

## **Women and Intellectual Life in New South Wales 1835-1868: Ann Rusden**

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Ann Rusden had a room of her own in her second house, *Holmwood* at East Maitland in the Hunter region of New South Wales. She described this room in 1847 to her daughter Sarah Ann or Saranna, and her account demonstrates a hierarchy in valuing of objects that contributed to her identity. She listed in order the wallpaper, the couch, imitation venetian blinds, a lazy chair, a work table and “nice little table for writing at”. On the writing table she had placed several useful ornamental “pet articles” comprising a writing case formerly protected “from the flies”. The case had been given to her by her daughter, Georgiana. There was also a “pretty box of Chinese pens” from her daughter Grace and an ink stand given “by my lamented sister Aunt Betty”. On the right hand of the writing table was a wax taper presented to her by Robert Scott, Saranna’s brother-in-law and “a pretty paper knife sent out by dear Grandmamma”. Ann had only one other object to add to the description of her writing table, “the pretty pen you made me long ago, ornamented with brown silk and blue beads and a tassel”, cradled by a “plume” (Ann Rusden to Saranna Scott 10 January 1847). Most of her description concentrated on the objects used in writing and it was the writing and copying of letters that was central to the way she saw herself. The letters written at her desk at Maitland would be passed from their recipients to others both in the family and outside of it and would perhaps be read out to a drawing room full of interested listeners.

The reader gains insight into the personality behind the letters in Ann Rusden’s description of her surrounds. Her room was “upstairs at the end of the landing place so the door is immediately before you at the top of the stairs. The window by which it is lighted is opposite the door and is the middle window at the front of the house”. She described the wallpaper, “green upon a stone-coloured ground”. She added that though the floral pattern “was not vine leaves” it did remind her of a pretty little room belonging to Mrs Jackson “when I visited her in Wimple St”, London. “I say Mrs Jackson because she did not live to be Lady Jackson” (Ann to Saranna 10 January 1847). To have wallpaper of vine leaves would have symbolised a link to classical taste, associated with Dionysus. The vine died and came back to life each year, demonstrating the power of that particular god to return people to life; the symbol of the vine was also linked to Christ and regeneration (Tresidder 217). The aristocratic Mrs Jackson did have vine leaves on her wallpaper, but even without them this room resembled hers. In this description the reader is introduced to some of the complexity of the personality of Ann Rusden. There is a classical reference made, a reference to an aristocrat she stayed with and both image and story are linked to death. Hovering about the passage is a notion of humorous irony that is shocking. This capriciousness and silvery quickness characterise her sensibility and it was from it that she was to have influence beyond her life span.

Ann Rusden (1783 -1860) was the mother of Rose Selwyn and the grandmother of Rose Scott, two major figures in Australian feminist history (Conway 1). She had her own perspectives on life, morality, religion and politics. In the letters she wrote to her family she delineated a female intellectual space that her children inherited. Foremost in this was opinion, the need to form and substantiate one’s own opinions. Secondly was the need to ground opinion in reading of texts, either religious or secular. As such her approach may be considered to be based on reason at a time when new ideas that combined science and religion were becoming popular (Hilton 4; Knight and Mason 156).

An exploration of female intellectual space has been linked to biography in Australian history and mainly concentrated in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Rose

Scott's biographer, Judith Allen, examined the salon Rose established in late-nineteenth-century Sydney. Rosa Praed's spiritual life responding to her father's violence was discussed by Jennifer Rutherford and Jessica White and also by her biographer Patricia Clarke. Jill Roe wrote about Miles Franklin and Susan Magarey about Catherine Helen Spence. Ann Rusden lived at least a generation before these women and a detailed examination of her thinking gives us some of the seeds of later perceptions among politically active women.

The importance of religion as "a key to the world" for women in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century England has been stressed by Lenore Davidoff and Catherine Hall. Religious women could become involved in chapels and churches and contemplate a voice (148). Anglican women were involved in household discussion (106). In Ann's letters we find an idea that the world could be reorganised and women could advocate for such change. We are able to see the process of female discussion carried on in letters between mothers, daughters, sisters and other women of the Hunter River. It was female debate that largely excluded men, even men in the family who were church authorities. In this sense it may be comparable to Carol Smith Rosenberg's idea of the realm of female intimacy in the nineteenth century where close relationships were of equal value to relations between men and women (4). In Ann's life discussion of ideas formed part of this intimacy and opinions among women were valued in themselves; bishops and politicians were criticised. Importantly, such debate was made possible by quick access to books and pamphlets.

The history of books and reading in Australia has received attention from Tim Dolin who has seen book borrowing from libraries as a key indicator of "ways of being" in a colonising country (Dolin 274). As Patrick Buckridge writes, the history of the book can also be about *how* books are read (273). Studies of individual readers, as Martyn Lyons writes, may be broadened by the notion of "reading communities" of which the individual is a part. A reader may be a member of several such communities –gendered, work-related or religious (*Reading Culture* 10). Ann was part of a broader Anglican community of readers where pamphlets and new publications were avidly consumed by people who had always an idea that Scripture could be contested. This, I argue, gave her opportunity to debate in other arenas.

Ann relates her reading through letters and it is possible to list the books she mentions and the places books were obtained. Table 1 gives such information and provides a history of reading and the Rusden family. That books form a subject in letters means that the historian has access to the consumption of texts. Nineteenth-century letter writers were aware their letters were read by many and possibly read out to groups of people. This aspect of letter writing meant women could comment on political or religious matters and expect their voices to be part of wider social debate (Bannet 10). The history of letter writing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century forms a separate historiography from the history of books. Cheryl Nixon and Louise Penner deal with the intersection of print and letter writing culture in women's eighteenth-century letters. Even though there were letter writing manuals it did not mean that women necessarily followed those stipulations - they expanded the form (9). Minna Nevala and Anni Sairo examined discord in eighteenth-century genteel correspondence and found considerable divergence from what would be considered politeness with individuals making up their own minds about what was offensive in letters. They also note the enjoyment of cruel humour and satire in eighteenth-century correspondence as well as an emphasis on play and double entendre (109). Letters, as public performances, were also one way of constructing a self: they were a method of becoming. Given that selves are fractured and contested entities, the representation in a letter becomes central rather than a periphery in reconstructing colonial lives (Bal 371).

This article considers the way in which Ann Rusden, and to a lesser extent, her daughters Georgiana and Grace, represented their intellectual life in their letters to Saranna Scott, daughter and sister. It considers the books read and how they were interpreted and utilised by the women and what kind of colonial self emerges from it. It is clear that Ann and her daughters were the centre of a female circuit of exchange of ideas on the Hunter River and thus they give an insight into the female mode of colonising alongside men who were involved in violence on the Hunter and further afield into the Gwydir, the Namoi and Macintyre Rivers.

