, from the recorded activities of the other household members, that Henrietta was alone, and was therefore sewing (or doing other work; primarily, managing the records and bookkeeping for her many philanthropic involvements) and reading alternately. Sophia does not record reading in this way, although she may well have been engaged in it.

When Henrietta reads aloud to children, or to adults outside of her immediate family circle, she does seem to chronicle the fact explicitly. For example, she 'read out Elaine to the children's great delight' (Thursday 27 April 1888)—presumably, Tennyson's 'Lancelot and Elaine' from *Idylls of the King*. On the subsequent days, while she is staying at the same place with her nieces and nephews, references to 'reading out' indicate an audience, but it may have been her sisters, rather than the delighted children (who receive a special mention):

Wednesday 2nd [May 1888] Read out—& made a pinafore. Arranged ferns & wandered about the garden. wrote to Sophia & Blanche. hot wind.

Thursday [3 May 1888] Read out Mrs Hemans & made a pinafore Heavy rain stopped our drive. only went into the garden.

The specific records of reading out loud to adults outside of the family suggests that Henrietta read aloud as a matter of course to adults within the family—her mother, or both parents, when they were alive, and her sisters in the late 1880s in the period covered by the two remaining diaries.⁴ There are a few references to reading to close family friends, such as the à Becketts: 'read out a little to Mrs à B' (Sunday 12 August 1888). Sophia's diary contains the same sort of entry

⁴ Henry Jennings died 23 August 1885, and Alicia Jennings in 1875 (Jennings Family Tree).

occasionally: 'In the afternoon I went to no 2 district & called in to see Miss Sandhead [?] on my way back & read to her for a while' (Wednesday 21 July 1886). Thomas Anne Cole is also quite explicit about reading to the family. For Sincock, the eldest daughter in a family of children, reading aloud is both entertainment and education: 'We commenced this afternoon to read a story, sentence – and sentence, with Kate, Cilla, and Phillis, instead of reading aloud to them. It is a much more improving way for them' (9 July 1862).

At other points in Henrietta's reading record she certainly appears to be reading solo, to herself. For example, Wednesday 15th [October 1888][sic]⁵ '... sent off 20 packages for which we paid £2.12.6 ... [packing &] I read a book & rested till lunch'. Similarly Cole records reading alone: On 2 and 3 May 1867 she notes everyone retiring to their rooms, and that she 'read as usual after going to mine' (2 May 1867).

For Henrietta Jennings, Sunday reading, devotional reading, also appears to be usually reading to herself. She mentions her own, rather than collective or others' reactions to the items read, and sometimes mentions withdrawing first. The record of Sunday reading comes and goes—there are some strict entries in 1887 and then again in 1889. Sunday reading, as noted, is always related in some way to a serious, usually religious theme (and sometimes the Bible, which is not to say that reading did not always include the Bible), but as the diary progresses, the shifts in frequency suggest that devoutness (or its record) may be somewhat cyclical: 'spent the afternoon reading Stanley's "Christian Institutions" very plausible & pleasant' (Sunday, 28 August 1887).

Thomas Anne Cole likewise comments on sermons read and attended. On 9 June 1867 when she has a cold and doesn't go to church, she writes, 'I read divine service to myself and also a lesson by the Rvd Samuel Farm an old friend who sent me the sermon in question [.] Glorious'. On a sermon attended earlier that year she commented: '...Revd Mr Woolaston [sic] read prayers & preached on behalf of the Melbourne City Mission from Isaiha [sic, for Isaiah] Eliah 1st [sic] verse The spirit of the Lord is upon me because the Lord hath anointed me & it was a most earnest excellent sermon' (28 April 1867). Cole records reading a sermon on most Sundays.

