

Postcolonial Missionary Discourse: History of Drysdale River Mission
(Western Australia 1908-11)

From the times of “discovery” and subsequent colonization and settlement, Australia (del Espíritu Santo) has turned into a multicultural and multiracial society before its peoples became fully aware of that. The foundation of a Benedictine Mission by two Spanish monks, later Bishops Rosendo Salvado and José Serra in 1846, was an outstanding event in a British settler colony. The New Norcia Mission, situated in the Victoria Plains region of Western Australia, was established with the aspiration to provide educational and spiritual support to the indigenous population, in keeping with the long missionary tradition of former Spanish Empire.

The Archives of New Norcia, as originally desired by the Mission’s founder Bishop Salvado, was created in addition to the existing Library with the view to be open to scholars and researchers (Russo 231-32). It offers invaluable materials for the research in Australian history, society, culture, and its unexpected Spanish heritage which is still insufficiently explored and acknowledged.

The account of the second exploratory trip of the New Norcia Benedictines to the North of Western Australia is divided in two parts: “The Antecedents” and “The Foundation.” It exists in two forms. One is the manuscript housed at the New Norcia Archives, whose cover reads *Historia del Drysdale River*. Its title page is dated 1910 and reads *La Nueva Misión Benedictina del Drysdale River. Apuntes Históricos Sobre Origen de la Misma*. (The closing *anotación* of the manuscript gives a different date, 1911.) The other version was published in the Benedictine periodical *Revista Montserratina* in installments, starting in May 1908 and finishing in October 1911. The same but incomplete version was clipped and placed in one file marked as: *Colección de Correspondencias de Nueva Nursia publicadas en la Revista Montserratina por el Rev. P. D. Roberto Bas O.S.B.* Both versions were authored by the same author/compiler, Father Roberto Bas of New Norcia. The actual exploratory trip took place from June through September 1908, culminating in the foundation of the Drysdale River Mission.

The text deals with the events around the foundation of a new mission in the West Australian North, persons involved in the enterprise and the exploratory voyage undertaken by a handful of New Norcia monks determined to execute the plan intended first by Bishop Salvado (who died in 1900). This plan finally materialized in 1905 at the Third Plenary Council of the Catholic Church of Australia, when it was approved that the new mission should be established in the district of the Vicariate Apostolic of Kimberley, a region largely unknown and unexplored. The purpose of the new foundation was the conversion to Christianity and the salvation of the native race of Australia, even before any permanent white settlement has been established there (Catalan 5). The event marks the second stage of Spanish missionary activities in Western Australia, and the text largely follows the paradigm of Spanish colonial writing practices.

For the approach to this type of writing, models could be sought in the texts of Latin American literature of the period of discovery and colonization where the majority of them cannot be classified as “literary” simply because many of them were not considered as such at the time they were written. They belonged to other genres of writing with historical and often missionary or religious intent, but later became “literary” primarily by convention. Literariness is not an inherent feature of the text but is determined by the text’s cultural role within specific society and the reader’s perception of it. In Terry Eagleton’s view, “some texts are born literary, some achieve literariness, and some have literariness thrust upon them” (8). Its cultural classification is in the end determined by the reader, as well as its social function (Lotman 119-24). In Latin America, those texts written by foreign invaders became part of the “new” society and culture through the adopted language of the colonizer, subsequently shared by the center and the colonies.

In the analysis of this text as a verbal act, our approach is based on Bakhtin’s notions of speech, utterance and author, and his notions of the dialogic nature of text. The dialogic relations in a given text are multifold, and understanding text too is dialogic in nature (*Speech Genres* 122-27). Text, pragmatic

nature according to Bakhtin, is defined by its plan or intention and the realization of that plan by the author, who anticipates a responsive understanding of contextual meaning of utterance (*Dialogic Imaginations* 276-300). This approach enables us to position the text into its literary, historical, social and cultural context. It also equally addresses the form of the text and its content, and its function.

The *relación* as a form of writing in Latin American literature is one of the discursive types characteristic of the early period of discovery, conquest, colonization and settlement. While the entry in the seventeenth century Covarrubias's *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española* offers only a Latin definition, the first meaning for the entry *relación* in the sixteenth century *Diccionario de Autoridades* is "narración o informe que se hace de alguna cosa que sucedió," corresponding in meaning to Latin "*Relatio. Narratio.*" One of its contemporary meanings in Spanish is *relato*, whereas English equivalents are: an account, report, narration, story. More specifically, *relación* is *relato/informe* or story/report, originally obligatory and expected by the Spanish Crown, even though not officially requested. Although not homogeneous, all *relaciones* generally followed certain pattern in providing detailed information on geographic situation, climatic conditions, natural resources, also including ethnographic, religious, historic, and cultural information. The same form also accommodated accounts of personal participation in any important event, adjustable to the needs of the state and society. Many of the texts have been modeled on the same organizational principle and with the same pragmatic features as the *relación* even when bearing different titles, such as *historia*, or *apuntes*, as is in this case. Another distinctive feature is that those texts were written by educated men. By their very nature of being virtually assigned, they are dialogic, responsive to a certain series of questions, pragmatic in the need to gather and set in order information on the newly discovered and conquered territories. Other examples of the same discursive type resurfaced later in the mid nineteenth-century Spain with different regions of the Iberian Peninsula as their topic (Mignolo 57-59, 70-75).