Ann Rusden was the daughter of a clergyman, Thomas Townsend (O'Leary 3). The Townsends were gentry in Pilton, Somerset, and the family name there was an old one. Ann's marriage notice shows her father was Rector at St Peter's, Aisthorpe, Lincolnshire (*The European Magazine and London Review*, vol 55-56, 1809). Her father married twice: the death of his first wife is not recorded but his second marriage was to Anne Milnes and was very late in his life in 1818, when Ann was already in her thirties. The Milnes family were patrons of St Peter's and listed as 'esq', meaning they were of the same status as the Townsends. A half-brother is listed, Thomas Jackson Milnes Townsend, born in 1819 (*English Births and Christenings*). Lincolnshire is of interest for the kind of Anglicanism practised there in the early nineteenth century. The laity attended all other chapels and churches, not finding any contradiction in doing so (Knight 28). Since Ann stated she did not have a mother it is presumed that Townsend's first wife, Anne Webster, died very early in Ann's life and her care would have been undertaken by servants or governesses, all of whom would have imbibed the free approach to services apparent in Lincolnshire.

Ann arrived in New South Wales with her husband, the Reverend George Keylock Rusden in 1834. Formerly a headmaster at Leighton Hall, a school in Surrey, Reverend Rusden was appointed to the parish of Maitland. Ann Rusden had six daughters, Saranna, Georgiana, Amelia, Emily, Rose and Grace. Her sons were Frank, Thomas, George William, Henry and Alfred. Her daughter Saranna married Helenus Scott, a squatter at Singleton, Emily Rusden married Richard Ottley, a squatter on the Gwydir River. Amelia married Ellis Gilman, primarily based at a Merchant House in England and Rose married Arthur Selwyn who had hoped to be a squatter but instead became a Reverend himself, allocated the Parish of Grafton. George William Rusden originally worked at managing a station in the south west of New South Wales and then took up a government appointment as secretary to the Victorian Executive Council. He wrote a number of books, including a *History of Australia* discussed by his biographer, Paul Nicholls (16). Tom, Henry and Alfred all worked on stations and Henry followed his brother to Melbourne to take a position as a public servant. Alfred worked as a merchant clerk in Shanghai, China. All of the boys travelled to England and China and Henry returned with a wife, Annie. The family was entirely involved in the first waves of colonisation in the upper Hunter, the Gwydir and Namoi and the south west of New South Wales. Emily referred to her husband having numbers of stations, as did the Scott family. After the arrest of several of Henry Dangar's servants for the Myall Creek massacre in 1838, Helenus Scott and his brother Robert became closely involved in the organisation of squatters opposed to the trial. Family letters for this crucial period in Australian history do not appear in the records held at the State Library. However, over 1000 letters of Ann Rusden's remain and these are primarily to her daughter Saranna Scott, and apart from the 1838-1839 gap and a later gap in the 1850s, they cover the years 1835-1868. Georgiana, Grace and Rose's letters to Saranna are included in the same volumes and they continue after Ann's death to 1868.

Saranna's life was not an easy one. Robert Scott died in 1846 and the estate he held with his brother was not financially stable. Helenus Scott hurtled towards bankruptcy and the Scott

brothers' estate, *Glendon*, was sold and all his property, including books, sold at auction in 1848. Saranna and Helenus moved into a small cottage on *Glendon* and Helenus sought government work. He was away from home a great deal and was a collector of Royalties on the goldfields in the early 1850s in the west of New South Wales. Saranna had to educate her own children and decided to send her son Walker to England to live with Amelia and Ellis. Walker died soon after he arrived in England. Saranna, always nervous and prone to nervous exhaustion, suffered greatly and did not seem to recover until around 1858. Her children were taken by neighbours who cared for them and Rose Scott went to stay with her Aunt, Rose Selwyn. The Scott family then moved to Newcastle.

Ann Rusden certainly had a classical education and was familiar with theology, science and literature, all of which appear in her letters to Saranna. The books available in the later Rusden household suggest a strong continuance of the idea of educating girls as well as boys.

### **Books and Their Availability**

Table 1 shows the books and texts mentioned by the Rusden family in their letters. "Family copy" indicates that the books were brought with the Rusdens in 1834 or purchased by them without reference to the vendor or giver. Biblical passages are listed separately even though they may have come from one text. If the term "book" is mentioned in any context it is listed. In terms of sourcing books, the Rusdens had several options. Parcels of books were sent from England by relatives, particularly William Gilman, the brother-in-law of Amelia Gilman, Ann Rusden's daughter. The Reverend Rusden also ordered books from London himself and Ann wrote to Saranna that "he never pays till he gets them –else it leads to mistakes" (Ann to Saranna undated ML MSS 38/19). Baldock's is a company listed in this context. Books were also obtained in Sydney, from the Religious Tract Society in King Street. This society, established in the colony by the Reverend William Cowper, had been active in circulating Christian publications since 1825 and by 1829 had distributed 120,000 books and pamphlets (*Sydney Gazette* 17 December 1859). In 1851 the Society moved to "a new depot" situated at the corner of Pitt and King Street (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 April 1851). Whittaker's was an Inn in Maitland where regular auctions of household goods and books were held in the 1850s by a series of auctioneers (*Maitland Mercury and Hunter River Advertiser*, 26 April 1851, 3, 15 November 1851, 3, 13 August 1853, 3, 8 September 1855, 3, 5 June 1858, 3). Since books sold there formed part of household property they may have been seized as part of bankruptcy proceedings. Lipscomb's bookshop was referred to in 1845 (Ann to Saranna, 16 February 1845). A store that was referred to in East Maitland was owned by a German family – Deichman - and books were displayed in the window (Rose to Saranna, 9 August 1846).

Books were also obtained from the Book Depository at Morpeth and money was sent by Grace in order that Saranna would purchase books for the St Peter's Church library, run by Grace and Georgiana. As can be seen from Table 1 the books lent from St Peter's included poetry by Longfellow, Milton, Wordsworth and Herbert. The Morpeth Book Depository was a fundraising fair held by the Anglican Church and books were donated for the purpose. It too included books that were not religious (*Maitland Mercury and Hunter River Advertiser*, 6 May 1854). The importance of "good books and education" was stressed by the Reverend George Keylock Rusden in his contribution to a meeting that discussed the regional funds of the Anglican Church in 1854, indicating a strong belief in the value of literature for all. He referred to a hanging he had just attended and thought reading would have led to a different life course for the accused (*Maitland Mercury and Hunter River Advertiser*, 6 May 1854).

Books were also obtained from the School of Arts libraries, set up in local areas by diverse groups of individuals, sometimes squatters and in other places innkeepers and tradesmen (Dolin).

