

ARTICLES

William Henty stands on his legs in front of Governor Gipps

Independence, manners and manliness in colonial Australia

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William Henty's detailed journal of a visit to Sydney in December 1842 to meet with the New South Wales Executive Council reveals an uneasy relationship between claims for independence and displays of manners. This disquiet is, firstly, a result of the illusory nature of independence and, secondly, a manifestation of the disquiet that manners may have been unmanly. And the uneasiness was played out at the level of bodily comportment and gesture in social interactions. When Henty met Governor Gipps, financial security, family reputation and personal autonomy were compressed into anxiety about when to speak and when not to speak, and whether to sit or stand.

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William Henty was in Sydney in December 1842 to meet with New South Wales Governor Sir George Gipps and the Executive Council. Henty's journal kept during this visit recorded a series of meetings giving detailed descriptions not only of words spoken, but also of gestures made. Gipps was imperious and officious, asking questions without allowing Henty to reply, bringing discussion to a halt by turning his back, and addressing

Henty without fully facing him. Henty, for his part, seemed aware of being in a subordinate position and held back at one point from ‘further speechifying’. But at one meeting he left the office before he was shown the door and at another he addressed the members of the Council while standing, as he described it, on his ‘Legs’, at which the governor responded with surprise. We do not know why Henty recorded these meetings so attentively: whether it was to impress on his brothers the appropriateness of his actions, or to reassure himself. But we are left in little doubt that the minutiae of interpersonal dealings were significant to William Henty.¹

Henty’s journal reveals the uneasy relationship between claims for independence (the traditional foundation of adult manhood) and displays of manners (the social mode required of men in a civilised society). This disquiet is one aspect of the paradox of manliness and modernity that Christopher E Forth has eloquently outlined.² Historians of the long eighteenth century in Britain have fruitfully explored the phenomenon through aspects as diverse as fashion, duelling and nation-building, and from perspectives of power relationships along class and gender lines.³ Much of this work has sought to connect these changes in the realms of culture and identity with the changing material circumstances of British life. Paul Langford, for example, described the men and women of Britain during this period as ‘a polite and commercial people’, with their politeness the product of an emerging commercial and ‘vigorous’ middle class involved in both production and consumption, which ‘required a more sophisticated means of regulating manners’. These changing expectations of behaviour had specific implications for men, giving rise to anxieties that have led Michèle Cohen to claim that the most vexing question for eighteenth-century British men was whether

¹ William Henty, ‘Journal on My Visit to Sydney Dec. 1842 Re Portland Bay Claims’, *Henty Family Papers*, State Library of Victoria (SLV), MS 7739, 108/1 (f) (1842–1843).

² Christopher E Forth *Masculinity in the Modern West: Gender, Civilization and the Body*, London, New York: Palgrave MacMillan 2008.

³ Michèle Cohen, ‘“Manners” make the man: politeness, chivalry, and the construction of masculinity, 1750–1830’, *Journal of British Studies* 44, April 2005, 312–329; Robert Shoemaker, ‘The taming of the duel: masculinity, honour and ritual violence in London, 1660–1800’, *The Historical Journal* 45 (3), 2002, 525–545; David Kuchta *The Three Piece Suit and Modern Masculinity: England, 1550–1850*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002; Stephen Gregg, ‘“A truly Christian hero”: religion, effeminacy, and nation in the writings of the societies for reformation of manners’, *Eighteenth-Century Life* 25, 2001, 17–28; Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850*, London: Routledge 2002; Louise Carter, ‘British masculinities on trial in the Queen Caroline affair of 1820’, *Gender & History* 20 (2), 2008, 248–269; Philip Carter *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660–1800*, Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited 2001; Karen Downing, ‘The Gentleman Boxer: Boxing, Manners, and Masculinity in Eighteenth-Century England’, *Men and Masculinities* 12 (3), 2010, 328–352.

they could be both polite and manly. Recently, Penny Russell has shown that manners mattered in the Australian colonies, too, where complex rules governed the finer points of social interaction.⁴ Russell's work contributes to a growing body of literature that reveals how penal origins particularised the emergence of a modernising world in the Australian colonies, straining tensions between privilege and merit, clouding issues of identity and complicating the pursuit of status.⁵ That educated men, gentlemen, were part of the convict population was just one of the confounding characteristics of colonial society.⁶

This article adds to such works by foregrounding the relationship between manliness and manners. It argues that the uneasiness between claims for independence and displays of manners is, firstly, a result of the illusory nature of independence and, secondly, a manifestation of the disquiet that manners may have been unmanly. While autonomy was a key facet of adult masculine status, men lived in increasingly complex webs of obligation and reciprocity that made true independence unattainable. This interdependence necessitated manners which were taught to men by conduct manuals and etiquette books. That manners were not innate – that they needed to be learned – left room for suspicion and anxiety along both class and gender lines. And all of this was played out at the level of bodily comportment and gesture in social intercourse. So when William Henty met Governor Gipps, financial security, family reputation, personal autonomy, and perhaps even his own sense of himself as a particular type of man, were compressed into anxiety about when and when not to speak, and whether to sit or stand.

'Independent' men

William's father Thomas Henty was a prosperous Sussex sheep farmer and banker with aristocratic connections and a large family. Thomas was

⁴ Paul Langford *A Polite and Commercial People*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1989, 4; Penny Russell *Savage or Civilised? Manners in Colonial Australia*, Sydney: University of New South Wales Press 2010; Michèle Cohen *Fashioning Masculinity: National Identity and Language in the Eighteenth Century*, New York: Routledge, 1996, 41.

