

Negotiating the Colonial Australian Popular Fiction Archive

KEN GELDER
University of Melbourne

There is an identifiable ‘archive’ of colonial Australian popular fiction consisting of romance, adventure fiction, Gothic fiction, crime fiction, Lemurian fantasy and a significant number of related subgenres (bushranger fiction, convict romance, Pacific or ‘South Sea’ adventure, tropical romance, ‘lost explorer’ stories, and so on). Looking at this archive soon reveals both its sheer size and range, and the fact that so little of it is remembered today. Rachael Weaver, Ailie Smith and I have begun to build a digital archive of colonial Australian popular fiction with the primary aim of making this material available to an interested reading public, as well as to scholars specialising in colonial Australian (and transnational) literary studies. At the time of writing we are really only about 20% complete with around 500 authors represented on the site, although many with only a fraction of their work uploaded and with only the bare bones of a scholarly apparatus around them: a few short biographical notes, a bibliography, and the texts themselves: first editions in most cases <<http://www.apfa.esrc.unimelb.edu.au/about.html>>.

The first entry in this digital archive is J. H. M. Abbott (1874-1953), and we have so far uploaded three novels by this author, beginning with *Sally: the tale of a currency lass* (1918), published as a cheap paperback by the NSW Bookstall with a cover illustration by Norman Lindsay. I should note that we take the colonial period to run at least as far as the First World War and arguably beyond, into the 1920s: where by this time the ‘colonial’ functions as an enabling signifier, a point of reference (as well as a point of origin), already receding from the present even as it continues to be animated, and reanimated, to generate a set of often increasingly nostalgic and nationalist sensibilities. In fact, J.H.M. Abbott’s *Sally* does exactly this: it is one of seven historical novels he produced about the early colonial period, three others of which were also published by the NSW Bookstall. Abbott was a journalist and a historian of colonial events (he wrote histories of William Dampier and Ben Hall); he wrote famously about the Boer War in *Tommy Cornstalk* (1902), and about the London poor in *Letters from Queer Street* (1908); and he was a long-standing contributor to the *Bulletin*, the *Australian Town and Country Journal* and the *Lone Hand*. But this remarkably prolific and varied writer is barely mentioned in Australian literary histories. His Boer War experiences are noted in passing in the *Penguin New Literary History of Australia* (1988) and again in *The Oxford Literary History of Australia* (1998); he isn’t mentioned at all in *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature* (2000); and the recent *Cambridge History of Australian Literature* (2010) invokes him just once, where a passage from Abbott’s *Letters from Queer Street* is quoted in Peter Morton’s chapter on Australian writers in England – where Morton seems to view Abbott’s account of poverty in London and his

homesickness for Australia as a sort of peculiar curiosity (272). The most recent entry on Abbott in AustLit is Shirley Walker's article on Australian writing about the Boer War published in *Australian Literary Studies* in 1985; the previous entry is Norman Lindsay's short biographical account of him twenty years earlier in *Bohemians of the Bulletin* (1965). He is one of a large number of highly productive colonial writers who largely remains outside the Australian literary archive as we know it today.

The colonial Australian popular fiction digital archive is one of many hundreds of digitised literary archives around the world designed primarily to facilitate access to material that might otherwise languish in the special collections of university libraries. It is now in fact continuing in partnership with the Baillieu Library at the University of Melbourne, and we expect it to achieve some level of comprehensiveness by the end of 2013. In the meantime, we also hope to develop the scholarly apparatus that surrounds these authors, the biographical material in particular which in many cases (especially for authors who only published occasionally or briefly) remains scanty. We also want to work some more on genre and subgenre: because, although genres are not always clearly defined or demarcated in colonial popular fiction, they nevertheless make distinctive investments in the colonial literary scene. Even the most minor of colonial literary subgenres, like the 'kangaroo hunt' adventure, can mobilise a remarkable range of themes and tropes. Rosa Praed's 'Bushed' (1907) turns to the role of itinerant labourers in the bush and gently mocks Lawsonian bush stereotypes: 'If I'd been wanting to write something that was going to ketch on in England, like Lawson's way of describing the bush', the narrator sourly announces, 'I reckon I could have fetched the public with that first morning of kangaroostering' (130). Published in the same year as Praed's story, Ethel Castilla's 'The Red Kangaroo' is by contrast a version of the squatter's romance and a feisty critique of colonial masculinity. It is the title story of a collection of stories published by John Fairfax and Son in Sydney: reminding us also of the significant role newspapers played in colonial publishing.