Books were also introduced by family members arriving from London or those who had travelled to Sydney or Melbourne. George William Rusden introduced *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1853, a year after the book's publication and Saranna obtained her own copy. Ann's son Frank and his wife Alice arrived with Fanny Burney's *The Wanderer* and *Cecilia* in 1836 and Dickens's *Martin Chuzzlewit* in 1845. The Burney volumes were older books the family had not read and *Martin Chuzzlewit* was obtained from Lipscomb's bookshop in Maitland. George William sent his own book on education to Georgiana in 1853. *The Rose of Thistle Island*, published in serial form from 1842, was obtained, possibly through Frank and Alice in 1848, and the famous *Pearl of Days* was eagerly sought from 1848 and received from England in 1850.

Ann's female friends also sent books, particularly those of a religious nature, and there is apparent a circle of exchange and loans of books among women. Augusta Mitchell, Helenus's sister, sent an Evangelical text. Georgiana sent Saranna Bishop Horne, a "great favourite" and Mrs Ogg, a local storekeeper's wife, was very keen to borrow the copy of the life of the anti-slaver Thomas Fowell Buxton. Miss Bingle loaned Saranna a printed sermon.

In the books referred to by Ann and the family there were theological or religious texts produced by women, Julian of Norwich, Hannah More and Mary Ann Burges. In terms of the novels Ann and her daughters mention in their letters the family might be considered similar to the rest of the colony in that the Waverley novels, *Gil Blas* and Dickens were popular books from lending libraries and for sale (Dolin 273). Tim Dolin found Waverley novels at the top of the list of books borrowed in a South Australian institute in 1861-2 (290), and Martyn Lyons writes that Scott was enormously popular in Britain and that he had done much to enhance the reputation of the novel ("New Readers" 317). Ann Rusden's set of Scott novels were "gilt leaved" indicating some expense had been undergone to acquire them (Ann to Saranna 31 July 1850).

The books in Table 1 were referred to by Ann and her daughters in three ways. The first involved the naming of the title and sometimes the author, secondly was quotation, placing a passage from the book, text or poem, in inverted commas where sometimes the author or origin would not be listed at all, and thirdly there was simply mention of a character from a text. The latter was particularly so for Shakespeare and Biblical or psalm passages. All references, apart from references to books to read, served a purpose, sometimes carrying dual meanings. Quotations amplified or contradicted the context and thus were a kind of play. It is the mentality shown by such a habit that forms the basis of this paper. Underlying all of these references, however, was a constant imagery that was perhaps used unconsciously by Ann.

### **Theology and Imagery**

Ann's psychic world was underlined by a specific form of Christian imagery that that was related to women and concerned the act of pouring, light or brightness and an unfathomable God. What Ann's imagery effectively did was give women singular access to the light of God. This gave them power and would allow them to suggest an alternative society and politics. The ideas were present among the young squatter women of the Girls Friendly Society and can be found in Rose Selwyn (*Letters On the Peculiar Fitness of Women to Help in the Government of the Nation*).

The image of “pouring” was used by Ann to describe God’s relationship to human beings. God poured his blessings down onto the heads of those prayed for (Ann to Saranna 1 January 1836, 5 November 1837). Blessings from God were also “showered” down, there could be “a gentle shower to refresh our sorrows” (undated ML MSS 38/19). “Pouring” could also be undertaken by those who prayed: “your pious heart will pour forth in gratitude to the author of every good and perfect gift” (Ann to Saranna 17 September 1835). Water imagery is central to *Revelations* and the Fourth Gospel. Mark Wayne Wilson finds a comparison in the Temple of Artemis where the pouring of water was an important part of ritual (15). For Ann such imagery of pouring involved both God and her daughter, both could pour. Water was associated with “soothing”, “serenity” and “peace” (Ann to Saranna 23 July 1844). This was a God who soothed, who showered blessings and who worked for peace if prayed to.

Imagery related to “brightness” and “light” follows a similar pattern. Brightness comes from God but it can also be present in humans. Bright rays “illuminate our path” (Ann to Saranna 1 January 1836). Religion sheds “bright hope” on the humble Christian (Ann to Saranna 18 July 1844). Of her friend Miss Cristall, Ann wrote, “may I emulate her virtue and follow her bright examples, her gentleness, her humility, her Christian piety and faith” (Ann to Saranna undated ML MSS 38/19). Saranna, too, exhibited brightness; she was a “treasure whose value shines with brighter lustre under trials” (Ann to Saranna 4 January 1848). This brightness only relates to ‘Him’ and to women. At no point was brightness ever ascribed to men in Ann’s letters. The word “pious” was also used solely in terms of women: Miss Elizabeth Cristall was pious, as was Saranna. It was not a term Ann used often and was indicative of high praise (Ann to Saranna undated ML MSS 38/19). This imagery informed what it was to be female. Women were closer to God and acting in the manner of God in their pouring and their light. This was a confident female space of being and it was from such a space that women looked out to the world.

Ann believed that prayers might not be answered for many years or in the way one expected (Ann to Saranna 4 January 1848). Saranna’s marriage may have resulted in prosperity which had come solely from God. Saranna had to be careful not to be injured by it and to enjoy it in the right way (Ann to Saranna 5 November 1837). However, a “constant feeling of acquiescence in the Divine will” would “give additional brightness to prosperity and will cheer even adversity” (Ann to Saranna 1 November 1836). There could be human involvement in prosperity: “let us so use prosperity, that, should adversity come we may be secure of that Divine support under it which can only make joy safe and sorrow endurable” (Ann to Saranna 11 November 1836). When such prosperity was taken away in 1846-48, as it was in Saranna’s case by her husband’s bankruptcy, such misfortune could also be traced to the Divine will that would “try us with affliction” (Ann to Saranna 30 August 1846). “Prosperity may be the gift of God, it may be a permitted temptation but to bear trials in the spirit in which you bear them is assured by his gift. May our heavenly Father continue to you his gracious consolations [sic]” (Ann to Saranna 4 January 1848).

Ann did not blame Helenus or Saranna for any of the trials or afflictions they underwent, since such afflictions were the result of a truly unknowable God. “We must not expect to understand all that he does” was a lesson that had to be taught to children (Ann to Saranna undated ML MSS 38/19). The grace of God had to be negotiated in the right way. Sorrow was “sanctified”, so humans had to be “resigned when clouds intervene and cast a gloom over our prospects” (Ann to Saranna 1 January 1836). The eternal life, one where the family would all be together, had to be remembered at such times.

Fixed on the higher joys which being eternal are alone worthy of the contemplation of an immortal soul – that we must not wonder these enjoyments are not clearly

understood by us with our present faculties perhaps we would not comprehend without a special method. We are told of but one person that was vouchsafed with the superior power alluding to St Paul's declaration in 12 Chapter of Corinthians (Ann to Saranna 2 November 1836).

Paul was referring to Christ and it is significant that her reference and her understanding brushes over the gifts Paul shows are given to individuals, such as prophecy and speaking in tongues. It is the lack of comprehension she dwells on.