⁵ Kirsten McKenzie, 'Of convicts and capitalists: Honour and colonial commerce in 1830s Cape Town and Sydney', *Australian Historical Studies* 33 (118), 199–222, 2002; *Scandal in the Colonies: Sydney and Cape Town, 1820–1850*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press 2004; and *A Swindler's Progress: Nobles and Convicts in the Age of Liberty*, Sydney: University of New South Wales Press 2009; Anna Johnston *The Paper War: Morality, Print Culture, and Power in Colonial New South Wales*, Crawley, WA: UWA Publishing 2011.

⁶ David Andrew Roberts, "'The valley of swells': "Special" or "educated" convicts on the Wellington Valley Settlement, 1827–1830', *History Australia* 3 (1), 11.1–11.21, 2006.

persuaded of the advantages of emigration better to secure his family's financial future than he felt was possible in England in the period after the French wars. Accordingly, his sons James, Stephen and John sailed for Swan River in 1829.⁷ Thomas himself, his wife Frances, three more sons Edward, Charles, and Francis, and their daughter Jane, joined the vanguard of the family in Van Diemen's Land in 1831, where the first three sons had decamped on finding such poor soil in Western Australia. Thomas appealed to the British government for permission to exchange the large Swan River grant for a smaller one in Van Diemen's Land but free land grants had by this time come to an end and the appeal was refused. So the family turned their attention to the enormous area of land across Bass Strait in the Port Phillip District. Edward was the first to move, in 1834, with stock and a small party of men, and Francis followed a month later with the first merino sheep. William was the final Henty man to emigrate, arriving from Britain in 1837.⁸

Most of the Henty men kept journals and as the family did not live together in the Australian colonies, they maintained bonds through letters.⁹ The Henty family papers are a valuable resource for colonial history covering topics from farming and whaling practices to encounters with Port Phillip's Indigenous peoples. They also tell us about the disputes that the family endured to secure legal possession of the lands on which they squatted. Gipps refused to acknowledge any claim that the family made on these lands and Thomas Henty did not live to see the matter settled. In 1842, however, the Colonial Office finally informed Gipps that the 'Messrs Henty' were to be allowed pre-emption of their lands at the price they would now realise if unimproved, and compensation for any claimed lands that had already been sold. It was therefore necessary to determine the extent of the land involved.¹⁰

This family history explains why Henty was in Sydney in December 1842 and we can understand why he kept a journal of that visit – he was, after all, dealing with the future of the whole clan. But it does not explain the exacting detail in which he recorded his meetings. This explanation lies more in concepts of independence entwined with notions of manliness.

⁷ Edward Henty, 'Henty Papers', Mitchell Library (ML), C172, CY1572, 1845–1872; Marnie Bassett 'Henty, Thomas (1775–1839)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography (ADB)*, <<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A010493b.htm>>, accessed 29/2/2008.

⁸ Bassett, 'Henty, Thomas'.

⁹ Collections held: State Library of Victoria, Mitchell Library, Western Australia State Library, National Library of Australia, Deakin University.

¹⁰ Marnie Bassett *The Hentys: An Australian Colonial Tapestry*, London: Oxford University Press 1954, 329, 495–507; Henty, 'Miscellaneous Correspondence'.

Thomas Henty was explicit about the significance of independence: in 1822 he urged John Street, who was already in New South Wales, to persevere in the pursuit of independence, which he described as ‘so delightful, and so desirable in every sense of the word’.¹¹

The phrase, ‘in every sense of the word’, highlights how slippery the concept of independence was at the time. The social mobility offered by increasing opportunities in commerce, warfare and empire-building created a stratified but no longer clearly delineated society. Men’s endeavours to make a place for themselves in this world were expressed in terms of maintaining or pursuing independence. The term was associated with freedom from patronage in the eighteenth century and with autonomy of action and opinion by the mid-nineteenth century, but during the first decades of the century it was both – and more.¹²

‘Independence’ was cited by men as their motivation for moving to the Australian colonies, but there was no consensus on what they meant by the term. For barrister Edward Landor an ‘air of independence’ came from doing for himself what servants in Britain would have done for him. For gentleman convict John Grant ‘a level of independence’ came from not relying on government rations. Henry Haygarth found independence in the ‘adventurer’ rather than the ‘settler’. The explorer Matthew Flinders’ ‘definition of independence’ was to ‘live without pecuniary assistance from anyone’, and he emphatically underlined ‘anyone’ in his letter.¹³ In the Australian colonies independence manifested itself in diverse behaviour. For the convict dandy independence was displayed by his purchasing power on the streets of Sydney. Other men of ‘low rank’ chose to enter trades or go to sea rather than work for settlers as farm servants. Convict men on assignment built their own huts and cooked for themselves, a physical separation of masters and servants which did not happen in Britain. And authorities found it difficult to replace convict clerks with educated migrants because those migrants preferred, in their own telling phrase, to ‘make their own way on the land’.¹⁴

¹¹ Thomas Henty to James Street, 25 January 1822, ‘Henty Papers’.

¹² John Tosh *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*, London: Yale University Press 1999, 111.

¹³ Edward Landor *The Bushman*, London: Richard Bentley 1847, 45; Yvonne Cramer *This Beauteous, Wicked Place: Letters and Journals of John Grant, Gentleman Convict*, Canberra: National Library of Australia 2000, 40, 51; Henry Haygarth *Recollections of Bush Life in Australia*, London: John Murray 1848, 20–21, 97; Flinders to Ann Chappelle, 18 December 1800, in Paul Brunton (ed) *Matthew Flinders: Personal Letters from an Extraordinary Life*, Sydney: Hordern House 2002, 55.