Diaries as records

As I have noted, one of the problems with using diaries as records of reading patterns and practices is that gaps in recorded reading may be due to the fact that it was such a commonplace part of life that, like breathing, it is not recorded;

⁵ It was actually 17 October; the date is regularly incorrect in Henrietta's diary.

however, reading may not be recorded because it was not taking place. When reading is recorded, as in these diaries, it is difficult to present findings, or produce specific conclusions for the individual readers, let alone groups of readers. Henrietta's recorded reading—as noted—is eclectic. Joyce Sincock's is similarly dispersed, but this seems more because she is at the mercy of what is made available to her—what relatives or friends bring home, and Sincock's sample is very small. As Judy Lensink comments, diary forms tend to be literal and repetitive. The most important topics (the most moving piece of reading for instance) may be absent (Lensink 41), amongst the general problems of reading another's journal (Lejeune 42-44).

Thomas Anne Cole's reading

Thomas Anne Ward Cole (1810–98) kept a diary across a period similar to Henrietta Jennings, but her diaries for the sixteen preceding years also exist. She commences almost every daily entry in the early 1880s with a version of the line: 'Got up as usual After prayers & breakfast arranged household matters and then looked at the newspapers' (9 July 1881). Much earlier, in the late 1860s, she was regularly noting her reading of travel memoirs and other books, so it is possible that Cole continued this sort of reading, and also that part of what she read in the papers, particularly the weekend papers in the 1880s, is the fiction which was included. But, as she does not detail the content of the papers she took in, it is not possible to gauge this reading, or its significance to her. Nor is it possible to tell whether newspaper-fiction replaced the regular volume reading she was enjoying in the mid-1860s, or whether she had just stopped writing about that. In the long-term diary of the Currie family (who were selectors in Gippsland from the 1870s), there are similar, regular references to newspapers. But, since these newspapers are very seldom named, it is not clear whether the Curries took regional newspapers which included fiction (see Currie 19 November 1880).

Throughout her diaries, and very likely throughout her life, Thomas Anne Cole read the morning newspapers. She seldom identifies which papers, although *The Illustrated News* (11 June 1867), *The Queen*, *The Illustrated London News* (6, 7 September 1881), and *The Herald* (3 October 1881), are specifically mentioned. If one assumes that death notices are placed in the local papers one reads, or expects one's peers to read, then it is possible the family took *The Australian Sketcher with Pen and Pencil* in 1879, as notices for the deaths of Thomas Anne's son Farquhar and his father were both placed there, although they may have

been copied.⁶ Most of the family death notices appeared in *The Argus*, as well as interstate papers, and it is clear that Thomas Anne and her daughters read *The Argus* from a response to a charity plea that her daughter Margaret Cole wrote on their behalf in the 1890s (28 May 1890, 6). Henrietta Jennings most commonly mentions newspapers in relation to death notices or alerts to the ill health of friends, while Joyce Sincock, twenty years earlier, responds with enthusiasm to interesting news items in *The Argus* such as ‘The Prince of Wales’ Tour in the East’ (2 July 1862, 3), as well as using it to figure out her father’s work address (5 July 1862).

It is likely that Thomas Anne Cole kept track of new books through the newspapers, particularly *The Argus*, although it is possible that she later used Robertson’s monthly book circular, as Henrietta Jennings did (Robertson). Booksellers regularly used newspapers to advertise the latest publications that had arrived by the Mail ships. On 13 May 1867, Mullen’s (the Collins Street bookseller’s) new list, and Robertson’s library, included ‘A Trip to the Tropics by the Marquis of Lorne’ ([Campbell]). By 26 June Thomas Anne’s diary records: ‘After prayers I began a Book by the Marquise [sic] of Lorn’. The full title of this travel book was *A Trip to the Tropics and Home through America*. The author, in his early twenties, would later become the Governor of Canada. Cole records reading a number of new releases in this period. In early March 1867 she was reading about India, including Emily Eden’s *Up the Country: Letters Written to her Sister from the Upper Provinces of India* (1866), which—as noted—was advertised in Mullen’s Select Library amongst the ‘New Books: In Circulation’ in *The Argus* of 29 September 1866 (7). Cole followed this immediately with Sidney Laman Blanchard’s *Yesterday and Today in India* (1867), ‘another book on India’ as she called it, an even more recent publication (14 March 1867), which she liked ‘better’.