Having this distant and not so distant association, it is not surprising then that this particular form, as opposed to those of purely religious purpose, was chosen for the account of the foundation of the new mission, indiscriminately called *historia/relación/apuntes*. It belongs to this discursive type for all of its features as a unique twentieth-century description of a dangerous voyage to new and hostile areas, people involved, detailed descriptions of those virgin lands, including the climate and nature's riches. The addressee, however, in the twentieth century is neither the Crown nor any superior in rank. The author elevates to this stand the reader to whom and for whom the text and by the same token the whole enterprise are being executed. By repetitive use of the phrases *lector benévolo*, *lector carísimo*, *lector amable*, *nuestros lectores*, *mis amables lectores*, or simply *lector/lectores* throughout the text, the author is offering this narration to the reader, inviting him to read it, pass the judgment, to act upon it.

With the view to the fact that the text is basically unknown today outside the Benedictine Community, it is appropriate to explain how it was established. The starting point was the manuscript version, which I came to know first. The other version was found later, but the manuscript was instrumental in establishing the other text which was part of Bas's regular correspondence published in the *Revista Montserratina*, a monthly periodical newly founded by the Catholic Press and the Montserrat Benedictine Community. Whereas the manuscript is a closed unit, the *Revista's* serialized version is almost an open ended text. For the very nature of a serialized text which appears in installments over a period of time, the spacing opens it up for a different reception. In this case it was published over two and a half years in different intervals and under different titles. Often, one unit of Bas's writing would be broken up and published in several installments. Closer to the end clippings appear slightly edited, a different wording suggested, with marginal comments such as "no es de autor," who obviously attached great importance to his work, whether it is to be considered literature or not. They were repaginated by the same hand to include all of Bas's contributions published in the *Revista* since its foundation in 1907. The serialized text is therefore older, and instead of the Prologue it has an introductory correspondence

which sets the tone and tunes in the reader for the forthcoming events. The manuscript was produced later, apparently with the view of bringing all the installments into one unit and under one title. Included in our established text is the aforementioned correspondence written in March and published in May of 1908, in which Bas announces the launch of the expedition and summarizes the history predating that moment. While the missionary explorers are traveling, New Norcia (namely Bas as its Prior) is receiving scarce news from them. By the time the leader of the expedition, Bishop Fulgencio Torres has returned (the other founding members remained at the new Mission), Bas is still at his *Antecedents* and engaged in a heavily moralistic and didactic, almost medieval discourse. He does not even start writing about what happened during the trip until the following year, 1909, with the exception of a brief notice which appeared in another section of the *Revista*.

Most of the abundant footnote comments were part of Bas's original writing, though some were provided by the editors when deemed useful, or were often added in an attempt to restore or simulate the continuity of the text, or to revive the readers' interest as the following editorial suggests: "Ya poseemos , por tanto, desde hace algun tiempo, noticias directas de la fundación recientemente realizada por nuestros hermanos de Nueva Nursia, y de ellas vamos a hacer participantes a los lectores de la Revista." There were various attempts to engage readers into a more active participation during the undertaking by inviting them to write to the missionaries and in that way show their support. It is not clear, though, whether the call came from the editorial staff or from Bas himself, whose exhortative and exalted discourse in places resembles TV reporting and the movement of the camera. We could even speculate that if he were our contemporary, he would opt to use television as a medium, a live broadcast of an event with several crews on the spot and with viewers calling into the studio. That studio being New Norcia with Bas sitting and directing the show. Although he is not a direct participant, a protagonist, as the narrator and the director of the show he creates his own personal involvement, seeking approval by his reading audience.