It is still sometimes noted that colonial writers had difficulty in finding local publishers for their work: but this simply isn't true. We know about George Robertson who began as a publisher in Melbourne in 1852 and developed a strong list of colonial Australian popular fiction, publishing and reprinting Marcus Clarke's *His Natural Life* (1874, 1878), for example, and remaining in business for many years until merging with Melville and Mullen in 1921. We also know about the NSW Bookstall, which published a significant number of cheap Australian colonial paperbacks. We know less about other colonial publishers and printers like McCarron, Bird & Co., which published Clarke's *Sensational Tales* (1886) and Campbell McKellar's *The Premier's Secret* (1887), amongst many other literary works, including theatre, children's fiction and poetry. Many colonial writers were published by British publishers and by the Colonial Libraries, of course – think of Rolf Boldrewood's publishing deals with Macmillan's Colonial Library, for example. In their discussion of colonial women's romance, Hsu-Ming Teo and Richard White note that it is 'impossible to overstate the importance of London publishers such as Mills and Boon, Hodder and Stoughton, Hurst and Blackett, Hutchinson, or Collins [and there are many others: Ward, Lock & Co., Alston Rivers, and so on] in providing international and lucrative publishing opportunities' for popular colonial writers like Rosa Praed, Louise Mack and Alice Grant Rosman (348-49). Benjamin Farjeon's *Grif: A Story of Australian Life* was published in 1870 in Britain by Tinsley, which

had published some other, minor Australian colonial novelists such as Wybert Reeve and the Tasmanian conservationist Louisa Anne Meredith. *Grif* was also published in New York by Harper and Brothers, a company which – much later on – would come to Australia as HarperCollins, taking Angus and Robertson over and effectively bringing it to an end as a national imprint. The American society journalist Morris Phillips, who wrote Farjeon's obituary in the *New York Times*, said the following about Farjeon, Harper and Brothers and the American publisher George W. Carleton in 1901, giving us a sense of just how widely colonial Australian fiction could circulate:

Carleton, like other publishers, made mistakes. One of them was when he declined to republish from an English edition "Grif", a story of Australian life, by Benjamin L. Farjeon, the sheets of which I brought from England in the early [eighteen-]seventies, the author and I being close personal friends. Carleton's reader voted against it...I took "Grif" to my friend "Joe" Harper....The Harpers published "Grif", and made with it a great success. No copyright law then existed between England and the United States, and so "Grif" was printed and published by many newspapers in this country without let or hindrance. (Phillips 1901)

Providing publishing histories for popular colonial writers – and building those histories into the digital archive – will also help us to understand how colonial literary careers were made and sustained. The colonial magazines, journals and newspapers are as crucial here as the various publishing houses. Ken Stewart once noted that reading the nineteenth-century periodical press made him feel as if 'something had been going on that [he] should have been told about – that an entire cultural site, even perhaps an alternative cultural identity, had been withheld from [his] awareness' (cited in Brown, 74). Of course, we have seen some important studies of the *Bulletin* – although both Sylvia Lawson and John Docker focus mostly on journalism here and have little to say about the immense amount of popular fiction this magazine had published during the colonial period – and Robert Dixon has looked at serialised invasion fiction in the *Lone Hand* after Federation. But alongside the *Bulletin* and the *Lone Hand* were the *Australian Journal* (1865-1962), the *Australian Monthly Magazine* (1865-67) – which later became the *Colonial Monthly* (1867-70) – the *Boomerang* (1887-92), the *Melbourne Review* (1876-1885) – edited by Arthur Patchett Martin – the *Centennial Magazine* (1888-90), *Cosmos Magazine* (1894-99) – with Ernest Favenc as a founding editor – the *Australasian Critic* (1890-91), co-edited by Baldwin Spencer, George Robertson's *Antipodean* magazine (which published Nat Gould, Rolf Boldrewood and many others), *Steele Rudd's Magazine* (1903-07), and so on. There were also a number of weekly magazines, attached to the daily newspapers, that published colonial popular fiction. Melbourne's *Age* hosted the weekly *Leader* (1856-1957), which early on published a lot of British popular authors (Conan Doyle, R.L. Stevenson) but by 1900 began to publish Australian popular novelists and writers like Rosa Praed and Mary Gaunt. The *Leader* was in competition with the *Argus's* weekly, the *Australasian* (1864-1946), which published Ernest Favenc, 'Rolf Boldrewood' and Mary Gaunt, among many others. The *Sydney Evening News* hosted the *Australian Town and Country Journal* (1870-1919), which published a great many colonial authors; and the *Sydney Mail* (1860-1938) was another remarkably active weekly that serialised popular colonial novels, including Boldrewood's *Robbery Under Arms* (1882-83). One of the editors of the *Bulletin*,