Joyce Sincock’s reading

Joyce Sincock’s (1844–1904) surviving diary details quite a lot of reading for the brief period it covers. Her brother Richard made the little book for her. Whether she kept a diary outside of this period, or used and retained the surviving diary because of this sentimental value is unknown. Apart from attempting to read a daily ‘chapter’ of the Bible, Joyce appears to get most of her reading from visiting clergy or from her father, who brings books home from the circulating library. In the case of new magazines, it is not always clear from the diary whether the reading material has arrived with her father, in the monthly mail

⁶ Death notices from other newspapers, usually interstate or overseas, were sometimes picked up and reprinted in the death columns of other newspapers, or ‘copied’ if they were deemed to be of local interest.

from friends or relatives, as circulating library items, or as new shipments purchased from booksellers. Joyce is so enthusiastic about the *Macmillan's Magazine* that her father brings home (seemingly, the volume for April 1861) that she gives an account of almost its entire contents:

The third volume of 'Macmillan', which Papa brought home to-day, is a very rich one. It seems to us as if we wanted to read nearly every Article in it. In the first place there is the going on of 'Tom Brown' [Tom Brown at Oxford], which increased in interest in every chapter. Then, there is an article on Travelling in Victoria, by Mr Henry Kingsley, who, it seems, has been a good deal here. The discovery of this fact has made the colony ride very high in its claims to our admiration and respect. Next there is a story by him called 'Ravenshoe' which must be read, out of curiosity. Then there is an article called 'The English Evangelical Clergy', where 'Canon's' name comes in in a note and which describes them beautifully, at least, so I have concluded, from my hasty glance at it. In short wherever you open there seems to be something interesting. We must gallop [sic] through 'Tom Brown' to have time for the rest. (6 August 1862)

The need to gallop indicates that the magazine had been borrowed. Across the few months of her recorded reading, Sincock also mentions Anne Manning's novel *Family Pictures*, John Evelyn's *Diary*, and *Picturesque Sketches of London*, as well as *Parochial Tracts*, other Christian reading, and a number of newspaper articles.

Digesting the reading

There are several possible ways to try to 'reveal the reading' of these readers—looking at the sequence of reading, sorting texts by author, by category, by apparent impact on reader. Each presents challenges. Take the more extensive list of Henrietta Jennings' reading as a sample. If I sort the reading by author, for instance, then it is presented out of sequence and out of context, outside of the moment of reading, and out of the progression which gives the diary its meaning and gives the individual entries about the books much of their meaning. The diary-context raises questions and helps explain: Why did Henrietta read that specific text, then? Removing an entry from its context also erases the distinction, to the extent that there is one, between Sunday and not-Sunday reading, holy and secular reading that occurs in the ebb and flow of each week. For Thomas Anne Cole—going on a binge of reading about India, or returning again and again to her favourite sermons—this kind of sorting also removes the context and volition. For Jessica Sincock, to some extent, it does the reverse. Sorting would conceal the randomness of her reading. Her devoted attention to the entire contents of one volume of *Macmillan's Magazine* would not stand out

so much, and not be so suggestive of deprivation of reading and imaginative outlets.

Henrietta Jennings' reading: a test case

However, if the reading is not sorted, how do we examine it? Continuing to use Henrietta Jennings' reading as the sample it is worth examining different ways of considering the actual reading. In the early portion of Jennings' extant diary in late 1887 she notes the following reading during the sisters' visit to England, and on the trip home.

Monday 15 August 1887, *Scir* [?] *on the Pyramids*
 Sunday 28 August 1887, *Stanley's 'Christian Institutions'*
 Sunday, 4 September 1887, 'Harrington's life' [sic?]

Henrietta's shipboard reading includes:

Friday, 28 October 1887, James Russell Lowell, *My Study Windows*
 Tuesday 1 November 1887, Emily Eden, *The Semi-Detached House* (1859)
 Sunday, 6 November 1887, 'Wycliffe'
 Monday 7 November 1887, 'out of her element'.