The major events that occurred in Saranna's life devastated her. Through all of it Ann maintained the perspective that these afflictions were sent from God for reasons that could not be fathomed or understood, and that Saranna had the capacity to bear them nobly. These ideas were Evangelical in origin. As Boyd Hilton writes, "apparent nastiness...was a blessing in disguise" (Hilton 22). References to God do intensify in Ann's letters and the source of such concerns may have been Saranna's difficulties. They do, however, appear immediately after the first appearance and sermon of the Tractarian-influenced Bishop Broughton at Maitland in 1836. She wrote reporting his sermon to Saranna and then stated "Oh! May that Being whom he appears to serve in singleness of Heart Bless his labours" (Ann to Saranna 23 November 1836). Ann's references to God increased as if inspired but the key word in the line from her letter is "appears" and this expresses effectively the family relationship to Bishops and to Scripture.

Like other protestant religions, Anglicanism is based on scripture and prayer, but it also incorporates argument and defence over the place of religion in life. (Strong xvi, Hilton 22). Bill Lawton writes of the Church that it is "a voluntary association of men and women ...who value place and symbol while not always investing them with the same meaning" (Lawton 177). Opinions were published and it was the reading of this secondary literature and discussion of it that is significant in Ann and her daughters. As has been stated such reading and exchange of books extended to a wider circle of women.

Texts Ann favoured supported her perspective of an unknowable God but they also created space for reason, learning and science. A major theological dispute in Ann's lifetime involved the emergence of Tractarianism or High Church Anglicanism which argued for a more mystical and ritualised Catholic-style church with gothic imagery and practices such as fasting and the recognition of the Eucharist as the Real Presence of Christ. David Hilliard (16) and Ken Cable (35) note the influence of such ideas on women, particularly Hunter River women, in this period. Archbishop Broughton favoured Tractarian views and appointed a number of Cambridge graduates to ministries in New South Wales, George Keylock Rusden being one of them. Archbishop Tyrell, appointed to Newcastle in 1847, considered himself a moderate supporter of the Tractarian perspective and due to the interests of these two men the diocese of Newcastle has been described as High Church (Elkin 137). The Evangelical strand of Anglicanism with its emphasis on mission is best expressed by William Cowper's inspiration from *Micah* 2 10 "Arise ye and depart, for this is not your rest; because it is polluted, it shall destroy you, even with a sore destruction" (Bolt 26). Evangelical thought engaged with pain (Hilton 11).

Ann was not required to write sermons or to advise a congregation, so there was no need for her own belief system to be logical or to dovetail with specific Anglican thinking. This was, however, a tumultuous period for all Anglicans in Australia, not only because of the conflict between High Church Anglicanism and Evangelical churchmen but also because of struggles between an increasingly impoverished clergy, a Church Act inspired all-powerful colonial bishopric and an increasingly restive laity (Gladwin 182). More broadly the Anglican Church

had moved away from its attachment to the state and towards voluntarism, apostolic worship and mission, and in doing so gave rise to an immense creativity in thought and interpretation of the Anglican place in the world. (O'Brien 7). Thus, the lay person like Ann may have brushed aside clergy interpretations of the meaning of texts or even the central message of an author in order to draw from it their own meaning and values. In considering the wider Anglican Church Boyd Hilton writes of Evangelical thought, "we are dealing with an amorphous set of ideas and attitudes, capable of seeping into minds that were sometimes formally hostile to the type of churchmanship they represented" (30). Ann's seeming contradictions can be accounted for in this way.

A text referred to five times from 1846 to 1858 in Ann's references to books was Frederick W. Krummacher's *Elijah the Tishbite* published by the Religious Tract Society. It was a collection of sermons addressed to Christians living in the Enlightenment and was a response to rationalism and threats to the supernatural. Krummacher wrote about seeking God in times of hardship and the need to trust God when the supports of faith were lost. Elijah, at a time of persecution of faith gave up any hope of worldly deliverance and found the free grace of God. The fear of revolutionary change and irreligion in the early nineteenth century led believers back to Christ's hidden power (Odd 104). Ann mentioned this text after she discussed her prayers for all the "members of my spread family". "The spirit is indeed willing but the flesh is weak, adding to the blessed assurance", she writes. "I have been looking at the beautiful passage in Krummacher's *Elijah* – It is enough etc etc." (Ann to Saranna undated ML MSS 38/19). Ann understood that Saranna was familiar with the passage so she did not write it out. In this passage Elijah's soul longed for rest

'It is enough' he sighs to heaven, his eyes glistening with tears. 'It is enough, O Lord! Take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers'. Ah! Who could have thought Elijah could have been so weak and fainthearted, the man invincible in his faith, and superior to every storm (Krummacher 10).

For Krummacher "the elements of natural life and spiritual life [were] fomenting together in a strange intermixture" in Elijah's sighing request to God. But it is never enough until God has claimed it so and feelings like Elijah's were to be soothed by sitting at the foot of the Cross where grief would soon be alleviated (10). In her letter, undated, but probably from the late 1840s, Ann was responding to Saranna's worries of what would become of her sons when she could not afford a good education for them. Krummacher was offered as solace and yet there was possibly reproach in referring to this passage: Elijah had been weak and fainthearted at the moment of his request to God, perhaps Saranna exhibited a similar faint heartedness. The passage may have had a double use for Ann. In 1849 Ann quoted her dear friend Miss Freeman: "[God] does not give strength before-hand but when the trial comes", and added that "if prayer is not immediately Granted yet be assured it is withheld for some merciful purpose ... even Elijah said 'it is enough' yet God showed him it was not enough" (Ann to Saranna 1 December 1849). Miss Freeman, too, had been reading *Elijah*.

The references in Ann's letters were intended to provide solace for her daughter. Published in 1836 *Elijah* was a new book with a new perspective on the rapidly changing world. It involved hardship and faith. Yet Krummacher also sits well with Ann's perspective concerning God – that he could not be fathomed. The trials she mentions around Saranna were not spiritual but temporal. God intervened in everyday life and constant prayer would lead to easing of difficulties, but only at the time and manner God appointed. One had to be prepared to wait for years.



In another sense, perhaps a less religious reading, what such solace implied was forgiveness for actions. The Scotts' relatives in England, written to for help, were quite clear that it had been Robert's speculative investments that had broken *Glendon* (Patrick Scott of Dundee to Saranna 26 August 1847). Similarly, actions against Aboriginal people could be evaded by reference to the idea that the individual was at the mercy of God's mysterious plans. Ideas like these were a refuge in themselves, a hiding from responsibility and reality. They could be called upon in self-explanation. There is nothing in Helenus's letters that suggests he shared similar views. Rather, they were full of desperate practical action (Letters of Helenus Scott, ML A2265). Ann's beliefs might be explained perhaps by the trauma of living in violent times where her own family were involved. Ann Curthoys argues that settler trauma and repression of memory is crucial to understanding the history of Australia (Ann Curthoys, "Expulsion" 1). References to Indigenous people are rare in Ann Rusden's letters but she did advocate extreme military violence in the 1840s after claiming Aboriginal people were formerly "inoffensive" and should have been taught a sharp lesson then, before they came to know too much about the settlers (Ann to Saranna undated, ML A2268). The trauma of advocating aggression and her family being involved in such aggression would be soothed by the knowledge that all events in the world were controlled by an unfathomable God.