Throughout his writing, Father Bas was practically involved in two foundations, different but closely related. He begins to emerge not simply as a missionary in some faraway antipodean lands, but as a missionary on a two-fold mission. One, outside his own country, reaching out for “innumerables tribus de infelices salvajes que pueblan las ignoradas y vastas regiones del Norte de esta grandiosa isla de Australia,” and the other in Spain herself, reaching out for his countrymen to boost their national feelings and heighten their awareness of belonging to one nation by assisting them find sense and direction in life within that very nation through this kind of involvement. In continuation of the nineteenth-century era of national soul-searching, the Spaniards are through this discourse offered to join the missionaries engaged in the “saving” of pagan indigenous peoples. Evangelizing and civilizing them is an *exemplum* for the Spaniards at home whose souls are seen as lost in modern world. Likewise the missionary work is to bring honor to Spain “para que el recuerdo del hecho tan notable y glorioso viva siempre en la memoria de los presentes y llegue a conocimiento de los venideros . . .” (Bas ms. 4). For instance, another example refers to the “uncivilized” aborigines of the North who cannot but learn from the obvious (for Bas, of course), and “cuando aquellos negros salvajes vean a nuestros Padres rodeados de otros negros hermanos suyos, y que los cuidan y tratan bien y no como ellos han oído decir que los tratan *otros blancos*” (emphasis added).

If texts of this kind of testimonial writing are not inherently literary, they are inherently polyphonous. Everything written has its intended purpose and its function should be understood as an ongoing dialogue with the present, with the past and with the future. Therefrom, the reading is the same process of re-writing it or re-constructing it but from an historical perspective. In this three-way dialogue, the invocation of the present deeds is expected to serve in the future the same purpose the invocation of the past deeds serves today. It is implicit then that the present endeavor will be regarded as a great deed. The author’s intention is in service of the same ideology of fortifying national pride and spirit based on the dual role of the Spanish nation as State and Church, when the Christian religion

became the official ideology for imperial expansion. Now, there is a direct correlation: by expressing himself in favor of the political unity of the nation, Bas is engaged in the struggle for improving the status of the Church. Coming the full circle, it is now the christianization taking place out there in foreign lands which arguably did or did not belong to Spain that is expected to act as an active force in preserving the unity and identity of the same nation. In the manuscript version this is seen not only in the prologue, but also in the hymn written in Catalanian. Even though Bas uses the language of vigorously re-discovered regional nationalism, he brings it under a broader and unifying concept of Iberia. For him, it is *la pía Iberia* as the land - equals one nation united under one religion chosen by Jesus the Redeemer. And while Spain is about to launch her latest, and certainly her last religious campaign in Australia to conquer lands, the world is on the verge of its first global war fought for a new order. In Spain, Catalonia witnesses a rebirth of her national language and vernacular culture leading to regionalism which in the first couple of decades of the twentieth century resulted in political nationalism and acted as a driving force further leading to separatism. With that in mind, early in his text Bas emphasizes that in this arduous work “están representadas las principales regiones de España; como son las Baleares, Cataluña, Castilla, Galicia y Valencia.” He refers to the missionaries as *religiosos españoles* who are unreservedly committed to “diseminar la gloria de España y los españoles.” The new mission is in like manner “una fundación que puede llamarse verdaderamente Montserratina y eminentemente española.”

It would be appropriate here to examine the foundation of the *Revista Montserratina* in the historical context of Europe in general and Spain in particular. The new century started with the disillusion and disenchantment that dominated the intellectual milieus. The nineteenth century Spain badly needed administrative, social and economic changes while torn by social unrest, political turmoil and civil wars. The governing class, the liberal revolutionaries, were violently anti-clerical and decidedly taking measures against the Church and religious orders through the confiscation of large and rich monastery estates (Comellas 82-108). Bas does not hesitate to launch a diatribe against the liberals and

the political situation mainly in Spain but in Europe too, closing one of many similar comments with the following: “¡Afortunadamente no nos encontramos en alguno de los países católicos de la *culta* Europa, sino a muchas leguas de distancia y en tierra de *salvajes* y de *protestantes!*” The Church which for many centuries had been enormously strong, influential and actively involved in the affairs of the State, could no longer base its strength on the support from the government. The project was politically motivated, since the Church, in order to make one more attempt to improve its position, needed another forum to launch a severe criticism of the overall conditions in the society, including the trends motivated and dominated by what was perceived as an extreme egoism and utilitarianism (Ubieto 772-77). In the *Revista's* criticism of the contemporary society lost in corruption and moral decadence, with no sense of direction, the moment is compared with the downfall of the Roman Empire. In the opening text of the first issue the following paragraph best depicts the role the new periodical was to carry out:

¡Una nueva Revista! Sí: contra la inmensa avalancha de libros perniciosos que hoy pululan por todas partes, contra ese gran número de revistas y periódicos impios que pretenden monopolizar la opinión pública, no reparando en medios, venimos también nosotros a levantar nuestra voz, a luchar denodadamente por la Fe y por la Iglesia, a sumir nuestras débiles fuerzas con las de aquellos celesos apóstoles que, de palabra y por escrito, se esfuerzan en defender la verdadera doctrina sin otro fin, sin otro móvil que ganar almas para Cristo, redimirla de la esclavitud de las pasiones, prenda de la felicidad verdadera del Cielo. (*Revista* I, Jan. 1907: 2)