¹⁴ Jane Elliott, ‘Was there a convict dandy? Convict consumer interests in Sydney, 1788–1815’, *Australian Historical Studies* 26 (104), 1995, 373–92; Peter Cunningham *Two Years*

The contradictions in the varying uses of the term ‘independence’ and in the behaviour it motivated are clear. Was independence to be gained from running your own business or farming your own land? Was it to be displayed by nurturing a family or wandering the world? Did it involve a life of quiet contemplation or a life of conspicuous wealth? Individual men negotiated these dilemmas through a variety of practices: they retired to the country after success in business; they continued agricultural work alongside other occupations; or they moved between paid commercial employment and independent agricultural activity and back again as circumstances allowed or dictated. The explorer Edward Eyre, for instance, was explicit that his ‘wild rambling life’ was a means to the ‘prospect of repose [and] independence’ that he sought.¹⁵

The Henty men negotiated the dilemma as a family. Where individual men struggled with competing imperatives, as a family they could combine them all. James was a banker and merchant in Britain and a successful trader in the colonies. Charles, also a banker in Britain, was managing director of the Launceston branch of the Bank of Australasia. Edward, John and Francis established large sheep and cattle stations. Stephen was a merchant and trader, ship owner and whaler. And William was a solicitor in Launceston.¹⁶ James had outlined just such a plan to his father soon after he arrived in the Australian colonies: ‘I hope you will bear in mind’, he wrote, ‘that it will be a matter of very great consequence that one of the Boys or myself should settle down at the Town as a merchant as a great deal of good may be done perhaps quite as much as in agricultural pursuits the two blended will however answer best’.¹⁷

For all this, the Henty family remained part of a web of obligation and reciprocity that made independence frustratingly difficult to achieve. Thomas’s 300 acre property was purchased following the death of his father. His farming interests included merino sheep: Thomas was probably one of the farmers who successfully petitioned the King for gifts from the royal flock in 1796. He gained a name as a reputable breeder in England and John Street took a number of Thomas’ sheep to New South Wales where they thrived, prompting orders for further merinos from men

in New South Wales, vol. 2, Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia 1966 (1827), 55; John Hirst *Convict Society and Its Enemies: A History of Early New South Wales*, Sydney: George Allen & Unwin 1983, 54–55, 89.

¹⁵ Edward Eyre *Autobiographical Narrative of Residence and Exploration in Australia 1832–1839*, London: Caliban Books 1984 (1859), 165–66.

¹⁶ Bassett, ‘Henty, Thomas’.

¹⁷ James Henty to Thomas Henty, 15 November 1829, ‘Extracts of Letters from Swan River’.

now recognised as pioneers of Australia's wool industry. In 1805 Thomas also entered the world of commerce, founding a provincial bank with three partners. Thomas' sons James and Charles received their business training in this family firm.¹⁸

The Henty family were – through a combination of inheritance, patronage, hard work and circumstance – financially comfortable. But the post-French wars period of falling corn prices and rising rural unemployment rendered this position uncertain – especially for Thomas' many sons. Emboldened by Street's accounts of prospects in the Australian colonies and his reading of William Wentworth's influential *A Statistical, Historical and Political Description of New South Wales* (1819), Thomas decided to emigrate. This economic imperative is the motivation expounded by historians of the Henty family.¹⁹ Henty family correspondence during the 1820s certainly puts financial circumstances at home and opportunities in the colonies at the forefront of the family's decision. But one letter intimates that there might have also been another reason. Thomas' eldest son James wrote to his father's friend Street in December 1828: 'Since the date of my last Letter we have come to the resolution of directing our future efforts to Australia, at least the greater part of our family and myself among them; on account of the infamous conduct of our relations in this country our prospects are very much blighted'.²⁰

Men could be disadvantaged by the web of obligation and reciprocity in which they lived, especially when it involved extended family connections. Thomas's brother George Henty also had a son by the name of James born, confusingly, one year before his cousin. This James Henty was a trader at the London Stock Exchange and he shocked the financial world on 27 July 1827 when he defaulted on his creditors. It was, said the newspapers at the time, 'one of the most extensive failures that ever occurred'.²¹ The drama that unfolded in the ensuing weeks involved, according to the *Morning Chronicle*, astonishment, grief and tears.²² Frequent meetings of creditors were reported and their reaction as well as that of other members of the Stock Exchange was duly noted. Not only did they place James Henty's name at the Exchange on eight 'black boards', rather than the usual one naming serious defaulters,

¹⁸ Bassett *The Hentys*, 3, 11, 18, 19, 24–25.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁰ James Henty to John Street, 16 December 1828, 'Henty Papers'.

²¹ *Morning Chronicle*, 27 July 1827; see also *The Times*, 27 July 1827; *Examiner*, 29 July 1827; *Bury Norwich Post*, 5 September 1827.

²² *Morning Chronicle*, 28 July 1827.

they also published their disapproval in *The Times* on 30 July 1827. In this advertisement James Henty was accused of ‘aggravated dishonesty as to be almost without parallel in the history of the Stock Exchange’, and of ‘heartless indifference’ to the ‘sufferings so wantonly inflicted upon others’. Publication of such an advertisement, as *The Times* noted elsewhere in the same edition, had ‘few precedents’.²³

James Henty was not the only defaulter, but he was the only one named in the newspapers. And most reports included reference to his father, the head of a banking establishment in Sussex.²⁴ ‘Mr Henty, senior’ travelled to London at least twice but apparently declared that he had ‘no intention of making any advances to retrieve the character of his son’. He was, however, asked to account for some £30 000 to £35 000 worth of stock or credit involved in dealings between his bank and his son.²⁵ Eventually, James Henty’s creditors received a payout of ‘eightpence half penny in the pound’ and in December the *Morning Post* advertised, with reference to his Stock Exchange ‘speculations’, the auction of the contents of James Henty’s London home ‘preparatory to the disposal of the property’.²⁶ The banker father in these reports was George Henty of the firm Henty, Henty and Hopkins, Bankers, in Arundel and Worthing. Thomas’s son James had taken his father’s place in the firm in 1823 although it is not entirely clear whether James was still part of the firm at the time of his cousin’s default.²⁷