The fact that this raw list is not very illuminating is quickly evident, as is the fact that even the simplest list must be interpreted, expanded. Handwriting requires interpretation, and raw data is not useful without context. For instance, *Scir on the Pyramids* (15 August 1887) may refer to a book by John Taylor or Charles Piazzi Smyth. If this is Smyth, it is probably one of his extraordinary texts such as *Our Inheritance in the Great Pyramid: Reading the Pyramids As Keys to God, the Bible and History* (1874). Smyth was Astronomer Royal in Edinburgh, and his theories on pyramids were still in circulation and with some acceptance in the late 1880s, although discredited by the end of the century. 'Stanley's 'Christian Institutions'' (Sunday 28 August 1887) appears to be Arthur Penrhyn Stanley's *Christian Institutions: Essays on Ecclesiastical Subjects*—appropriate Sunday reading. Henrietta was in London, visiting churches, and Stanley had been a Dean of Westminster, influential in preserving church treasures. He was also a liberal. His essays offer a kind of history of the origin and significance of church institutions such as baptism. By the following Sunday, 4 September 1887, Henrietta lists 'Harrington's life'. This is possibly *The Commonwealth of Oceana and Other Works of James Harrington, with an Account of His Life by John Toland*. Toland's biographical sketch, the 'Life of Harrington', appears as the Introduction to Harrington's seventeenth-century outline of an ideal commonwealth. Harrington's proposal for the redistribution of wealth, and senate elections, does not seem particularly consistent with Sunday reading.

It is common for more reading to be recorded in shipboard diaries, since there is more time to read, and more time to record all activities. The record of Henrietta's reading is quite extensive for the period spent at sea, but it is impossible to tell whether her diary more accurately represents her reading, or just that when she had more time on her hands she read more, and wrote her reading down. On shipboard she read well-worn popular novels such as Emily Eden's *The Semi-Detached House*, (1 November 1887), as well as more improving work like James Russell Lowell's *My Study Windows* (28 October 1887). Lowell was Professor of Belles Lettres at Harvard. *My Study Windows* is a collection of his essays concerning nature—the first chapter is on birds—but also contemplations of literature. The second chapter, for instance, considers poetic representations of winter from Wordsworth and Coleridge to Thoreau (Lowell 18-40). Sunday's reading, 'Wycliffe' (6 November 1887), may be a translation of John de Wycliffe's *Summa or Tracts and Treatises*, or one of the many accounts of the 'Lives and Opinions' of Wycliffe.⁷ Wycliffe was a fourteenth-century reformist clergyman/doctor of divinity, an early anti-papist, proto-protestant, and translator and populariser of the Bible. Again, this was appropriate reading for the evangelical Anglican Henrietta on a Sunday.⁸ The following day's reading, 'out of her element', is probably Margaret Elizabeth Majendie's *Out of Their Element* (1884).

This sequential sample shows some of the eclectic nature of Jennings' interests. She reads contemporary poetry, sermons, biography, journals, and the latest novels—not just old romances like that by Emily Eden, but what might now be considered 'male' adventure stories, like H. Rider Haggard's *Allan Quatermain* (1887), which she read in January 1888. And, as is evident above, it is not always possible to ascertain exactly *what* Henrietta was reading, either because of the difficulty of deciphering her handwriting, or of matching a name to a specific book. The following table is a chronological list of the remaining (named) books.

Books named as read from 12 November 1887–12 September 1889

Sun., 20 Nov. 1887, 'Easter Rose'.

Possibly Sarah Prescott Kellogg, *An Easter Rose in Wide Awake* ([April] 1885) or Sophia May Eckley, *Easter Roses: Being Meditations on Religion Suitable for Easter* (1864).

⁷ For example, Thomas Arnold (1869) seems quite likely, and Vaughan's *Life* (1831) is another possibility.

⁸ If it was Sunday. Henrietta's dates are rather random across this period, as they often are.

Fri., 2 Dec. 1887, 'Mrs Prentiss'.

Perhaps Elizabeth Prentiss, *Stepping Heavenward* (1860), a novel, or G. L. Prentiss, *The Life and Letters of Elizabeth Prentiss* (1886).

Sun., 22 Jan. 1888, 'Schomburg Colta' [Schimberg?].

Not identified. There is a faint possibility this could be something written by Adelaide Botanic Gardens director Mortiz Schomburgk.