The time in which Father Bas writes his *relación* is very complex for Spain as a former colonial empire. The turn of the twentieth century meant for Spain the final loss of all the colonies of what was perceived the greatest empire of all times. Following the loss of all of her American colonies Spain was no longer in a position to maintain its domain neither in Cuba and Puerto Rico, nor in the Philippines. They were lost in the last war she fought in 1898, whereas the Pacific Caroline, Mariana and Palau islands

were actually sold later to Germany (Ubieto 775). At the beginning of the twentieth century Spain is almost within the same borders as today. However, the same period for certain European countries, including Great Britain, is marked by their expansionist tendencies motivated by economic needs to both find new markets for their products and to secure raw materials for their growing industries. As Spain unequivocally ceases to be a colonial power, on the other side of the globe, Australia, with the birth of its own Commonwealth embarks upon a long road of evolving into a post-colonial society.

Arguably, the discovery of Australia was seen by the Spaniards as their own deed, as they claimed the whole Pacific Ocean, took possession of all lands to the South Pole as the result of various maritime exploratory expeditions launched from Callao, Peru, naming the Southern Continent *Australia del Espíritu Santo* (Grasby 23). From the bulls of Pope Alexander VI (1493) all expeditions were accompanied by the missionaries and for the Spanish government evangelization appeared as justifying principle objective. “The papal decrees “donate”, “grant”, and “assign” for life to the Catholic Monarchs and their royal descendants, the newly discovered and yet to be discovered lands, and grant them the exclusive responsibility for converting their native inhabitants to the Christian faith” (Rivera 25). The Prefecture Apostolic of Terra Australis was established in the seventeenth century and it was decided in Rome that newly discovered lands should officially become a mission of the Roman Catholic Church. Spain never revoked its territorial claims although the effective occupation of its domains in the South Seas was limited to the Philippines, and some of the Pacific islands since Spanish monarchs never saw the colonization of the Southern Continent as a viable enterprise (Grasby 25). Now, this particular instance was the last moment for Australia to finally become Spanish, as a purely nationalist agenda is sought through colonial discourse and imagery and through a utopian aspiration.

Just as the papal decrees assigned geographic discoveries to the Spanish Crown, the territory of the future Benedictine Mission in the Kimberleys was assigned by the West Australian government and reserved for the New Norcia Community for the foundation of their new mission. The 50,000 acres of

land were leased to the missionaries for 49 years who would in return school the natives. An additional 2,000 acres were “granted” in property. The area was also recommended to be “reserved for experimental purposes” (Brockman 10). One of the features of the *relación* is that its writing is expected to bring gains, either tangible or intangible. However, tangible gains could easily transform into intangible ones, and vice versa. Addressing this point in length, Bas denies any material interest in this enterprise reiterating that they were guided only “por el amor puro de Dios.” If the author too is not seeking personal wealth or fame, he is then seeking collective fame and recognition for the Benedictine missionaries. It is not completely clear though how big were his literary ambitions which he undoubtedly had. In the prologue he claims to be a chronicler who simply records events for others to give them “artistic” life.

Who is Father Bas the author? The information on him is scarce and limited. Monastery Records show that Bas, educated in Barcelona and with many talents including singing and literary aspirations, shortly after his arrival to New Norcia was appointed by Abbot Torres Prior of the Community and Vicar General of the Abbey Nullius. He also discharged the duties of Novice master, Prefect of Clerics, Professor of Dogma, Moral Theology and Literature. His first contribution was published in the *Revista's* October, November and December 1907 issues, when he was already on his way to Australia. He will remain loyal and prolific correspondent until his death in 1919 on the way back to Europe. His brief reports on New Norcia were regularly published in the *Noticias de la Orden*, but his major contribution was in the section *Correspondencia de la Revista Montserratina*, a space dedicated to lengthy reports from Benedictine missions all over the world. Father Bas's literary ambitions were not limited to prose only. He wrote poetry as well, both in Spanish and Catalanian. His writing debut from Australia is the already discussed correspondence dated March 21, 1908, in which he announces the heroic deeds asking readers for support through their prayers. Bas also reveals himself as self conscious of his role. His addressee is the group targeted by the *Revista*, the group in need of moral and spiritual support and encouragement.

The discourse is being directed at them and the expected response is their action, as the immediate function of the discourse is to modify their situation. In a given historical moment, the discourse is determined by socio-ideological consciousness and becomes an active participant in social dialogue (Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 276). Bas seizes the opportunity his own situation provides, and in his account laden with ideological intentions he uses persuasion to involve the reader in the proposed dialogue and to elicit an active response. Pleading for the readers' support for the foundation of the new mission, he calls upon all of the Europeans in the name of all the Christian heroes and European apostles, he calls upon all of the Catholics to "conquer" the new lands for the Catholic religion, he calls upon all of the Spaniards whose glory will be crowned with the success of the expedition, since they are her sons. And finally he calls on all of the Catalonians, whose Patron Saint is the Black Virgin of Montserrat, la Morenita. (She is also the very leader of the expedition and her picture will be taken along during the trip.)