W.H. Traill, was editor of the *Sydney Mail* as well as the *Queenslander* (1866-1939), another weekly magazine hosted by the Brisbane *Courier* which (a few years after the *Australian Journal*) had serialised Marcus Clarke's *His Natural Life* (1870-72) – a novel that was serialised and re-serialised several times over across colonial media – and published the romance stories of someone like Edith Mary England, another forgotten colonial writer. Many colonial writers published their fiction across a number of journals and weekly magazines, including England (who also published in the *Australian Town and Country Journal*) as well as better-known writers such as Gaunt, Louis Becke, Ernest Favenc, N. Walter Swan and J.A. Barry. Others remained relatively loyal to just one or two: like Randolph Bedford or J.H.M. Abbott in the *Bulletin* and *Lone Hand*, or R.P. Whitworth and Mary Fortune in the *Australian Journal*. Very little work has been done on the kind of literary archive these journals provide for us: an diverse and prolific world of literary production that I tend to think of as an 'assemblage', mixing literary writing up almost willy-nilly with a range of non-fictional material (political, social, cultural, economic, scientific, and so on), geographically promiscuous and visually striking (with a small army of illustrators – Norman Lindsay is just one among many others, including Phil May – whose work is also forgotten in contemporary Australian literary studies).

These colonial journals were in some cases remarkably popular. Kit Taylor tells us that the first issue of the *Lone Hand* in 1907 sold 50,000 copies in three days (16). Toni-Johnson Woods suggests that the long-running *Australian Journal* was 'one of the most successful magazines in English (language) publishing history', outstripped in sales only by *Chamber's* and *Blackwood's* in Britain. G. B. Barton, in his *Literature in New South Wales* (1886), had said it soon averaged around 5,500 copies per week in sales. The *Australian Journal's* patronage of serialised popular fiction made it arguably much more influential on the development of the Australian novel than the *Bulletin*, as Megan Brown has suggested (Brown 2007). In her very useful 1981 account of literary journalism in Australia before the *Bulletin*, Elizabeth Webby draws attention to the *Australian Journal's* national circulation and its commitment to colonial 'sensation' fiction (12). But the newer literary histories have little to say about this kind of archive, and our sense of it as scholars has almost certainly contracted over the years. To get a glimpse of how the contraction of the archive works as a kind of literary ideology, it is worth returning to H.M. Green's *A History of Australian Literature*, first published in 1961 when the *Australian Journal* was, as he put it, 'still going strong' (it closed down in 1962). In a useful but typically judgmental chapter on the early colonial magazines, Green spoke of the *Australian Journal's*

crude emotionalism, mild humour, "facts not generally known" and mostly not worth knowing: all cooked up cleverly in a stew that must have been exceedingly attractive to the semi-literate of the day, and even to some of the literate who might otherwise have taken a better magazine with them on a coach or railway journey. (323)