Mon., 6 Mar. 1888, H. Rider Haggard, *Allan Quatermain* (1887)

Thurs., 27 Apr. 1888, 'Elaine'.

Presumably the poem by Alfred, Lord Tennyson, 'Lancelot and Elaine' from *Idylls of the King* (1859).

Sun., 30 Apr. 1888, 'Carlyle'

Possibly Richard Garnett, *Life of Thomas Carlyle* (1887), but more probably Thomas Carlyle, *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays* (1838–39); see below (6 May 1888).

Thurs., 3 May 1888, 'Mrs Hemans'.

Possibly *The Poetical Works of Mrs Hemans* newly published in 1887.

Sun., 6 May 1888, 'Read A. H. A. B [sic?] in Robertsons'

Possibly referring to George Robertson's monthly book circular, but it is not clear who or what 'A. H. A. B.' refers to. If these are initials, they may refer to something written by Arthur Hayward A'Beckett, but he would only have been 19 or 20 at this time. See below (17 Feb. 1889).

Sun., 6 May 1888, *Critical Essays*.

Likely to be Carlyle, *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*—but could be those of someone else.

Fri., 8 May 1888, "'Uncle" Max'

Probably: Rosa Nouchette Carey, *Uncle Max* (1887)

Sun., 10 June 1888 'Hancis in the Poets'

Not identified.

Thurs., 14 June 1888, *Blackwood*

Probably *Blackwood's Magazine*. If so, it would probably be the April or May 1888 volume; May 1888 includes: 'Wanderings and wild sport beyond the Himalayas', and 'Mackay on the history of Slang'.

Wed., 25th July 1888, *Miss Edgeworth*

Probably a novel by Maria Edgeworth, such as *Castle Rackrent* (1800), or one of her non-fiction titles, such as *Practical Education* (1798).

Sun., 11 November 1888, Minister calls *Robert Elsmere* a 'slovenly ignorant book['].

Henrietta may read this book, at this time.

Tues., 20 Nov. 1888, Francis Richard Stockton, *The Hundredth Man* (1887)

Sun., 17 Feb. 1889, 'read A.H.A.B.'

[See above (6 May 1888)]

Thurs., 22 Feb. 1889, Margaret Deland, *John Ward, Preacher* (1888)

Mon., 25 Feb. 1889, Dorothea Gerard, *Orthodox* (1888).

Fri. 1 Mar. 1889, 'talking about' Mrs Humphry Ward, *Robert Elsmere* (1888)

Sun., 5 May. 1889, *Faber's Poems*.

Probably by Frederick William Faber (1814–63); if so, possibly the 13th edition of *All for Jesus* (1888).

Sun., 5 May, 1889, Pansy, *Judge Burnham's Daughters* (1888).

Fri., 17 May 1889, Edna Lyall, *In the Golden Days* (1885).

Sun., 19 May 1889, 'Mrs Coote *Grace Trevelyan or Into the Light*' (1888), and 'a little of Tullock.[']

This could be John Tullock who wrote on church History and religious philosophy. His works included: *Modern Theories in Philosophy and Religion*, 1884. See below (2 June 1889).

Wed., 29 May 1889, '*The Love of a Life*'

Possibly Robert Brown's poem, 'Love in a Life'.

Sat., 1 June 1889, Charles Kingsley *Alton Locke* (1881; new edition, 1889)

Sun., 2 June 1889, 'Tulloch' & Phillips.

Tulloch as above (19 May 1889). There are a number of possibilities for Phillips.

Sun., 9 June 1889 'read extracts'.

Probably these 'extracts' are from prayers.

Sun., 16 June, 1889, 'Brooks Philips'

Perhaps referring to American cleric Philips Brooks, the author of a number of sermon volumes—such as *The Candle of the Lord, and other Sermons* (1881)

Sun., 16 June, 1889, Edward Payson Roe, *An Original Belle* (1885); and 'a paper on Guy Pearce'

Sat., 6 July, 1889 'Sernia' [sic?]