Again, two closely related questions arise. Why do we have Spanish missionaries in Australia, having literally emerged out of another time and another space? And, how are these new lands and its peoples seen by the Spaniards who were ready to risk their lives by coming out here in the "driest of all deserts" and the "harshest of all the bushland". For finding appropriate answers, there is another important aspect to consider.

The discourse is in Bakhtin's view oriented towards the "already uttered" and "already known" (*Dialogic Imagination* 279) and shared within the common culture. Bas counts on an understanding and his orientation towards the reader is an orientation towards a specific conceptual horizon (282). The key words are "conquest", "possession", "foundation", associated with the expedition and exploration, along with "glory", all evoking splendid past, active participation of the missionaries and the role they played in the discovery, conquest and evangelization of Spanish America. These words gathered from the past are to serve Bas's own new intentions. And Bas had the best of models in the writing of

his predecessors who had ventured into the unknown lands of the vast territories of another “New World” once “discovered” by great Admiral Christopher Columbus. That also includes the discourse established with his first trip. Bas embraces the tradition of Latin American colonial and missionary writing of the initial stage, known as literature of discovery and conquest. There is no explicit mention of that, but he must have been familiar with the work and writing of Spanish missionaries. The works of the early stages of the colonial period were written by the pioneers of this new enterprise, *conquistadores* and missionaries intended to describe the new territories in order to facilitate the settlement and conversion of the indigenous population to Christianity. They may be part of Bas’s invocation of “el glorioso nombre de sus antepasados” for an immediate political aim to invigorate the national spirit, through a new religious conquest of the aboriginal population of these other new territories in predominantly Protestant Australia. Moreover, the new lands were not just any lands, but those of particular importance: the lands bound to be “lost” as a colony of the maritime and colonial rival over the centuries, however still possessed by the Imperial Great Britain.

Hopefully, it is easier now to position the text and the nature of its discourse. To certain extent, missionary discourse at this stage of colonialism, can also be aligned with similar travel and exploration writing by Europeans about non-European parts of the world which attempts to engage metropolitan readers with the events in contact zones (Pratt 4). With the expansionist enterprise of the Spanish missionaries in Australia, this contact zone becomes more complex, increasing the multiplicity of colonial relations and cross-cultural contacts. The author exploits the older Spanish rhetoric of conquest associated with the medieval and absolutist eras. But it can also be read as a counterdiscourse to the one prevailing on the imperial roads following the eighteenth century in which “Northern Europe asserted itself as the center of civilization, claiming the legacy of the Mediterranean as its own” (Pratt 10). The task the missionaries are to perform is difficult, brave, and above all courageous. In the past it was done for the King, Spain and the Holy Church. Presently, it is carried out for the Church and above all for

Spain for ideological reasons, but it unfailingly remains an act of taking “possession” of somebody’s land in the name of Christ.

The Foundation, second part of Bas’s *relación*, is based on the accounts of direct participants in the expedition. The author heavily relies on the notes written by Father Planas, Father Alcalde’s memoirs, and possibly on some letters he received from them. All official correspondence was carried out in Spanish. Private letters, even though on the same subject as well, were written in Catalan since it was the mother tongue for a large number of New Norcia monks at the time. Bas also uses Bishop Torres’s diary kept during this trip and the one kept during the previous expedition to the same area in 1906. The use of quotation marks is inconsistent, and in places it is difficult to tell which text is which, particularly since he manipulates the sources according to his needs, “copiando del Diario siempre que convenga.” The narration is centered on the undergoing enterprise taking place “en las apartadas regiones de la Australia,” along the coast of Western Australia, and the narrator is ready to possess through the eyes of the protagonists and real eyewitnesses. Right from the opening installment, Bas’s narrative is constructed in terms of a new campaign, conquest and expansion creating a discourse of a crusade based imagery. This legacy was absorbed by the Europeans through the continuous conquest of space, initiated much earlier with the Crusades, when the Eastern Mediterranean with its riches was revealed to the West European world. Even though Spain, busy with her own eight century long Reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula from the Moors did not even take part in the European Crusades, the same imagery was perpetuated. Once again the “noble propósito” translates into “tomar posesión en nombre de Cristo.” For missionaries “una vez echado el pie en esta tierra, será después de tomar posesión de ella en nombre del misericordioso Dios que allí los envía.” Before setting his extended foot in, his eyes are set on the North of Western Australia, trying to make readers understand how great the distances are from New Norcia, which for him/them is not only a spiritual and educational but a geographic center symbolizing Spain. And the distance is like from the South of Spain to Norway. Europe and all Europeans are his