For Green, the archive of colonial literary magazines is worth noting but only to dismiss it as a kind of supplement to the literary field. 'A magazine can never rise for long above the normal level of the literature of its day' (324), he writes, although what that normal level might be is anyone's guess. In fact, we can argue that the colonial magazines themselves produced a kind of *abnormality* for the colonial

literary scene by folding literary production into a much wider set of cultural and political formations and networks: and this is something we would also like the digital archive to begin to reflect. That abnormality – let's say, that particular colonial predicament – is also reflected in the structural split in colonial literary production between the kind of literary aspirations registered by Green (whose prejudices and judgements had long been anticipated by colonial critics and commentators) and, on the other hand, the enthusiasm for what colonial magazines like the *Australian Journal* routinely called 'light literature': popular fiction. It is worth noting that this structural split is still very much with us in Australian literary criticism. A good example is Simon During's 'Out of England: Literary Subjectivity in the Australian Colonies, 1788-1867' (2004), which looks at Catherine Helen Spence's *Clara Morison* (1854) to argue that colonial Australian fiction was not able to produce a 'literary subjectivity' that was autonomous and self-sustaining. His essay ends by noting this failure and then distinguishing *Clara Morison* from two early Australian convict novels written by convicts, Henry Savery's *Quintus Servinton* (1830-31) and James Tucker's *Ralph Rashleigh* (1845, 1929): 'This returns us to literary subjectivity', During writes,

as a particular mode of entangling life and literature...*Clara Morison* is an accomplished work of literature written against literary subjectivity by a woman who is justly regarded as one of modern Australia's founding figures; these convict novels are clumsy works of quasi-literature written by obscure and dangerous men, yet they are able to foster a mode of literary subjectivity just because they articulate and instantiate that extra-literary danger. (20)

Putting aside the question of how dangerous the educated, convicted forgers Savery and Tucker might have been, what is interesting about this distinction from the perspective of colonial Australian literary studies is that it is not new. It is a re-articulation of exactly the same structural split I have been describing in the colonial literary scene: which sees aspirational literature as a matter of failed aspirations, and 'light literature' as successful precisely because (in this account, just as in so many of the colonial periodicals) it is not 'literary'. For an example of this, we might return to the colonial novelist and journalist Alfred Buchanan – another generally neglected figure in the colonial Australian archive – whose collection of essays, *The Real Australia* (1907), contains an anxious chapter titled 'Pseudo-Literary'. For Buchanan, 'Australian literature' is an aspiration that remains only partially realised, undercut by the fact that so many Australian writers are finding literary success overseas (in London especially) and so much literary 'ephemera' is circulating unchecked through the colonial newspapers and magazines: where life and literature are indeed entangled, where the authentic and the artificial seep into one another, and where originality and imitation seem difficult to distinguish, even in the later stages of colonial literary production.

Contemporary Australian literary scholarship has begun to excavate and process bits and pieces of this immense archive of material, and this has been helpful in some ways and problematic in others. The contemporary excavation of the colonial Australian popular fiction archive properly begins with Robert Dixon's *Writing the Colonial Adventure* (1995), which looks at novels by Rolf Boldrewood, Rosa Praed, Louis Becke, Fergus Hume, Guy Boothby, Ambrose Pratt, Ernest Favenc, David Hennessey, and three or four others in less detail. Dixon identifies the neglect of