Another book that supported Ann's religious views was *The Young Christian* by Jacob Abbott, published by the American Tract Society in 1832. This further underlined the unknowability of God. Jacob Abbott explained his purpose:

It has been my design in presenting this subject to convince Christians that they cannot understand everything connected with Christian theology and to try to induce them to repose willingly and peacefully in a sense of ignorance fully realised and frankly acknowledged (Abbott i).

One can see that such an admission opened up possibilities. If one recognises and embraces ignorance there is no longer a need to argue with rationalism or reason. The reader rests in peace with the world. However, the means by which one has obtained this position is through realisation and acknowledgement, processes far away from the mystical and close to the thinking of reason. The text is well known to Ann and Saranna when the Reverend Rusden wished Saranna to buy a copy of Abbott's *The Corner Stone* (Ann to Saranna 15 August 1836). Grace Rusden was very pleased with Bishop Broughton's visit to her Sunday School - "the Bishop asks questions in the way Abbott recommends" (Grace to Saranna 11 November 1836).

Theology gave opportunity to debate. Alexander Ross' *Panthebeia or A view of all Religions* made Ann "agreeably surprised". She thought it had great merit and asked Saranna "how did you like it?" (Ann to Saranna 3 March 1836). This was published originally in 1653 and was an early attempt to understand religious diversity. When Saranna was in Sydney in July 1836 she was reading a book by the evangelist Frederick Graeber. Ann was "not surprised" Saranna liked the book, "it must be interesting" (Ann to Saranna 1 July 1836). Ann was pleased to open a parcel from Saranna and see Simeon's *Life*. She wrote

There is a beautiful passage I mean to copy speaking of Hershel's works being too Calvinistic in their tendency. I think that Simeon discriminates beautifully first, the assurance of the understanding, second, the assurance of faith, third, the assurance of hope – the two first duties the last being confounded with the second – being a privilege not a duty – do you remember the passage- he must have been a good old man but an eccentric one, in his going to Scotland I cannot but think he was wrong

to conduct the service, though he might Preach. What do you think? (Ann to Saranna undated ML A2268).

Charles Simeon (1759-1836), Evangelical and Vice Provost of King's College Cambridge, published *Horae Homiliticae* in 1832 and described himself as "no friend to systematisers in theology" and sought to derive from Scripture alone his views of religion, "never wresting any portion of the word of God to favour a particular opinion". He sought to see Scripture with the "simplicity of a little child" (Simeon i). The simplicity of his reading impressed Ann and one can see how her interpretation of 'understanding' as a privilege related to not always being privy to God's reasoning. More importantly in all these descriptions Ann asked for Saranna's opinion – "what do you think?"

That discussion and debate occurred in households as well as letters is apparent in Ann's analysis of Richard Watson in 1844. Richard Watson (1737 -1816) was an Anglican Bishop and academic who argued free disquisition was the best means of illustrating the truth of Christianity. Ann wrote

I think with Grace he was too worldly minded to be a bishop and entered into politics more than became a churchman. I have never thought of comparing him with Wolsey but since Georgiana's remark I have thought upon it – there may be points of resemblance (Ann to Saranna undated June 1844).

Grace, Georgiana and Ann were involved in discussion without deferring to George Keylock Rusden or even mentioning him. This was theological discussion among women and it would be later found in Rose Selwyn's circle (Arthur Selwyn to Mrs Selwyn, 5 November 1864, 26 July 1882). Moreover, the inadequacies of both argument and personality of both men, Simeon and Watson, were up for discussion. An unknowable God provided safety from which a woman could think and argue.

The writers discussed were primarily Evangelical and it is surprising, given her mysticism, that we do not find the texts of Tractarians in Ann's letters until her mention of one of its main texts, the *Sacra Privata* by Newman in 1853. That was sent to Ann by her daughter Rose and Ann in turn quickly gave it to Saranna's son, George (Ann to Saranna 1 August 1853). So while many of Ann's mentions of God seem mystical and perhaps Tractarian influenced, these new Evangelical texts were read and incorporated into Ann's own theological perspective.

In 1844 she wrote to Saranna, "show Georgiana that part in Southey's *Book of the Church* about Sir Edward Dering's speech on the proposal to forbid bowing at the name of the Saviour, I admired it much –you will find it in the index under the name of Dering" (Ann to Saranna 9 September 1844). Dering had been opposed to the Long Parliament's ban on bowing to the name of the Saviour in 1641- "take heed Sir! God will never own you if you forbid his honour...in short Sir I shall never obey your order" (437). Robert Southey, Romantic poet and then conservative MP, was fervently anti-Catholic in *The Book of the Church*, yet this passage has been selected by Ann and recommended to Georgiana and it was found through index reading. Southey himself is ignored in favour of this "beautiful" speech. Georgiana's "favourite" in 1848 was the High Church leaning Bishop Horne: "all his writings bear the stamp of such beautiful serenity of mind and his style is really so practical" (Georgiana to Saranna 5 September 1848). Bishop Horne argued "true religion and true learning were never yet at variance" (Jones 1). Such perspectives supported the girls' interest in science. "Beauty" and serenity found in reading made space for learning.

In 1853 the combining of science and religion apparent in the Natural Theology of George Barrell Cheever was praised by Ann. The book, *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in the Shadow of Mount Blanc*, had “the feeling of [Ann’s friend] Miss Cristall in it, overflowing, and perfected in the soul” (Ann to Saranna 18 July 1853). Natural Theology saw in nature’s mechanisms proof of God. By mid -century investigation of those mechanisms with “free speculation and scientific progress” was embraced by sections of Evangelical thought (Hilton 24-25). For Cheever nature’s workings were not perfect. The world was not perfect, it had “storm and tempest, barrenness and disaster but humans had the means of enjoyment. If rightly used it would draw men into industry, to show God’s kindness and love and enough of beauty to impress, delight and educate the soul” (Cheever 186). But Ann wrote that she disagreed with Cheever’s separation of church and state. Why should it be when the litany was meant to guide magistrates, Parliament, the Sovereign and the assembled wisdom of the land? “If those in the counsels of the sovereign are not chosen from amongst the faithful servants of God how can we expect that they will try and do his will?” Ann asked to be forgiven her tendency to being “prosy” but “I do not like forms so very, very closely adhered to, when circumstances make it necessary to risk essentials to maintain them [sic]” (Ann to Saranna 7 July 1853). Ann was returning to a much older idea of the Anglican Church as a pillar of the state (O’Brien 7). However, it was the litany, she thought, that should be the foundation of the state. Now with its “forms” the state missed the essentials needed for life. Ann was re-envisioning government based on litany.