frame of reference, and within Europe Spain occupies central place. The Australian North is, looking from New Norcia, stereotypically unknown and hostile, barbaric, remote and isolated. To support this, incorporated in the text is an official map commissioned by the Government of Western Australia from the chief surveyor, Fred S. Brockman. In a footnote Bas even writes “our government”, indicating that upon arriving and settling in at New Norcia the monks followed the established tradition of becoming citizens of Australia, and therefore British subjects. Once in the North, the missionaries are stunned before the breathtaking landscape which is for them the proof of the very majestic nature of the Creator. They are profoundly absorbed in what lays within the reach of their eyes and are genuinely enchanted with the new land they are about to conquer and possess. Their rejoicing becomes the readers’, like in witnessing a spectacular scene when hundreds of ducks and different aquatic birds, among which pelicans of exceptional size, take off instantly and soar in the air. When discovered a natural granite amphitheater with a splendid cascade, it is compared with Rome’s Fontana di Trevi.

Imprecision in Brockman’s map and the nature of the terrain leads the missionaries to become completely convinced that no white soul had ever trodden the area. A highlight in their trip was when they found a suitable location not on the official map and proudly “[u]sando . . . del derecho que les concede la ley como descubridores, pusieronle el nombre de Mission Bay, Bahía de la Misión.” A real pearl of a territorial “discovery” in the twentieth century while at the same time in Europe a Great War and a Great Revolution are about to explode. The missionaries are anew first explorers and conquerors for whom the ideological interest is a kind of rehabilitation of the old and crumbled Spanish Empire. Through them Bas is recreating Spain’s past, and the reader cannot help but relive it.

In this Hispano-centered discourse all non-Spaniards are bound to be the Other to indiscriminately include all other Europeans and aborigines. The quality of being a Catholic is not sufficient and can bring the Other only closer to them; its absence can be rectified by conversion as in the case of aborigines. There is no achievable way of becoming Spanish, particularly not in Australia,

since one is only born as a Spaniard and monks do not produce legitimate descendants. Around New Norcia both Catholics and Protestants compete who would pay better tribute to the memory of late Bishop Salvado and to new Bishop Torres. In this picturesque Australian crowd of Blacks and Whites, of Catholics and “dissidents”, the Anglicans are the most enthusiastic ones, the reader is informed. By way of another example, second installment begins with a long footnote comment in which Bas explains that “[l]os protestantes admiran y alaban y festejan al Misionero católico,” of course to be read *español* (*Revista*, September 1908, 32). Furthermore, not all the Whites and Europeans are good: there are the good ones and the bad ones. The meaning of good is determined exclusively in relation to their attitude to aborigines. In this context, the Spanish missionaries see themselves in a special role of protectors of the aboriginal Other from the European Other. General attitude of the non-Spanish Whites is not only an observation: Spaniards are told by aborigines about the hostility of the White race. At this point, like Las Casas in the past, Bas does not hesitate to directly accuse Church authorities for hypocrisy and for failing to single out the bad guys, since the remark does not refer to all White Europeans. British settlers, including the missionaries, were committing many atrocities failing to give aborigines credit for possessing a remarkable culture and social structure. For Spanish missionaries there is no alignment with them. Not even with the Catholics who are not treating aborigines correctly. The New Norcia Benedictines carried on Bishop Salvado’s attitude towards the indigenous population, absolutely unique in Australia at the time. They introduced elements of liberal education, as well as liberal principles in politics and business in order to further the cause of aborigines, adapting Christian Gospel to the needs of aborigines, and not hesitating to oppose the establishment when acted against aboriginal interests (Russo XVIII). In a lengthy footnote comment referring to Bishop Kelly’s letter to the *Propaganda Fide* regarding the attitude and actions by the Europeans towards the indigenous population, Bas adds that “aquí podía haber concretado algo más el Sr. Arzobispo diciendo *de donde* eran esos europeos; pero no lo hace, porque sin duda teme irritar a *los ingleses*.”