colonial adventure/romance in Australian literary scholarship ‘despite its being one of the most popular literary forms of the period’ (2), and he argues for a field of writing that is ‘astonishingly heterogeneous’ with popular genres ‘often hybridized to a degree that now seems bizarre and even unreadable’ (8). For Dixon, colonial adventure/romance was both an escapist, derivative literary genre and symptomatic of its historical and social predicament: ‘no other literary form was more revealing of the anxieties that attended the end of empire and the beginning of modernity’ (8). His re-evaluation of colonial popular fiction depended on a paradox which saw this field of writing as revelatory precisely because (as ‘quasi-literature’) it was so remote from reality: these novels, he writes, ‘stage a construction of the national culture whose conflictual and endlessly proliferating identities are, in a word, implausible. It is precisely this implausibility that makes them such a revealing and symptomatic form of cultural signification’ (9). This is a generous view of colonial Australian popular fiction which is not sustained in recent literary criticism. It is substantially modified by Andrew McCann in his more recent book on the colonial Gothic, *Marcus Clarke’s Bohemia* (2004). For McCann, colonial popular fiction is indeed, in one sense, revelatory: ‘Light literature’, he writes, ‘circulated...in ephemeral periodical writing, where it seems to have been placed beneath the threshold of critical cognition. Beneath that threshold is exactly where we need to look in order to reconstruct the experience of colonial modernity’ (230). But it is also repressive or ‘sublimatory’, reconfiguring colonial realities (colonial violence, for example) as a kind of ‘phantasmagoria’. In fact, McCann’s view of the colonial Gothic in Australia is itself split in two. It is revelatory in one sense, ‘inauthentic’ (as he puts it) in another; it draws attention (as *His Natural Life* does) to colonialism’s ‘scandalous foundation in violence’ (186) but it also provides ‘a thin veneer stretched over the horror of history’ (215). Like Simon During on Catherine Helen Spence, McCann therefore also regards Marcus Clarke’s literary career negatively: immersed in the literary marketplace, working as a journalist and tied to the imperatives of popular entertainment, Clarke fails to achieve an autonomous and self-sustaining literary subjectivity (this is his ‘inauthenticity’ in McCann’s study).

There are other kinds of structural splits in the colonial literary scene which contemporary literary critics seem condemned to reproduce: one of which is gendered. While Dixon and McCann were looking at a dozen or so popular male colonial novelists, Fiona Giles and, later, Tanya Dalziell turned their attention to popular women writers. In *Too Far Everywhere: The Romantic Heroine in Nineteenth-Century Australia* (1998), Giles recovers the generic term ‘romance’ for six colonial women writers. Her book came in the wake of earlier feminist excavations of the colonial literary archive – the essays collected in Debra Adelaide’s *A Bright and Fiery Troop* (1988), for example – but it was right to draw attention to the neglect of colonial romance as a *women’s* genre. ‘Disappearance’ provides Giles with a trope for reading the colonial woman’s social predicament, but she also drew on the same critical resources as Robert Dixon – the postcolonial theorising of Homi Bhabha, for example – to provide an equally generous reading of the significance of a popular genre. Colonial romances, she writes, ‘allow for an ideal of cultural heterogeneity, deriving from both English and other cultures, including Aboriginal; and they offer this as part of the idea of Australia itself’ (174). The turn from Dixon’s book to Andrew McCann’s book is rather like the turn from Giles’s book to Tanya Dalziell’s later study of colonial romance published in the same year as McCann, *Settler Romances and the Australian Girl* – a book that barely mentions Giles’s study

at all even though it, too, is influenced by colonial discourse analysis. Rather like McCann, Dalziell sees colonial popular fiction as essentially hegemonic: ‘The role popular texts played in the production of settlers’ consent to colonial projects’, she writes, ‘cannot be underestimated’ (6) – even though she also retains (as McCann had done) a sense of something more heterogeneous here, emphasising at another point ‘the possibility of multiple interpretations of settler capitalism’ (20). This is a study of six more colonial women’s popular novels which remains unclear about its own structural position in the literary field: ‘The conclusion of the book’, Dalziell confesses early on, ‘is not a confident summary of the discussions that precede it’ (23). This is partly because the six colonial novels she writes about occupy different registers of the ‘popular’, something the last chapter – which discusses Miles Franklin’s *My Brilliant Career* (1901) alongside ‘Iota’s’ (Kathleen Mannington Caffyn’s) earlier novel *A Comedy in Spasms* (1895) and Tasma’s *The Penance of Portia Jones* (1891) – draws attention to. Dalziell rightly notes that Franklin’s heroine Sybylla had in fact tried her hand at writing a popular women’s romance: ‘a prodigious novel in terms of length and detail, in which a full-fledged hero and heroine performed the duties of a hero and heroine in the orthodox manner’ (cited 109). But Sybylla’s Sydney publisher rejects her manuscript and instead advises her to be aspirational, to undertake ‘a study of the best works of literature’ (cited 110). But Sybylla remains attached to the popular literary field almost in spite of herself, reading Lawson alongside Marie Corelli and George du Maurier’s *Trilby* (1894), as well as a colonial Australian novel that Dalziell had discussed in a previous chapter, J. D. Hennessey’s *An Australian Bush Track* (1896). What is more interesting here, then, is not so much Sybylla’s literary ‘failure’ (to achieve an ‘autonomous’ literary subjectivity etc.) but more particularly, the way her literary development – her structural position in the colonial literary field – is charted: as the effect of a network of literary citations that routinely slide back and forth between colonial Australia and Britain.