The effect of the scandal on Thomas Henty’s side of the family can only be surmised. *The Times* reported on 30 July that James Henty’s ‘failure’ had caused as much surprise in Worthing as in London but that there had been no ‘injurious effects’ on the local banking establishment bearing the Henty name. Still, this optimism might have been premature.²⁸ There is an enigmatic newspaper account of an assault charge in mid-August 1827 against a ‘Mr. Henty, one of the firm of the Worthing Bank, and brother or uncle to the defaulter on the stock Exchange’ which may indicate that tensions in Sussex were running high.²⁹ And we have Thomas’ son James’ statement in December 1828 that ‘the infamous conduct’ of his relations

²³ *Morning Chronicle*, 30 July 1827, 4 August 1827, 22 August 1827; *The Times*, 30 July 1827.

²⁴ *Morning Chronicle*, 27 July 1827, 28 July 1827; *Bristol Mercury*, 30 July 1827.

²⁵ *Morning Chronicle*, 30 July 1827, 3 August 1827.

²⁶ *Morning Chronicle*, 31 August 1827; *Bury Norwich Post*, 5 September 1827; *Morning Post*, 17 December 1827.

²⁷ Notice of dissolution of partnership, *London Gazette*, 27 March 1827.

²⁸ *The Times*, 31 July 1827.

²⁹ *The Times*, 20 August 1827.

had 'blighted' his family's future. Men's reputations, like their finances, were not independent of the behaviour of other men.³⁰

The Hentys did, however, ultimately benefit from their connections in England. In 1835 Henry Charles Howard, Earl of Surrey, interceded on behalf of Thomas Henty with Lord Aberdeen, the Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, who had previously refused an application for land grants in Portland Bay. This intercession elicited a written caveat from Aberdeen that although there would be no grant of land, he was 'not prepared to say that Mr. Henty's pretensions to any land *actually brought into cultivation and surrounded by a proper fence*, would not be favourably looked upon by His Majesty's Government at a future period'. (The emphasis is Aberdeen's.) The Hentys relied on this statement for years in their land claims.³¹ James asked again for Surrey's assistance in 1840 and in subsequent correspondence with Gipps declared his 'full reliance on the efforts of His Lordship in conjunction with [their] friends at home to obtain just recognition' of their claim.³² Another of those 'friends' was Charles Gordon Lennox, fifth Duke of Richmond and long-time patron of Thomas Henty, whom James visited in England in 1835. In what can only be seen as acknowledgement of the part that the Duke played in the Henty family's fortunes, Stephen Henty and his wife Jane called their first son 'Richmond'.³³ It was the efforts of 'friends at home' that finally saw Gipps obliged to meet William Henty in Sydney in 1842.

Men's continued dependence on patronage, connections and 'friends' into the nineteenth century belied their stated aims of, and claims to, independence. We can see the difficulties clearly in the words of the explorer Matthew Flinders. Flinders was emphatic about living without 'pecuniary' assistance but hoped that an advance of two or three thousand pounds from relatives to forward his mercantile plans would see him soon,

³⁰ As yet, no evidence has come to light that Gipps or other members of the Executive Council knew of or remembered the stock exchange default of James Henty 15 years earlier. When Charles La Trobe, superintendent of the Port Phillip District, recommended that Stephen and Edward Henty be made magistrates he wrote personally to Gipps to say that he had 'taken some trouble to hear what could be said in *disfavour* of Mr. Henty of P. Bay but have only elicited praises'. (He is referring to Stephen living at Portland Bay, italics are in the original.) AGL Shaw (ed) *Gipps-La Trobe Correspondence 1839-1846*, Carlton: Melbourne University Press 1989.

³¹ Bassett *The Hentys*, 327-29; Charles Kent 'Howard, Henry Charles, thirteenth duke of Norfolk (1791-1856)', rev HCG Matthew, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB)*, Oxford University Press, 2004 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13913>>, accessed 25 Sept 2012.

³² Bassett *The Hentys*, 462-64.

³³ *Ibid*, 406.

in his words, 'independent of the world'.³⁴ Flinders appeared unaware of any irony in this plan.

The 'growing length of chains of interdependence' is the expressive phrase that sociologist Norbert Elias used to describe the transformations in European societies during this period. This was partly, as we have seen in the Henty family history, an expression of a new accountability in terms of money.³⁵ Alexis de Tocqueville noticed the phenomenon very clearly in another colonial context: America. 'As society became more stable and civilized', he wrote, 'men's relations with one another became more numerous and complicated'; the links which 'formerly bound men together' were 'destroyed or altered' and 'new links' had to be forged.³⁶

The quandary of manners

Manners helped to forge these new links. But the increasing emphasis on manners during the eighteenth century was not simply, as Paul Langford describes it, a 'logical consequence of commerce': it was also a response to a society in transition where socio-cultural principles were unstable. As sociologist Pierre Bourdieu points out, the body is a primary site for instilling these principles so that during times of change, it takes on a new emphasis. This is why societies 'that seek to produce a new man ... set such store on the seemingly most insignificant details of *dress, bearing, physical and verbal manners*'.³⁷

Langford's observation of the commercial necessity for politeness also glosses over the struggle and effort that attaining and using manners actually entailed. Such behaviour did not simply emerge; it needed to be learned and practised. And this was the message contained in an abundance of etiquette guides and conduct manuals from the period. They bristled with admonition over those small details of dress, bearing, and physical and verbal manners. And they were very exact in their directives to men to speak without heat and violence, keep their word, allow time for

³⁴ Flinders to Christopher Smith, 14 February 1800, in Brunton, *Matthew Flinders*, 42.