The second Other and the very reason for the Spanish missionaries' presence in Australia and for this discourse, are aborigines. In spite of that, the author is, just like the expeditionists and Australian society, puzzled by the existence of native peoples. Although they are the reason and the end of the Spanish Benedictine missionary activity in Western Australia, the relationship in this narrative is ambiguous right from the introductory installment through the end. The aborigines are referred to as *negros, negritos, indígenas, nativos, naturales, salvajes, australianos*. These terms are often interchangeable and only the context or a possessive *nuestro/nuestros* would indicate how close they are to the writing subject. The ethnonym *australiano* would mainly refer to the natives like in the following statement: "Esta mala cualidad de los australianos no era ningún secreto para los misioneros." Linguistically, the aboriginal Other is determined in three levels of distance from the writing subject and the group he belongs to. The closest are the ones with the possessive attached and they are positioned as already appropriated by the missionaries. (The distance is reduced to the minimum, but they invariably remain the Other.) "Our" does not make them part of "Us", since they are neither Spaniards nor they come from the New Norcia Mission anyway, but appear as "our possession" of them through our "civilizing" them. On one occasion "our poor blacks" is used when talking about the New Norcia aborigines at the farewell for the expedition. The omniscient author knew they were crying because some of those fathers leaving were the ones who "saved them from barbarity and from slavery," indicating their new social and religious situation. When the expedition is later joined by four aborigines brought by a non-Benedictine monk who also took part in the operation, they are referred to as "four relatively civilized aborigines, although one still not baptized," and placed at the second level of distance. Both of those aboriginal groups are fully praised for their subordination: they are useful helpers and indispensable sharp-eyed trackers who not for a second stop being vigilant.

Being the *relación* a multipurpose form with different types of discourse interwoven in its texture, the episode of how to catch a *dugong*, a sea cow, can be read as an interesting anthropological discourse

involving a detailed description of indigenous practices, immediately followed by a comment that the natives were lead to their natural instincts to overcome the “poor animal.” (Likewise, the most distant aborigines, the natives of the area explored, are referred to as “[a]quellas bestias feroces, que de hombre sólo tienen la figura.”) The same narration can be read as a funny description of the same hunting party of aborigines trying to bring the important and sizable catch (later shared both by missionaries and aborigines), for which they had to work very, very hard. Using the language quite spontaneously and oblivious of any possible racial connotation, Bas writes about “seis nativos remando como negros.” And, on the same lines, Father Bas should probably claim the fame of the first twentieth-century politically correct author for he quite early in his *relación* uses the now popular term “people of color.”

And lastly, the most troubled level of closeness of the aboriginal Other is the designation of the most distant one. They are all savages, barbarous savages, wolves, animals, beasts, and the list of such terms is rather long. When the forthcoming expedition is announced, the reader is already given the important parameters for looking at the Australian race of the North, although the blame is clearly put on the attitudes and actions of the Europeans as well:

Si; allí se ha refugiado gran número de tribus salvajes empujadas u acorraladas de casi todo lo restante de la Isla por los europeos; allí viven totalmente separados del resto del mundo miles y millares de hombres, embrutecidos, abyectos y degradados hasta el último extremo; allí siguen entregados a la idolatria, a las prácticas mas execrables y a toda suerte de abominaciones . . . allí están como encerrados toda una serie de monstruos más bien que de seres humanos Allí van a encontrarselos pobres misioneros con aquellos naturales armados de toda su ferocidad y brutales instintos, que reciben a cuantos van a visitarles tendido el arco y armado de penetrante saeta que con rara habilidad dejan clavado en el corazón de la víctima, para dividirla después entre sí y comerle las entrañas.
(*Revista* May 1908: 178)

In this passage written while the missionaries were still finalizing their preparations for the trip, Bas foreshadows what will come out of the actual field reports. If his knowledge is based on real experience, the sources are never revealed and the reader is left only with the hint that about those aborigines “pregona la fama y anda en boca de todos.” It is then just a hear-say sounding like an echo of some distant passages from the writings of Spanish missionaries in Latin America. The claim that the information comes “por las noticias de algunos exploradores” is contradictory, to say the least, if the area was completely unexplored, as stressed by the expeditionists. The only known report was Brockman’s, according to which the rarely sighted aborigines were in no way aggressive (4). Always traveling in small parties, they were all “terrified at our approach [and] immediately ran for cover,” the surveyor wrote (11).

However, everything that follows in *The Foundation* is in support of what was already said. It is a challenge to travel from New Norcia to the land of savages, set up a “colony” for those “degraded beings” and through a strategic planning establish a “centro de futuras operaciones.” Even though it was clearly stated that the new expedition was exclusively aimed at helping their fellow men, human beings, referring to those same savages, this somehow becomes lost on the way, since “[l]os indígenas en medio de los cuales iban a establecerse tienen fama de ser de la peor raza: crueles, sanguinarios, antropófagos y sobre todo traidores.” They are worse than the Zulus of Africa, who among the contemporaries obviously enjoyed the reputation of being the most savage among the savages. Bas is undecided which position to take towards aborigines. He speaks of “aquel odio con que miran siempre a los hombres de la raza blanca.” When he talks about the Kimberley region in the context of the new mission, he also speaks of them as the “tribes of good intelligence and quite promising,” from the missionary point of view, of course, to later refer to them as “unos hombres antropófagos y fieres que están en el último grado de la barbarie,” of which the reader is repeatedly reminded. By way of repetition Bas employs the strategy of fictionalization and constructs the aboriginal Other to suit the image he creates right from the