On the Hunter River debates among women extended outside individual families. In 1860 Ann obtained from Saranna the sermon of David Low. Saranna had been loaned it by Miss Bingle. This gave a history of the Church of England but it appears from the context that there was some disagreement between Saranna and Miss Bingle as Ann writes “Oh! That people would differ (if they must differ) without quarrelling! There is a beautiful sermon of Arnold’s on that subject” (Ann to Saranna 4 March 1860). Ann was referring to Thomas Arnold, anti Tractarian who believed that reason combined with the Holy Spirit was sufficient guide for truth (XVII). From this letter we understand and that stylistic “beauty” combined with reason, via Arnold, is the approach of Ann Rusden to theological issues.

Women’s discussions led to critiques of church figures and also of politicians. At the height of the dispute in New South Wales between Tractarians and Evangelicals Ann wrote

For my part I am sick of isms and ites and almost all ians except the one blessed one of Christ-ian which I think, if acted up to, would go far to do away the others.

Ann mapped her own position in relation to the dispute. However, she also exhibited considerable anger against Robert Knox Sconce and Thomas Cooper Makinson, two Anglican clergy from Penrith who after long discussion left the Anglican Church to become Catholic in February 1848. The men had been selected by Archbishop Broughton because of their Tractarian leanings. Ann wrote

These are times of trial in a political, moral and religious sense – I grieve with you at the seceders...I grieve at their Bishop (Ann to Saranna 7 March 1848).

Ann was critical of Broughton’s tolerance of Sconce. As Austin Cooper writes such criticism was a major theme of press reports about Sconce and Makinson (175).

Ann and her daughters were critics and consumers of the sermons of Australian bishops. Georgiana related the entire sermon of the Bishop Tyrell at Maitland in March, 1848 in which he gave his history of the church. He stated the differences between the churches and regretted the various denominations “wishing they might cease”. He touched on the errors of

other Churches besides the Anglicans, “hoping [the churches’] differences might cease but not that we should coalesce with Rome”. The Roman church should give up the “fatal errors” of transubstantiation, tradition equal to Scripture, celibacy of the clergy, purgatory and the role of indulgences (Georgiana to Saranna 29 March 1848), Georgiana wrote “all the girls at Morpeth are wild in their admiration of the Bishop! Though much awed by him”. She wanted Saranna very much to hear the Bishop: “his manner is so earnest and impressive and then of a quiet dignity of manner, which had no need to ease itself – his sermon really was most impressive” (Georgiana to Saranna 29 March 1848). Not only the content of the sermon was considered but also the manner in which it was given. In 1850 all of the Bishops met with the Bishop of New Zealand and toured. Georgiana wrote of the sermons printed in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, “I liked the Bishop of Adelaide’s speech least” (Georgiana to Saranna 11 November 1850). When Arthur Selwyn was thinking of joining the church as a minister Ann wrote, “if the Bishop of Exeter had a hand in training Arthur I fear he would not have been my choice, a worldly minded harsh man would not have been likely to instil such principles [as Arthur’s]” (Ann to Saranna 4 November 1850). In 1866, according to Georgiana’s letter to Rose, the Bishop was capable of acting “foolishly” (Georgiana to Rose Selwyn 18 October 1866). The position of the Rusden women in relation to Bishops is best expressed by Georgiana in 1867 in her criticism of the Bishop of Melbourne’s lecture on *Ecce Homo*, a book that discussed the humanity of Christ. Georgiana was “‘disgusted’ by the book – “though my objections are different from the Bishop’s (though as far as I can see he is justified in his also) yet mine led to the same conclusion that its teaching is not of the Bible – that it is of the earth and it would inculcate a spurious Christianity” (Georgiana to Saranna 19 October 1867). The Rusden women saw themselves as on the same level as Bishops and capable of interpretation of Scriptures themselves from which they judged theological writing and the performances of Bishops. Such opportunity came from the nature of Anglicanism itself, but it also came from the Rusdens’ utilisation of such opportunity. Ann’s mystical imagery involving women and God gave her firm ground from which to consider theological debates within the Anglican Church. It also gave opportunity for herself and her daughters to critique the bishops and to come to their own conclusions. The incorporation of science into Anglican thinking and its emphasis on reason and argument also allowed the Rusden women to become involved in scientific practices and debate.

## Science

The Rusden women evidenced interest in science throughout the letters. Grace had a book on minerology which was eagerly consulted by Helenus Scott (Ann to Saranna 1 July 1836). Ann had an interest in astronomy (Ann to Saranna 7 February 1851). Georgiana collected seaweed which she mounted and sent to Saranna’s daughter Rose, Mrs Augusta Mitchell and Mrs Howitt; in return Rose sent a specimen of moss (Georgiana to Saranna 11 July 1865). The most complex interaction with science came from the involvement of the family with phrenology and Ann’s commentary on electro-biology. Phrenology had been introduced to the family by Arthur Selwyn who brought his friend Dr Scott to the house. Dr Scott had been “born and bred a phrenologist” according to Ann (Ann to Saranna 31 July 1850). The examination of skull shape and the reading of personality traits and predilections from it seems to have become a parlour game at *Holmwood* in 1850 – “chess and phrenology are our principal pursuits” (Ann to Saranna undated ML A2268). Saranna reproached her mother. Ann replied:

Like all other sciences it may be productive of good or evil according to the extent in which it is investigated –if we pursue it for the purpose of knowing ourselves,

and our own weaknesses it surely would be productive of good and it is not the fault of the science but the effect of our misdirected passions that that knowledge we acquire should make us depend on ourselves instead of seeking God's grace to enable us to turn to the capabilities he has given us to his glory and our own eternal good. (Ann to Saranna undated ML A2268).

The space Anglican theology made for reason and science is apparent in this quote. Ann was far more critical of the electro-biology of Mr Daly who gave lectures involving volunteers, and though the word "hypnosis" was not used, the reports of the lectures indicate that participants lost their will and performed various actions requested by Daly.

Fifteen people concentrated on a small disk in their hands. Directed to shut their eyes and in spite of all their efforts were unable to open them until the lecturer willed it that they could do so. Another patient had his eyes and mouth closed at the will of the lecturer and was unable to repeat a syllable till Mr Daly had removed his magic influence (*Geelong Advertiser* 26 March 1853).