³⁵ Norbert Elias 'The Genesis of Sport as a Sociological Problem', in Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning (eds) *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1986, 151.

³⁶ Alexis de Tocqueville *Democracy in America, Vol 1 & 2*, New York: Harper & Row 1966, 4, 383.

³⁷ Langford *A Polite and Commercial People*, 4; Pierre Bourdieu *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1977, 94; Terence Bowers 'Reconstituting the national body in Smollett's *Travels through France and Italy*', *Eighteenth-Century Life* 21(1), 1997, 2.

both business and recreation and avoid drunkenness, gambling, audible laughter and the reading of romances and adventure tales.³⁸ They were specific on how to bow, how to give and receive, and how to behave at the dinner table, in the drawing room and walking in the street.³⁹

Arguably the most influential conduct book was by the fourth Earl of Chesterfield. His collected letters to his son repeated much of the etiquette wisdom of the eighteenth century: from avoiding 'awkward attitudes' and 'disgusting habits, such as scratching yourself' to entering and leaving a room with ease. Good breeding, for Chesterfield, was visible in a man's comportment, heard in his tone of voice and seen in his dress. He advised his son to learn 'every genteel attitude that the human body can be put into' and proposed that this be done by practice and role play. Chesterfield also wanted his son to have command of his 'countenance' so that he could look respectful or cheerful or insinuating as the occasion warranted. Speaking 'distinctly and gracefully' meant never speaking while under the influence of emotion, planning your words and their arrangement, considering your gestures and looks and avoiding 'cacophony' and 'monotony'.⁴⁰

Comportment, speech and dress were all aspects of the good breeding and manners that Chesterfield felt were necessary for getting on in the world. Rank, fortune, talent and character were insufficient to garner respect but manners that were dignified, engaging, gracious and flexible enough to conform to a given circumstance would 'prepossess people in your favour at first sight'— even in business where 'the usual terms of politeness and good-breeding' were strictly required.⁴¹ Dress, too, was significant in creating a favourable impression, as it indicated a man's character. Like manners that should conform to circumstance, a 'man of sense' would dress in the same manner as 'the people of sense and fashion' with whom he associated: if he dressed better he would be 'a fop', and if worse then he would be 'unpardonably negligent'. Clothes needed to be well-made and well-fitted so that once dressed, a man could

³⁸ For example, Richard Lingard *A Letter of Advice to a Young Gentleman*, London: Printed for Benjamin Tooke, and are to be sold at the Ship in St. Pauls Church- Yard 1671; George Chapman *A Treatise of Education*, Edinburgh: Printed for A Kincaid & W Creech 1773; J Gailhard *The Compleat Gentleman*, London: John Starkey 1678.

³⁹ Carter *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society*, 77; Lawrence Klein 'Politeness for plebes: Consumption and social identity in early eighteenth-century England,' in Ann Bermingham and John Brewer (eds) *The Consumption of Culture 1600–1800: Image, Object, Text*, London and New York: Routledge 1995, 362–82.

⁴⁰ Lord Chesterfield *Letters Written by Philip Dormer Earl of Chesterfield to His Son 1737–1768*, London: WW Gibbings 1890 (1774), 24, 95, 206, 56, 97, 385, 404.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 180, 267, 454, 169, 430, 630.

forget them and his movements could 'be as easy and natural as if you had no clothes on at all'.⁴² Yet for all Chesterfield's talk of 'breeding', the balancing act required to convey 'gentility' was the result of effort and practice and was 'not so soon nor so easily learned as people imagine, but requires observation and time'.⁴³

When published, Chesterfield's letters caused immediate and widespread comment and concern. He had controversially added to much sensible advice an overt expression of how the external manners of politeness might exist independently of inner virtue. Samuel Johnson famously summed up both the criticisms and appeal of the letters when he dismissed them as teaching 'the morals of a whore and the manners of a dancing master' yet he added that, if the 'immorality' were removed, the letters 'should be put into the hands of every young gentleman'.⁴⁴ The Reverend Dr John Trusler, editor of popular abridged versions of Chesterfield's letters, shed some light on the popularity of such seemingly confusing advice: 'Though Lord Chesterfield has been condemned for recommending simulation among men', he wrote, 'there is no getting on peaceably without it'.⁴⁵

The disconnection of manners from morality was not the only troubling message in Chesterfield's advice. There were other problems for men attempting to follow it. Firstly, there was the paradoxical stipulation that real success in acquiring manners lay in hiding the effort involved. Manners, like clothes, should appear to fit comfortably and naturally. That both could be 'put on' exposed the potential for failure in being seen as a gentleman. Secondly, this paradox created anxiety along class borders. 'Gentility' had been seen as a product of breeding. Knowing that it could actually be learned created uncertainty when making new acquaintances and added a stressful undertone to social encounters. Manners embodied social hierarchy and thus enforced social divisions in the little rituals of daily life, but learned gentility made these relations less clear.⁴⁶

There was also an enduring suspicion that manners and the social world for which they were necessary were somehow unmanly. The promotion of bluntness and simplicity as virtues, signs of sincerity in a duplicitous world, was just one among many attempts by social commentators to

⁴² Ibid, 155, 238.

⁴³ Ibid, 375.

⁴⁴ John Cannon, 'Stanhope, Philip Dormer, fourth earl of Chesterfield (1694–1773)', ODNB, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com.virtual.anu.edu.au/view/article/26255>>, accessed 16/6/2009; Carter *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society*, 79.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Linda Young *Middle-Class Culture in the Nineteenth Century: America, Australia and Britain*, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan 2003, 131.