beginning of his writing. In his diary, Torres, for instance, does not make such digressions and puts more emphasis on the religious side of the enterprise (25-42). Bas's own comments fill in the space between the quotes from the original sources. He places the missionaries' actions in the best possible light in support of his self-serving purpose. If no reliable source is available, the prefiguration serves the purpose of self-aggrandizement. It also underscores the European superiority embodied in the Spaniards. To elevate themselves, the inferiority of the indigenous culture is necessary despite their own Christian belief that the aborigines were first of all human. Their own achievements are much greater the lower the Other is, and even greater if there are two inferior Others, for the Spaniards are superior to the British Other for their magnanimity. They are also superior for their ability to "tame" the Blacks who "a su vez miran bien a los Padres y cuidan de ellos y los aman y defienden."

Having foreshadowed the encounter with the native tribes, it is almost needless to say that it was far from pleasant. Perceived as intruders, the missionaries were closely watched and followed. Since the local aborigines were as fearful of the Whites, their mistrust was reciprocal. To indicate the movement of the expedition they used white smoke signals "como de un signo de alarma . . . para señalar el *peligro de los blancos*." Even though this is acknowledged, the need of the indigenous peoples to preserve their own culture is completely disregarded. The foreshadowing is Bas's narrative strategy in service of self-aggrandizement: the more savage the tribes, the greater the achievement of the missionaries. And, like the sword in the past, the language of the guns speaks louder, deciding again the outcome of the contact and who had more right over the "granted" territory. On several occasions it was the rifles that helped the missionaries confronted with these "hordes of savages" who were getting closer and closer to the expedition. As their last resort, the local natives unsuccessfully tried to use women as a bait to lure the aborigines from the expedition. Their hope was to first finish off with the Whites, and later with the others as well. Once again native peoples are seen merely as objects, as the Other not in full possession of its self: the evangelized ones as much the ones destined to become "civilized" by being made to adopt

Christianity and white ways. What is missing here is the voice of the aboriginal Other, the other side of the story as a counterdiscourse of the ones who were the object. The truth is hard to find when only one side is heard.

This blend of traditional clerico-didactic, historical and travel writing with missionary purpose produced at the waning of the period traditionally known as postcolonial period in the history of Spain mirrors and recreates the structure of colonial discourse. It is in favor of discovery, conquest and colonization, this time apparently in exclusively religious and cultural terms in view of the fact that the non-Spanish European Other had already asserted itself as the possessor of aboriginal land. The purpose of the foundation of a new mission, a new entity in a new territory, is to create a Spanish centre in the middle of a British territory. The traditional Spanish colonial genre of *relación* serves also as a tool for an immediate political and ideological object, as it is directed to the Spaniards in search of their identity and burdened with growing social, political and economic problems.

Linguistically, this text belongs to the Spanish speaking world. It is also a valuable source of information pertaining to the history of an emerging country and society perplexed by the very existence of its indigenous population as much as unprepared to easily accept its multiethnic, multicultural and multiracial make up. The ever deceiving designation of *terra nullius*, under which the indigenous population did not own the land, did not and could not erase the presence of those who were both physically and spiritually strongly attached to that land. The notion of *terra nullius*, which justified the dispossession of the aboriginal peoples because the land was considered unoccupied when claimed by Captain Cook, ended only recently, in 1992, by the High Court of Australia.

If literature was a recent concept, as a mutable construct it is determined by social and cultural values. Whether a text will be considered literary, historical or a strictly culture based one, it will depend on how readers relate to that writing in the process of self-discovery. Whether this

particular text will bear more relevance to one culture or to the other, whether it will be shared by both, this will depend on readers' perception and interpretation, and that still remains to be seen. In this unique intersection of imperial experiences, nation, race, language and religion, the text opens up new directions for further exploring around the terms *colonial/post-colonial/postcolonial*. These interrelated terms are more readily acknowledged now as relative and ambiguous, even misleading (Hutcheon 7, 10). Their meaning is neither universal nor ahistorical but determined politically and culturally .

Note

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Fig. 1. Dioceses of Western Australia and location of Drysdale River Mission. In Dom Anselm M. Catalan, *Drysdale River Mission*. (New Norcia: 1935) 4.

Fig. 2. Fr. Bas (center) with the New Norcia Orchestra. In Antonio (Fulgentius) Torres y Mayans, *The Torres Diaries 1901-1914* (Artlook Books, 1987) 254.

Fig. 3. Map by West Australian Government surveyor Fred S. Brockman. In *Report on Exploration of North-West Kimberley*. (Perth: 1902); rpt. in Roberto Bas, "La nueva misión benedictina" *Revista Montserratina*. (Nov. 1908) 362.

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