It was not the science that was at fault but the attitude of people to it. Ann thought phrenology was "instructive and improving to the mind" (Ann to Saranna undated ML A2268). Mr Daly had given a performance at West Maitland "to a crowded and fashionable audience" according to Ann. She wrote "the more I hear of it the less I like it" and explained:

I have painful anticipations of the evil of a power, so great, employed without any prospect of good and with the present certainty of some mischief –for how can we be sure (supposing there is no collusion) that an act by which the operation of the judgement is suspended, a power by which the will of the patient is subjected to the will of another is safe in any human hands, how can we be sure that the operator will always be able to restore the faculties he suspends...I wish to conclude this with a notion from the celebrated Miss Elizabeth Smith after saying we should do all for the glory of God she adds "the business in which we cannot ask his protection and assistance cannot be an innocent stain of the amusement, for which we dare not thank him, cannot be an innocent pleasure"... I want to know whether you think I am overstraining the matter – ...I am not competent to judge that it is against it I speak – oh what a long prosing I am making (Ann to Saranna 12 March 1853).

In this passage Ann is far from certain about the relationship of this other new science, complete with the words, "operator" and "patient", and its relationship to God. She cannot see the good in it but she is unsure. Science held considerable power and Ann's letters are sprinkled with terminology related to it: "electrified" (Ann to Saranna 31 July 1850) "experimental" (Ann to Saranna undated ML A 2268) "auto maton" (Ann to Saranna undated ML A2268), but it had to be judged in terms of God. That she needed help with this is indicative of the power of science in her life.

Women's involvement in science and aspects of collecting in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has been explored in an edited volume by Arlene Leis and Kacie C. Willis. Drawing on earlier work by Susan Bracken, Andrea Caldly and Adrianna Turpin, they see collecting as a way for women to be part of arenas of scientific discussion. Mrs Augusta Scott while in India had a "minerals cabinet" in which she placed specific minerals she had collected and she resisted her husband's suggestions for more gruesome additions (A.H Scott to Augusta Scott, undated 1812). Ann looked for native parasitic plants for Saranna and a Mrs Saunders presented Grace with seeds of a moonflower plant that originated in South America (Georgiana to Saranna 11 March 1848). There was some frustration expressed when

Ann found *Ford's Almanac* was lacking. She wrote that if she were a gentleman prone to writing letters to a newspaper she would certainly critique the almanac (Ann to Saranna 7 February 1851). The circles of women who discussed theology were also concerned with science. The influence of the writer Mary Ann Burges cannot be excluded as an influence on the Rusden Girls. Mary Ann Burgess was described in the introduction to her book *Pilgrim Good-Intent*:

In Geological Studies the progress which she had made is ascertained by the share which she took in the last publication of Mr De Luc on that subject. In Botany she was equally skilful and the extent of her knowledge in Natural History is manifested by a manuscript account of British Lepidoptera, finished not long before her death, in which the various insects are traced from their egg to their ultimate perfection on the several plants peculiarly adapted to them (Burges i).

Grace was perhaps the daughter most interested in science. When Ann died in 1860 Georgiana and Grace took in students, but Grace also wanted to “continue her studies”. These studies were obsessive, since Grace did not leave her room for days or eat when she was in pursuit of a subject (Georgiana to Saranna 18 December 1866). She reached the point where she felt competent enough to “operate on her own thumb” (Georgiana to Saranna 8 April 1860). She and Georgiana moved to live with George William Rusden in 1865 in Melbourne. They rented out *Holmwood* and lived on the income and that from stocks and shares left to them independently. Grace argued with her brother, George William, refusing to speak to him and left the house (Georgiana to Saranna, 9 November 1866). Penny Russell has seen this argument as a pre-feminist act (317). However, in earlier letters to Saranna, Grace complained of severe pain in the back of her head making it impossible to think and this may have been responsible for the erratic behaviour Georgiana wrote of (Grace to Saranna 14 December 1863). In terms of pre-feminism the whole of the history of women in the Rusden family encouraged independent thought and study of religion and science. Such independence also can be found in their discussion of politics and literature.

### **Politics and Literature, Women and Strength**

Ann Rusden was no democrat. She believed the servant class would be better off not reading at all.

The spread of the taste for higher pursuits amongst the lower orders renders the difficulty of getting servants greater – nor do I think it so kind as people fancy it, to give a taste for literature to those who have to earn their bread – even we ourselves are not able to find time for such pursuits – and we are obliged to put a restraint on ourselves, lest we should neglect duty, for the enjoyments which our education has fitted us for – an education which is no more than is suitable to the station to which we belong (Ann to Saranna 12 May 1851).

A taste for literature should have been denied the servant class, with it they did not know how to manage their time as did those who were educated. In this she differed greatly from her husband who advocated, as we have seen, reading for all. The rhyme she taught her grandchildren, “How go the Ladies”, where the Butcher Boy had ideas above his station and ended up in the gutter (see Table 1), was indeed her understanding. Ann disliked “the mob” and felt in 1848 “the world was in ‘a great and awful stir...both politically and religiously’”. She wrote “we earnestly search for righteousness” (Ann to Saranna 29 February 1848). Georgiana too despised the “low mob cry” that would be appealed to by liberal candidate and

land reformer John Robertson in his contesting of the New South Wales election of 1861 (Georgiana to Saranna 11 December 1860). The “we” who searched for righteousness were both male and female from Ann’s perspective and Georgiana felt herself able to be scathingly critical of Robertson. When George Keylock Rusden was getting signatures against a new secular system of education in 1844 Ann wished there was a “Mothers’ petition” as “I would call this plan systematic rejection of Christianity” (Ann to Saranna, 9 September 1844). If there could be female commentary on political life there could also be action. In her idea of a Mothers’ petition Ann was imagining a distinct intervention in politics for women and this would be apparent also in those who eagerly signed the Wives and Daughters’ Petition against transportation delivered to the Executive Council in 1850 (Thompson 211). Ann imagined a political female terrain, distinct from men. This is precisely the space from which her daughter Rose Selwyn argued for female jurors (Letters, *Should Women Be Jurors?*).

This independent terrain is further apparent in the Rusden women’s discussion of literature. Ann thought Macbeth was “a despicable character” - Lady Macbeth was the real star of the play: “Her bold daring makes her character more prominent”. Ann continued, “she was as bad as Macbeth, but he was cowered, and therefore to my mind more despicable... Shakespeare does well to portray her to the last –to show that with all her lofty daring she becomes a very coward at heart (without change of character) because her strength of mind has no principal guide” (Ann to Saranna undated ML MSS 38/19). In this reading Ann praised lofty daring by women, as long as their strength of mind was guided properly. When Helenus Scott came to visit by himself soon after his marriage to Saranna he became involved in a long debate with Georgiana and Grace about which was more important – art or poetry. Ann said the girls consulted books and “agreed with Sir Joshua Reynolds when he agrees with them”. She felt sure that her friend Miss Elizabeth Cristall would have something to add to the discussion and would have enjoyed it, but Ann refused to take sides. She felt the girl’s minds were “strengthened” by such activity (Ann to Saranna 1 July 1836).