Possibly, the poem by John Keats, 'Lamia' (1820)

Sun., 7 July, 1889 Mude's books

Not identified. It is unlikely that this refers to books from Mudie's.

Mon., 22 July, 1889 Ferguson 'Laments'

Perhaps Samuel Ferguson, *Lament for the Death of Thomas Davis* (1847)

Tue., 29 August, 1889 Charles Dickens *Little Dorrit* (1857)

Across the period to 16 June 1889 Henrietta mentions approximately 38 volumes. Eighteen of these are novels, one is certainly a biography, and probably a couple of the others are also biographical studies. There are three volumes of poetry, and fourteen 'other' types of books—collections of essays, at least one volume of history, a book of criticism, collections of sermons, one edition of *Blackwood's Magazine*, and other collections. Since much of the reading has a religious theme or subject, Sunday reading is not significantly delineated from weekday reading, but sermons are not mentioned as reading matter on weekdays, and the most strikingly non-religious novels like H. Rider Haggard's *Allan Quatermain* are not, apparently, ever part of Sunday reading. Two novels are explicitly mentioned as being read on Sunday—both having crises of faith or religious salvation as their theme: *Judge Burnham's Daughters* in which the judge's wife battles to maintain her faith in a more worldly and secular family, and *Grace Trevelyan, or Into the Light*, which speaks for itself. In at least one instance, novel reading seems to have been abstained from—or goes unmentioned. The late entry for Saturday, 1 June 1889, which notes that Henrietta is reading Kingsley's *Alton Locke*, lists different reading for the next day. Perhaps Chartism and social injustice were not deemed suitable for Sunday reflection, or perhaps writing Henrietta did not always record Henrietta's acts of reading.

A quantitative analysis, or listing, of Henrietta's reading, does not reveal a great deal about Henrietta, nineteenth-century reading practice, religious observance,

the place of the popular novel in the lives of middle-class women, or the use of the diary in recording or shaping lived, or read, experience. If the reading and writing around the reading is filled in—the detail of the list—the list becomes qualitatively and quantitatively different.

Critical reading: examining the reading

The opening records in the above list are preceded by non-book reading of various sorts, in which Henrietta elaborates her critical skills by offering a critique of the sermons she hears. On 31 July, in England, the sisters go ‘to the pretty little English Church where the girls [their nieces?] stopt with us for the Communion service & the others joined us[.] a feeble and mischievous sermon on the sins of attending schismatic places of worship. The others were greatly pleased with their sermon’. Of Lowell’s *Study Windows*, a book which combines natural history with literary criticism, she comments ‘enjoyed it very much’ (28 October 1887) and of the book which may be by Amelia Barr, she says that she read it ‘all day & liked it very much, a good congregation in the saloon in the evening’ (12 November 1887), which implies a Saturday Church service.⁹ A few days earlier, she writes, with unconscious irony: ‘Hotter than ever. did a little work. read “out of her element” played some back gammon with Mrs Tennant. Dancing in the evening’ (7 November 1887). As noted, “out of her element” is very likely Margaret Elizabeth Majendie’s *Out of Their Element*—an interesting choice for the homeward-bound colonials, as it is partly about nationalism (although Italian nationalism), extreme homesickness, and the conflict between love for a partner and love for place. In the novel an English husband gives up his homeland and political prospects to remain in Italy with his homesick wife. The subplot is about Italian nationalism. Still hot, in Suez in November, Henrietta described *The Semi-detached House* (1859) as “a very stupid book.” It would be nice to think this was Jennings’ reaction to its anti-semitism, but she may have thought it stupid because it was lightweight or old-fashioned. It was popular, but twenty-eight years old by the time of reading, a comedy of manners tracking the encounter between upper- and middle-class English life. The novel makes a point of ridiculing the *nouveau riche*, particularly those not properly British—an interesting contrast to the previously-read novel, which examines national identity more sympathetically.¹⁰ The entry for Saturday 12 November 1887 may be ‘Amelia Barr’. Barr was a popular author whose most recent novel *A Daughter of Fife* was released in 1886. If this was the reading matter, it is a domestic romance set amongst working people in a Scottish fishing community, and deals

⁹ Assuming the date is correct.