⁴⁶ Young *Middle-Class Culture*, 126; Bowers 'Reconstituting the National Body,' 7.

reconcile politeness with traditional expectations of men. The English elevated this to a shared national character in the figure of John Bull, who was roughly dressed, roughly spoken, but always sincere, and sometimes juxtaposed with an undernourished and effeminate Frenchman.⁴⁷ In everyday life, however, men were required to strike a balance between blunt and simpering manners. If a choice between the two was required, William Cobbett expressed a preference, shared by many of his countrymen, for the former. He thought the Americans had got it right – they were ‘always *civil*, never *servile*’.⁴⁸

Manners, then, were a quandary in terms of gender and class and even nationality. They are a facet of Bourdieu’s articulation of the control of capital – economic, social and cultural – that is not only inherited or inculcated, but may be acquired, as conduct manuals made explicit. Control of capital includes expectations rooted in the past which have the potential to collide with the possibilities of a changing present. And this is the conclusion Russell reaches in her recent book *Savage or Civilised?*. ‘Colonial manners reflected, above all,’ she says, ‘the tensions of a modernising world. Contradictory ideas of conduct were thrust together in irreconcilable juxtapositions’.⁴⁹ Men’s endeavours to make a place for themselves in a society which was no longer clearly delineated, juxtaposed independence and manners and highlighted the paradoxes of each in men’s successful attainment of manliness.

The difficulties of being civil but never servile

The Henty men were conscious of their place in this stratified society. England’s economic prospects suggested to the Henty sons that they would not in the future be able to afford the style of living in which they had been raised. They would need, as James put it, ‘to descend many steps in the scale of Society’. On the other hand, he wrote, ‘our name is already well known in the Colony, and immediately we get there we shall

⁴⁷ Bowers, ‘Reconstituting the National Body’, 14; Stella Cottrell ‘The devil on two sticks: Franco-phobia in 1803’, in Raphael Samuel (ed) *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity*, London: Routledge 1989, 263.

⁴⁸ William Cobbett *Advice to Young Men*, London: Henry Frowde, 1906 (1829), 33.

⁴⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, ‘Marriage strategies as strategies of social reproduction’, in Robert Forster and Orest Ranum (eds) *Family and Society: Selections from the Annales Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1976, 117–18; Greg Noble and Megan Watkins, ‘So, how did Bourdieu learn to play tennis? Habitus, consciousness and habituation,’ *Cultural Studies* 17 (3/4), 2003, 522; Stephen Engler ‘Modern times: religion, consecration and the state in Bourdieu’, *Cultural Studies* 17 (3/4), 2003, 446, 50; Russell *Savage or Civilised?*, 188.

be placed in the first Rank in Society'.⁵⁰ With sheep and cattle properties and interests in whaling, shipping and horse breeding, to a large extent their hopes were fulfilled. But the family was not immune to the financial depression of the 1840s.⁵¹ When William Henty left Launceston for Sydney in 1842, the family was facing a descent from their hard won place in society for the second time.

Governor Gipps and his colleagues on the Executive Council all held similarly insecure positions in the British social hierarchy. Gipps was the eldest son of a clergyman whose military career earned him the governorship of New South Wales.⁵² Bishop William Broughton, the head of the Church of England in the Australian colonies, was prevented by financial circumstances following his father's death from taking a place at Cambridge: instead, uncles and family friends used their influence to get him a clerkship in the treasury department of the East India Company. When a legacy did finally allow him to go to Cambridge, he then entered his chosen profession of the church. It was Broughton's patronage by the Duke and Duchess of Wellington that led to his appointment in Australia.⁵³ Edward Deas Thomson, the Colonial Secretary, was the son of an accountant-general in the navy and his first job was as a clerk. After attending to some business following his mother's death in South Carolina, Thomson had the opportunity to travel widely in the United States and Canada during which time he kept a detailed journal of his observations of the US navy and army and other matters of interest. His father circulated Thomson's comments among influential acquaintances in London, including the colonial secretary William Huskisson. It was largely through Huskisson's patronage that he was appointed clerk of the council in New South Wales.⁵⁴

The final two members of the Executive Council were similarly assisted into their positions by relatives and friends. Campbell Riddell was helped by relations and friends into the colonial service with a brief period as a commissioner of inquiry in Ceylon before a permanent post as colonial treasurer in New South Wales.⁵⁵ Sir Maurice O'Connell was the penniless

⁵⁰ Bassett *The Hentys*, 35, 36.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 486.

⁵² Samuel Clyde McCulloch, 'Gipps, Sir George (1791-1847)', *ADB*, <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/gipps-sir-george-2098/text2645>>, accessed 11 September 2012.

⁵³ K J Cable, 'Broughton, William Grant (1788-1853)', *ADB*, <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/broughton-william-grant-1832/text2107>>, accessed 11 September 2012.

⁵⁴ M E Osborne, 'Thomson, Sir Edward Deas (1800-1879)', *ADB*, <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/thomson-sir-edward-deas-2732/text3855>>, accessed 11 September 2012.

⁵⁵ John Metcalfe, 'Riddell, Campbell Drummond (1796-1858)', *ADB*, <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/riddell-campbell-drummond-2589/text3551>>, accessed 11 September 2012.

younger son of an Irishman who distinguished himself in military service in France, the West Indies and New South Wales. Despite his own merits, O'Connell's promotion through military ranks to major-general appears to have also been aided by his relative General Count Daniel O'Connell. Following a knighthood he was appointed commander of the forces in New South Wales.⁵⁶ In the early decades of the nineteenth century traditional aristocratic patronage appeared less favourable in light of changing aspirations for independence but it is arguable that its replacement, in the form of 'friendship' and 'connections' maintained through overlapping activities of family, business and societies of shared interests, demanded less obligation or reciprocity.