Ann did not think that Madame de Staël’s *Corinne* did anyone any good to read because it did not “teach one to rely on one’s own strength”. It also “supposes our nature purer than the Bible”. *Corinne* was concerned with the limit society placed on the independent woman and the woman of genius. Madame de Staël, a French woman of politics and letters, had written the story of a love affair between a Lord and a beautiful poetess which examined the national identities of Post-Revolutionary Europe. It was a homage to the landscape, literature and art of Italy. The book suggested the role women could play in forging new communities (Isbell xii). While the book “had beautiful passages” it did not, according to Ann, teach humility, “it is not Christianity”. Ann wrote that while one could pick out passages to dispute her claims the general tenor of the work supported her. “It is a work I would not put into young people’s hands – it is powerfully written – it is a fascinating work but you rise from it uncomfortable” (Ann to Saranna undated 1846, ML A2268). For Ann a girl must be taught to rely on her own strength but to do so with humility and *Corinne* did not model that humility. In this Ann constructs the persona of the public woman, strong in herself, aware of her superiority to men but also understanding that her genius was not the centre of existence.

Harriet Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was eagerly given to Ann by her son George William and he termed it “a death blow to slavery”. “So it is”, wrote Ann, “but it is also a representation of the effect of vital religion upon the crushed African” (Ann to Saranna 29 March 1853). This was the only reference in the surviving letters of Ann Rusden to any kind of missionary work and yet for much of her life missions were one of the mainstays of the Anglican religion in Australia and the Pacific (Hilliard, Storch). She and Georgiana did visit

the poor and ill in Maitland (P. Curthoys) but of missions there is no mention at all in her letters.

In April she was more enthused about *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. "I greatly admire the labours of the authoress and the use she makes of them. She is a powerful writer and her subject alas! Too fertile" (Ann to Saranna 14 April 1853). This was written at a time where three of her sons and sons-in-law were involved in employing Aboriginal people on their stations and yet the message of the book was not applied locally by the Rusden women. Jane Lydon has written that such a reading was common in Australia where both the "poor" and slaves were somewhere else, not "here" (Lydon 84). Georgiana felt the book was written "to correct abuses" and that "its modes of expression were more Natural than elegant" (Georgiana to Saranna 23 October 1853). Georgiana reminds us that beauty was important in the female Rusdens' consumption of texts, both religious and secular. Concentrating on beauty in didactic literature may be linked with Ann's mysticism, her idea of an unknowable God and her ignoring of violence to Indigenous people. Such a mentality was perhaps partly productive of the disconnect Ann Curthoys and Jessie Mitchell identified between political history and the history of violence in Australia (10). Violence was negated by an unknowable God, whose actions we cannot understand, put aside as part of incomprehension of his meaning. Women soothed the household with this knowledge and with their engagement with beauty.

These books were discussed as texts but there were other authors that Ann made use of throughout her letters. Sometimes quotes were religious but could hint at a secular meaning. For example, Ann wrote that Saranna saw "through a glass darkly", a quote from Paul, *Corinthians*. The rest of the passage is invoked in the reference to *Corinthians* and this included Paul's request to "put away childish things". The passage could suggest that there was a childish aspect to Saranna. When Ann quotes *Lamentations* 3:26 "it is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the solution of the Lord" it was in a passage where Saranna's receiving of a deed to sign was delayed (Ann to Saranna 23 October 1853). Saranna would have been aware of the end of the passage: "he sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it on him. He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so there may be hope". Ann was advising silence over the matter.

In use of secular texts, the context of the quotations may have been pointed. When Georgiana requested Saranna to follow the advice of a doctor and not "Penelope-like" enquire into his reasoning. Georgiana was also invoking a character in *The Odyssey* who waited twenty years for her husband's return and to deter suitors pretended to sew a shroud which she unravelled every night (Georgiana to Saranna 3 September 1858). Helenus spent many years away from Saranna and sometimes she did not hear from him in months (Ann to Saranna 4 September 1853). There seems to have been some criticism of Helenus by the Rusden women: "I think your state comes nearest solitude", wrote Ann in 1857 (Ann to Saranna 24 December 1857). In 1851 Ann wrote to Saranna of Helenus's hoped for position with the government as Clerk of Quarter Sessions. She wrote of the Governor "there is much tardiness about 'a man dressed in a little brief authority'" (Ann to Saranna 26 August 1851). The quote is from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* and it relates to Isabella begging for the life of her brother Claudio, who has been condemned to death for impregnating his fiancée before marriage

But man, proud man,  
Dress'd in a little brief authority  
Most ignorant of what he's most assur'd –  
His glassy essence – like an angry ape



Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven  
As makes the angels weep; who with our spleens  
Would make themselves laugh mortal.

This is indeed criticism of Governor Denison, and it may have soothed Saranna if the appointment was not made, but could it also be criticism of Helenus's wish to obtain "brief authority" in a field he was most ignorant of – Clerk of Quarter Sessions? The female intellectual realm that Ann imagined was one from which male figures of power could also be criticised or made fun of.

## **Conclusion**

Ann's combining of separate threads of Anglicanism in her theological perspective is reminiscent of the religious culture of Lincolnshire, where laity went happily from church to church and perhaps selected their own relevant passages from scripture. She drew from mysticism and from new work that assured a place for reason by separating it clearly from the secure supernatural in religion. Ann valued the strengthening of the mind and education for girls. Such an education and a vibrant colonial book market gave rise to discussion and swapping of texts among women. Ann's mysticism and her particular emphasis on simplicity allowed her and other Anglicans to make space for scientific discussion in their lives. God was unknowable, he worked in ways that were impossible for humans to understand, but nature could be understood as open to interrogation, its mechanisms, determined by God could be explored as well as enjoyed. All people were thus able to conjecture, to argue. In such arguing women could question bishops, theologians and politicians. While Ann's view of herself as a contributor to political opinion allowed her to advise and contemplate violence to Indigenous people her underlying mysticism and her notion of an unknowable God allowed her to avoid such discussion in moral terms. All events came from God and the reasons for them were not able to be fathomed by mere humans. Women, however, were light and brightness and capable of soothing the households of the Hunter River.

This notion of independence created the environment for the feminism of Rose Selwyn and Rose Scott. Ann's perspective was more than an opening into public life for women, it was the creation of a distinct female intellectual space that in itself questioned the nature of that public. Her letters and opinions would be read out and passed around groups of people and she was aware of this audience, but her primary focus was discussion among women, thinking by women and the shaping of the world by women. The colonial book market was vibrant and Ann was sent and brought books from England, but it is how Ann negotiated these books that has been the subject of this paper. Texts were read against their grain, exploited for quotations and argued against. Ann provides us with valuable information on the history of the book and reading in Australia and tells us something of the emergence of feminism and its entanglements with the soothing of misgivings about colonial violence.

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