Citatoriality is the key to an archive: what and who we cite determines our own structural position in the literary field and conveys the extent and orientation of our cultural capital here. What does it mean to write an academic book about just six women’s colonial novels, for example? From the perspective of citatoriality (or ‘citatorial capital’), this is a limited and arbitrary intervention into the archive: made less arbitrary only because the question of citatoriality is to a degree built into the selection of the novels (as one novel invokes another, and so on). Citatoriality is one visible outcome of a network; but contemporary literary scholarship is continually condemned to produce a limited network of a much larger network, a sub-system of a system (which is one way to think about AustLit, for example). Colonial popular fiction is often itself overtly citatorial, keenly registering its structural position in a literary system in a way that I tend to think of as ‘colonial transnational’. Miles Franklin can invoke both Corelli and Hennessey as she charts Sybylla’s growth in *My Brilliant Career*; to give another example, Rosa Praed’s ‘The Bushman’s Love Story’ (1909) can, from its expatriated position in London, invoke Lawson and the Lawsonian ‘type’; and to give one more example, Louise Mack’s *The Romance of a Woman of Thirty* (1911) invokes the work of a number of poets as it charts the aesthetic tastes of its widowed protagonist Daisy, including Kipling (who had visited Sydney in 1891) and Roderic Quinn – another forgotten but at the time hugely influential colonial Australian writer and newspaper editor. Louise Mack is also forgotten these days, reduced in the literary histories either to a children’s novelist or

– in the recent *Cambridge History of Australian Literature* – to a low-level structural position in the colonial expatriate popular literary field that, in Peter Morton’s chapter, would seem to be a consequence of little more than her sluttish femininity:

London was good to Louise Mack, once she had swallowed her initial ambitions and entered “the great wild land of serial fiction”, or, to put it mundanely, had found work...scribbling romantic tales. She charmed the editor W.T. Stead, who had an eye for a pretty face, just as she had aroused the lust of A.G. Stephens at home. She attended Stead’s parties and was soon making better money than all her ex-colleagues on the *Bulletin* put together. (274)

We know, of course, that Mack was a remarkably well networked writer who regularly contributed ‘A Woman’s Letter’ to the *Bulletin* during the late 1890s (under the pen name ‘Gouli Gouli’) and went on – after arriving penniless in London – to become a global bestseller. She was also one of the first modern female war correspondents, winning acclaim for her first-hand account of the German atrocities in Belgium during the First World War and returning to Australia in 1915 to give a series of public talks about her war experiences. Her novel *The Romance of a Woman of Thirty* gives us a very different colonial typology to the ‘Australian girl’ from that found in Tanya Dalziell’s study, through its divorced protagonist Daisy, an older ex-colonial woman who literally navigates her way – from London to Sydney and then to Italy and Florence – through a series of possible romantic relationships: where Australia itself becomes a kind of citation, mobilised at some points, forgotten at others, in a transnational colonial novel (and there were many of them) that makes no deep structural investment in nation and, in particular, in nation building.