¹⁰ Interestingly its sequel, *The Semi-Attached Couple*, registers 48 borrowings, quite a substantial number, in the Australian Common Reader, all from the South Australian Institute (so all men).

with loyalty and religious faith—it would round out an international set of readings.¹¹

The reading of Rider Haggard's *Allan Quatermain* in March 1888, four months later, seems out of context with the devout publications of the Religious Tract Society, and earnest accounts of lost and found faith, that make up a good percentage of Henrietta's accounted reading. It is interesting that *she* does not set the novel apart. This was a new, bestselling novel. If the list is considered as a list, it is clear that Henrietta was reading a fair amount of recent, bestselling fiction, though not necessarily what twenty-first century readers might class as popular, because of the religious overtones, and different understandings of the topical. Some of Henrietta's reading can be matched against titles listed and recommended in George Robertson's *Monthly Book Circular* from the preceding months. In this instance, Jennings does not comment on Haggard, spiritual, ethical or racial content. It is a reasonable assumption that she had also read *King Solomon's Mines* as this was a sequel. Her list includes other men's-own adventure fiction, like American Frank R. Stockton's *The Hundredth Man*. Recent work by Julieanne Lamond and others using the Australian Common Reader database, confirms that twenty-first century stereotypes of nineteenth-century reading are based on unfounded assumptions about the association of gender and genre: i.e., that women read romance and men read adventure.

The book that gets the most commentary across the diary, with two entries, is Mrs Humphry Ward's controversial novel about a young clergyman who loses his faith, *Robert Elsmere*. Two entries mention the book. The entry for Sunday, 11 November 1888 reads, 'Lovely day. Mr Stretch preached for the S[unday]. school Called Robert Elsmere a "slovenly ignorant book["]'. The novel had been released that year, and had already gone through at least three editions. *Robert Elsmere* caused a great deal of controversy, because it details Robert's loss of faith in elements of the gospel, and his conscientious abandonment of his rural parish in favour of a near-suicidal urban mission. The following March Henrietta writes, '—had a talk over Rob^t Elsmere with Ted. had lunch & came home' (Friday 1 March 1889). Ted was Edward a'Beckett, an artist and old family friend about Henrietta's age, brother to the Jennings girls' best friends. It is not clear whether Henrietta actually read *Robert Elsmere*—but it seems very likely from her statement that she 'talked it over' with Ted. If so, she appears to have had a spurt of novel-reading focussing on religious-crises across this period. Henrietta records reading *Orthodox*, a romance told from the 'anti-semite' point of view about 'a Polish jew who falls in love with an Austrian officer' (Sutherland 243), a novel which examines a religious minority in a Christian country. Henrietta also

¹¹ Illegibility in entries can lead to speculative, rather than confident, identification of texts read.

mentions acquiring *John Ward, Preacher* (1888) shortly afterwards, in the year after it was released. It, too, deals with 'religious and social questions' and the author, Margaret Deland, was compared to Mrs Humphry Ward. The book was branded 'irreligious' because it depicted the bad marriage of a Calvinist minister. Henrietta may have been working through her own religious battles and beliefs via these readings, they may have functioned as a form of religious sensation or titillation, or they may just have been the fashionable, or necessary things to read for evangelical Christians of the period.

Reading as cultural capital

Discussions about reading, text and narrative—books, the newspaper, letters, and sermons—seem to have contributed considerably to Henrietta's social engagement, her placement in the world, and negotiation of it. Knowledge of these books, arguably, constituted part of her cultural capital.¹² The same might be said of the religious reading undertaken by Sincock and Thomas Anne Cole. Sincock's reading tends toward factual information—expansion of her education, and fiction that directly addresses her own situation. She likes Evelyn's diary for its demonstration of proper family life, in particular the ideal daughter. Although Cole read novels and probably poetry (she receives a set of Oliver Goldsmith's poetry for her 57th birthday on the 27 January 1867) her interest in travel writing, and her extensive reading of the newspaper may similarly have educated her and provided her with both entertainment and cultural capital in an increasingly cosmopolitan city.