None of the men on the Executive Council were born to privilege. All had attained their various positions through a mixture of the merit of their own efforts and the patronage of more powerful friends and relatives. And this was the same for William Henty. So when the men met in Sydney in 1842 there was no discernible social hierarchy to be observed, no shared understanding of the manners that would be acceptable in the situation. In its detail of their interactions, Henty's journal reveals the anxious self-consciousness of these men adapting the prescriptions of conduct literature to unfamiliar situations.

Henty first met colonial secretary Thomson whom he described as 'kindly and gentlemanly'. In contrast, Gipps was on their first meeting 'very abrupt – though intending I thought to be civil'. Their second meeting was in Parramatta where Henty travelled to see him when the Governor did not appear in Sydney as was usual on a Friday. Gipps was not civil on being visited at home and was not mollified by Henty's apology and explanation. He had not been able, he said, to do anything about Henty's matter because he had not heard from La Trobe (the superintendent of the Port Phillip district) at which Henty objected that Thomson had informed him just that morning that all his documentation was in order. But Gipps 'took no notice,' Henty told his diary, and he soon brought the meeting to a close:

[Gipps] then jumped up – & I walked as hard as I could to the door. He began muttering when he saw me near the door & as I did not pause he wished me a polite Good Morning Mr Henty which I returned by Good Morning Sir & shut the door.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ 'O'Connell, Sir Maurice Charles (1768–1848)', *ADB*, <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/oconnell-sir-maurice-charles-2517/text3405>>, accessed 11 September 2012.

⁵⁷ 17 December 1842, 'Journal on My Visit to Sydney'.

This was not the only time that Henty used underlining in his journal to add emphasis to words or gestures. But what do we make of the two men vying for the door and Henty's underline to 'Sir'? Did Henty feel, as Chesterfield had, that the 'manner of doing things is often more important than the things themselves; and the very same thing may become either pleasing or offensive, by the manner of saying or doing it'?⁵⁸ Was Henty acknowledging the governmental position that Gipps occupied but casting doubt on his gentlemanly status because of his lack of manners?

Unsurprisingly, Henty felt 'much uneasiness' after this meeting which he likely took with him to the Council meeting the following week. Gipps was at the head of the table, the clerk of the Council was at the bottom and between them were Thomson, O'Connell, Riddell and Sir Thomas Mitchell, the surveyor-general. To Henty's disappointment, Broughton was missing: he believed him to be the 'most independent of the Council besides being the more intelligent'. With maps and papers before them, Gipps pestered Henty with questions. 'Sir George,' Henty wrote later, 'kept making his Remarks as we went on & though they were made at me & as if meant for a Reply, there was so much talking going on that I was troubled to get much in'. The particular sticking point in the Henty land claim had always been the letter from Lord Aberdeen to the Earl of Surrey. Gipps asserted that it was a 'clear refusal' and that it was only because Aberdeen was writing to another lord that the refusal was 'softened' by the last paragraph. Henty gave his own explanation when he could get in a word. The letter, he said, was a refusal to grant Thomas Henty land 'unconditionally' but it outlined with 'precision' the conditions under which land could be granted so that 'there should be no doubt or dispute as to the terms on which our pretensions should be favourably considered (should be said Sir George turning around)'. Eventually Gipps 'shut up his Papers' and turned his back on Henty, apparently signalling an end to the meeting, but then 'made up his mind to look half round & say If you have anything Mr Henty to say'. But Henty thought better than 'to weary them by further speechifying'.⁵⁹

According to Henty's journal Gipps continued in this interjectory and confrontational manner during a second Council meeting the following day. Thomson was cordial about Henty's request to make 'a few more observations' to the Council, perhaps finally to deliver the speech he had

⁵⁸ Chesterfield *Letters*, 189.

⁵⁹ 22 December 1842, 'Journal on My Visit to Sydney'.

begun to prepare aboard ship, and when admitted to the meeting room Gipps said that if he had anything to remark upon he might proceed:

I rose but he checked me, thinking I believe that I was about to retire & not dreaming that I was going to speak on my Legs. He again informed me that I was to make such observations as I was desirous of doing. I got up, he looked round at me as if he was utterly astonished. His manner was disconcerting and disturbed me so that I could not get into my subject. He however then looked away & the others did the same.⁶⁰

This determination to speak on his 'Legs' was a statement of Henty's independence before Gipps and the men of the Executive Council. William's move to get to the door before Gipps, his hesitation about speaking at length, his decision to stand on his legs to deliver his prepared speech show his struggle to maintain that independence while creating a good impression on men whose decisions would affect his family's fortunes. His hesitations revealed the difficulties of being civil but never servile in circumstances for which traditional expectations left men ill-equipped, and which newer aspirations did little to clarify.

Conclusion

As interesting as William Henty's journal is, one document does not amount to proof of very much. There is, for example, no evidence that William Henty had read Chesterfield's letters although there are numerous extant copies of various editions in Australian libraries, with publication dates ranging from 1774 to 1973. There is, however, no shortage of accounts of confrontational and uncertain encounters in men's personal papers. Just two examples will suffice. The explorer and settler William Hovell took exception to a naval captain who 'would not condescend' to see him and the resulting exchange of words led to an official complaint to the 'Transport Board' and an appeal to the Under Secretary of State for the Colonies for the captain to substantiate his claims.⁶¹ In the second example, George Harris, the deputy-surveyor, was arrested in Hobart in 1808 after questioning Edward Lord's cruelty to a woman he publicly flogged. Lord – the largest stock owner in the colony, a magistrate, senior officer in Hobart, second only to Lieutenant-Governor David Collins, and distantly related to a baronet – told Harris that he

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ William Hilton Hovell to Henry Goulburn, 1812, 'William Hilton Hovell Papers, 1811–1921', ML, Safe 1/32a-h, CY 1522, 1811–1921.