Let me comment on two ways of approaching the popular colonial literary scene as a network and as a matter of citation and counter-citation. The first comes from a historian, not from literary scholars: Angela Woollacott’s important study, *To Try Her Fortune in London: Australian women, colonialism, and modernity* (2001). Woollacott gives us what we might call a systematic account of a system: it takes up the novelists discussed in Tanya Dalziell’s book and sweeps them up into a much more extensive network of alliances and affiliations as it accounts for the many ways in which colonial Australian women writers (and artists and musicians and so on) lived in London and developed professionally there. In this account, literary success for women – which often meant producing popular romances, for example, as well as working across media – is understood productively, not (as it was for Morton) negatively. Recalling During’s account above, this is where we once again find examples of a self-sustaining, culturally positioned ‘literary subjectivity’. In a chapter called ‘Neighbourhoods, Networks and Associations’, Woollacott traces professional connections among expatriate colonial Australian women writers like Rosa Praed, ‘Iota’ (Kathleen Mannington Caffyn), Alice Grant Rosman, Mary Gaunt, Miles Franklin (who wrote her Brent of Bin Bin novels in the British Museum), and many others – K.S. Prichard and Nettie Palmer later on, for example. Woollacott’s account of the careful construction of the ‘Australian girl’ during the 1890s and up to the First World War reminds us that this particular colonial typology was itself networked into a larger system of typologies (the ‘English girl’, the ‘French girl’, the ‘New York girl’, and so on) from which it was then distinguished itself: as in Louise Mack’s *An Australian Girl in London* (1902). For Woollacott, the networks, citations, typologies

and overlapping geographies established and nourished by these expatriate colonial women produced ‘a shared resource with which to combat the continuing masculinism of literary Bohemia in Australia’ (214).

Woollacott’s study is an ambitious and comprehensive account of one key aspect of the colonial popular literary archive: organised, structured, systematic, an expression (perhaps even a consequence) of exactly the sort of professionalism amongst women that she is charting. But just before some of us give up on the archive altogether, there is another way of approaching it that is less ‘professional’, certainly, but no less rewarding: the kind of non-systematic approach to a literary system that many readers and scholars engage in as a matter of routine when we browse (as readers can do through our digital archive) and wander and meander: following links almost arbitrarily (although arbitrariness here is always ‘structured’). A certain level of arbitrariness comes into play, for example, when a literary critic draws together novels by Spence, Savery and James Tucker, or ‘Iota’ and Miles Franklin. But arbitrariness was also already built into the processes of colonial canon-making, even in its early stages. Arthur Bayldon’s plea for federal government support for Australian writers, ‘The Attitude of the Commonwealth towards a National Literature’, was published in *Steele Rudd’s Magazine* in 1906. This is another colonial account that distinguishes aspirational literary writing from ephemeral ‘quasi-literature’, especially the kind found across the colonial media. ‘The Press’, Bayldon writes,

actuated by mercenary motives, cater for the realistic bushman who has no pretensions to culture; for the gambler, whose moral atmosphere is a pestilence; for the irreverent and cynical who delight in cheap pessimism, scantily veiled indecencies, and pungent puns at the misfortunes of others; and for the businessman who can rarely divest his mind of matters of commerce. (‘National Literature’ 33)

To remedy this, Bayldon put together a colonial literary canon the following year – in an early issue of the *Lone Hand* – that would be more or less unrecognisable today: putting Louise Mack alongside Henry Lawson, and including a great many popular colonial writers, like Guy Boothby, Roderic Quinn, Nat Gould, Mabel Forrest, and Randolph Bedford, many of whom have long since dropped away from Australian literary scholarship (‘Australian Fiction’ 454). In Bayldon’s list, literary fiction and popular fiction sit higgledy-piggledy alongside each other. There is nothing ‘systematic’ about this list at all, which is one of its points: it reminds us, instead, of the instability, the mutability and the remarkable variety of the colonial literary field.

To take up just one of Bayldon’s canonical writers from the 1900s: almost nothing has been published on Randolph Bedford over the last twenty years, and yet he is arguably one of the most networked, integrated (and masculine) writers in the late colonial literary scene, professionally connected to a host of other writers, newspaper editors, journalists and publishers, as well as state and federal politicians, explorers, investors, lawyers, miners of one kind or another, and so on. Bedford travelled around Australia; he also lived in London and then Italy, from 1901 to 1904. In fact, he lived just outside Florence, as Roslyn Pesman Cooper tells us in an article in *Overland* (Cooper 1990). This interested me partly because about half of Louise Mack’s novel, *The Romance of a Woman of Thirty*, is set just outside Florence, and Mack herself had