Conclusions

I have used a group of colonial diaries to sketch out some reading practices in middle-class colonial Melbourne and to indicate patterns of literary consumption and circulation in the colonial context. It is not clear to what extent such a micro-study, combining close and distant reading, can shift what is known about colonial reading, women's reading and 'gendered' reading. In many ways, the

¹² The main critical commentary traceable in the diary, as noted below, is not about the books, but about the sermons. Across a few June entries, reading (not critiqued) is recorded alongside sermons which are: 'Sunday 2nd [June] A lovely day. directly after prayers went for walk & saw some good views got back to dinner & had to start very soon after for Church. Mr Amos gave us a good sermon on Elijah. ... Read "Tulloch" & Phillips. ... Sunday Witsunday [sic] [9th] A lovely morning. After prayers went to the Mountain Retreat where I read extracts ...Scotch service after Church [.] had a long prosy sermon from Dr Cameron who came up to tea & told us his N Ireland experiences. ... Hurried away to evening services Mr Ludson preached a good sermon on Pentecost Sunday 16th Cloudy morning. Went to the Caves read Brooks Philips—came back to lunch [?] read "An Original Belle" till Church time, when we arrived late. Dr Cameron gave us a dry discussion on Sarah...'

reading of these women confirms the expected: that, as Elizabeth Webby concludes for nineteenth-century readers, ‘Australians in the nineteenth-century ... primarily read ... culture from elsewhere’ (qtd. in Lamond 28). However, as Katherine Bode has also recently pointed out, this may only be the case if critics exclude serialised newspaper fiction, which is frustratingly difficult to trace in life-writing accounts (‘Reading Data’; *Reading by Numbers* 55).

I believe it is clear that Cole and Jennings’ reading did range beyond what might be expected of a middle-class lady reader in a number of ways. Jennings’ penchant for boys’-own adventure reading, combined with a more than passing interest in spiritual problem novels and an eclectic taste in histories, biographies and sermons—including a large number of American authors across the range of genres—displace understandings of the ‘typical reader’. In her case, the particular combination of narratives can be read in different ways. Some reading (Eden, Dickens, Haggard) might have helped produce a British imperial identity (Bhabha’s ‘English book’), strengthened by Anglican evangelicalism, but others (*The Hundredth Man*, *Out of Their Element*) could have deflected this formation. For the Australian-born Jennings there seems some trend towards transnational reading—fiction particularly embedded with narratives of home/exile, foreignness, imperial celebrations, heroes and heirs returning from the colonies, but this may merely reflect the pervasiveness of colonial shadows in the literature of the day, particularly in the ‘narrative literature of the imperial metropolis’ (Dolin 277). The Scots-born Cole and English-born Sincock reveal equally international tastes. If they reveal less interest in colonial themes it may simply be because their lists are less extensive. The fact that Jennings describes *The Semi-detached House* as ‘a very stupid book’, and was actively debating *Robert Elsmere* also reminds us that ‘distant reading’ can produce the act of reading as homogenous passive incorporation, rather than registering its active engagement or disengagement. ‘Reading’ is never the same kind of act in any instance.

The way in which Henrietta commented on live textual performance and brought her critical practices to bear on visiting and regular clergymen alike is also of note. Published sermons and lives get monosyllabic affirmation or no comment, but Henrietta feels qualified and comfortable rating the public discourse of holy men—as do Joyce Sincock (24 August 1862) and Thomas Anne Cole. This confidence might be tied to the diary and its commentary as a traversal of the local. Jennings’ annotations on the narratives (and critical analyses of local and visiting clerics), reflect her comfort and ease in local space, and in the space of the text—the Bible—that she shares with these commentators. Her own text is punctuated by this local commentary and by the fruits of a global publishing network, which she incorporates seamlessly into the meta-discourse, the diary, which is in an entirely different register. Unlike Thomas Anne Cole, who in

almost every entry narrates herself writing ('Wrote up my journal') as well as reading. Henrietta Jennings never describes the act she is engaged in. She writes herself as a reader, walker, teacher, critic, never as a writer.

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