did not have the authority to question his behaviour. Harris, however, as gentleman and fellow magistrate, believed he did.⁶²

This preoccupation with personal interactions is also seen in the first book of essays published in Australia. Every essay in Henry Savery's *The Hermit in Van Diemen's Land* appraised the look, manners and relations of men. Though clearly intended to be satirical, the descriptions do reveal the pretence, effort and suspicion that these social encounters entailed.⁶³ The book's publisher was subject to a libel suit within months of its publication.⁶⁴ The same concern with the rules of social intercourse can also be found in the Bigge reports. In 1971, when John Ritchie published selections from the written evidence appended to Bigge's report, he noted the 'peripheral but fascinating minutiae' of correspondence with which the commissioner was forced to deal, but chose to omit most of what he described as 'petty complaints based on personal animosities'. It is possible that Ritchie rejected much of what was significant to the men of the time.⁶⁵

Contemporary commentators thought it 'curious' to find in the colonies 'men differing so entirely in birth, education, and habits, and in their whole moral and intellectual nature, thrown into such close contact, united by common interests, engaged under circumstances of perfect equality in the same pursuits, and mutually dependent on each other'.⁶⁶ Historians have subsequently perpetuated the idea of a nascent egalitarianism in this circumstance of men's reliance on each other, of a solidarity among convicts, 'manly' cooperation in the establishment of settlements and camaraderie among the civil servants of a colonial

⁶² George Prideaux Harris, 'Miscellaneous letters and papers', *Letters and Papers of GP Harris Vol II*, British Library (BL) ADD MS 45157, 1808–1809; E R Pretzman, 'Harris, George Prideaux Robert (1775–1810)', *ADB*, <<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A010475b.htm>>; Thea Rienits, 'Lord, Edward (1781–1859)', *ADB*, <http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A020113b.htm>; David Macmillan, 'Paterson, William (1755–1810)', *ADB* <<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A020284b.htm>>; Linda Monks, 'Knopwood, Robert (1763–1838)', *ADB*, <http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A020057b.htm>, accessed 1/7/2009.

⁶³ Henry Savery *The Hermit in Van Diemen's Land*, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press 1964 (1829).

⁶⁴ Cecil Hadgraft, 'Savery, Henry (1791–1842)', *ADB*, <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/savery-henry-2632/text3649>>, accessed 2 July 2012.

⁶⁵ Report of the commissioner of inquiry into the state of the colony of New South Wales, *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 1822 (448), 88–90; John Ritchie (ed) *The Evidence to the Bigge Reports: New South Wales under Governor Macquarie. Volume 2, the Written Evidence*, Melbourne: Heinemann 1971, viii–xi; JM Bennett, 'Bigge, John Thomas (1780–1843)', *ADB*, <<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A010093b.htm>>, accessed 21/8/2009.

⁶⁶ Haygarth *Recollections*, 22; JJ Macintyre 'Papers Vol I', BL, MS ADD 41742, 1794–1868, L199–200.

outpost.⁶⁷ At the time, however, men saw society as highly differentiated. The prominence of ex-convicts in the commercial life of the colonies led to a social division between ‘emigrants’, who had arrived free, and ‘emancipists’, who had come as convicts. But as ship surgeon Peter Cunningham described, this was not the only distinction. ‘Our society is divided into circles as in England’, he wrote, ‘but, from the peculiarity of its constitution, still further differences naturally exist’. Cunningham’s etiology of colonial society included ‘Sterling’ and ‘Currency’ (those born in Britain and those in Australia), ‘Pure Merinos’ (those free from convict ancestry) and ‘Canaries’ (recently arrived convicts dressed in yellow). In this confusion, ‘Pure Merinos’ might boycott balls if even the children of convicts were among the guests, while some governors, like Macquarie, were prepared to receive emancipists at Government House. And in the words of grazier Patrick Leslie in 1835, ‘first rate conduct’ was needed in this social uncertainty and ‘the smallest error in a man’s conduct here, (which would be scarcely noticed at home)’ would lose a man his social status.⁶⁸

This was not the case for William Henty who became colonial secretary in Tasmania in 1857. He returned to England in 1862 where he died in 1881. All of his brothers died in Australia and all but one have been recorded as contributing to colonial society and public life. The family were part of many celebratory pioneer histories including a semi-fictionalised children’s book in 1952. The most authoritative account of the family, Marnie Bassett’s 1954 *The Hentys: An Australian Colonial Tapestry*, devoted a whole chapter to William’s visit to Sydney quoting verbatim – but without comment – the journal passages that have been interrogated in this article. Bassett and other recorders of the Henty family do not mention a stock exchange defaulting relative or the anxieties that the Henty men had about their social status. All of them take for granted the Henty family’s pursuit of independence as an unexceptional expression of the Australian pioneering spirit of which the Henty men were a prime example. Yet William Henty’s journal illuminates the way in which the nineteenth century’s ‘growing length of chains of interdependence’ was uneasily at odds with men’s pursuit of this independence. And that uneasiness was particularly acute in the

⁶⁷ Alan Atkinson *The Europeans in Australia: A History. Volume 1 – the Beginning*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1997, 238; Alan Atkinson *The Europeans in Australia: A History. Volume 2 – Democracy*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press 2004, 138, 45–47.

⁶⁸ Hirst *Convict Society*, 81, 153–57; Cunningham *Two Years in New South Wales*, 118; Young *Middle-Class Culture*, 149–50; Patrick Leslie 1835, quoted in Joanna Gordan (ed) *Advice to a Young Lady in the Colonies*, Melbourne: Greenhouse 1979, 3.

Australian colonies, where the promise of independence was so pervasive while the chains of interdependence continued to bind men wherever they roamed and settled.

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