lived there around the same time, editing the *Italian Gazette* from 1904 to 1907. Their respective views of provincial Italian life remind us again of the heavily gendered and generic aspects of colonial Australian writing, with two very different notions of ‘romance’ being staged through their accounts of Italian life and labour (mining for Bedford, the making of olive oil for Mack). In an attempt to find a link between these two writers – no doubt arbitrarily, except for the fact that they are both in Bayldon’s colonial canon – I turned to Bedford’s autobiography, *Naught to Thirty-Three* (1944). But Bedford barely mentions Italy and never mentions Louise Mack (or any other colonial woman writer) at all. He does, however, give an exuberant insight into *male* colonial popular literary social networks, including literary club life in Melbourne and Sydney: the opposite of the account we find in Angela Woollacott’s study almost 60 years later (male and local in one case, female and transnational in the other). One writer in Bedford’s autobiography caught my attention: Charles Junor, author of a collection of stories and musings called *Dead Men’s Tales*, published in Melbourne by George Robertson in 1898. Junor was not on Bayldon’s list of canonical colonial writers. At the time of writing, the entry on Junor in AustLit was also blank: as if nothing at all was known about him. The Australian literary histories never mention him; it is as if he has disappeared completely from the colonial literary scene. But Bedford meets him and describes Junor typically as a link in a network of associations that, in this case, situate a colonial literary writer in relation to his professional work for a local political leader: ‘Through Charles Junor, who wrote, with all youth’s enjoyment of gloom and mystery, a collection of short stories published as *Dead Men’s Tales*, I met Bill [William] Maloney, then member of the state legislature [for West Melbourne] and to be a member of the Commonwealth House of Representatives....Junor was Dr Maloney’s secretary, a good writer and a merry soul....[He] was drowned in Sydney Harbour, falling between the wharf and the ferry in attempting a landing before the ship tied up’ (163). Bedford provides a short anecdote about playing a practical joke on Junor at the theatre: and that is all we seem to know about this perhaps rather tragic figure.

If we look at Junor’s *Dead Men’s Tales*, however, we see a colonial writer actively implicated in a colonial transnational popular literary scene, dedicating his book to H. Rider Haggard. The long ‘Introduction’ to the *Tales* is a meditation on what best enables popular literary success, drawing on the Canadian-British bestselling novelist Grant Allen to argue a case for the global future of popular romance (Junor xi). This is also an argument for the profession of popular literary writing, and it works through a network of British and American writers to illustrate its points, arriving finally at the colonial Australian literary scene: but only to point out its deficiencies: ‘With the exception of a few instalments by Boothby, Favenc, Becke, [Alex] Montgomery, Lawson, Patterson, [Fergus] Hume, [C. Haddon] Chambers, and [Frank Atha] Westbury, who, so far, have contributed, relatively speaking, but little towards the supply of the poetry, philosophy and pure art distinctive of Australasian literature, there is, as yet, next to nothing’ (xiv). Here, Junor puts together – just as Bayldon had done – a makeshift (although in this case entirely male) canon of colonial writers, many of them forgotten today. But this is a mean-spirited view of Australian writing that assembles a literary canon only to shut it down. It turns out that Junor is a writer immersed in the popular literary field who is at the same time aspirational, which means that, for him, the colonial literary canon as he sees it is doomed to disappoint. This is his own version of the structural split I had earlier been describing, with Junor able only to chart the failure of his aspirations for a colonial literature, projecting

whatever hope he has into some indeterminate post-fin-de-siecle future: ‘Finally’, he writes, ‘it is some consolation to remember that it is on the verdict of posterity that the writer has to rely for the correct appreciation of the merits of his work. He must look towards these halcyon days when copyright-holding publishers shall cease to clamour for cash and advertisements, and log-rolling critics have no further interests in booming the meretricious in place of the meritorious’ (xv). This commentary from a book of dead men’s tales is a plea for the future of the kind of autonomous, self-sustaining and *masculine* literary subjectivity that is already living with the condition of its own failure: speaking to us now not from any canonical position at all, but from the long-forgotten fringes of the colonial Australian popular literary archive.

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