

## Colonial Displacements: Another Look at Miles Franklin's *My Brilliant Career*

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In this paper, I revisit Miles Franklin's *My Brilliant Career* (1901), a text that is now firmly entrenched in the Australian literary and feminist canons in part because of the feminist fervour and nationalist earnestness of its Australian Girl protagonist, Sybylla Melvyn. I do so in the knowledge that much critical material has been produced in response to this text to the extent that Susan Gardner has declared in mock exasperation: "Hasn't enough been said?" (22). My answer is a very serious no.

This essay considers what has not been said because of its very familiarity. In short, colonial tropes of savagery, slavery and barbarity, and orientalist tropes of the eastern harem and the figure of the sultan, are figures in the text that articulate wider social anxieties over settler subjects, class orders and hegemonic gender relations. In other words, *My Brilliant Career* is far-fetched, not so much in its unlikeliness, but because it brings from afar remotely connected figures that found expression in the settler vernacular for purposes other than securing and superintending autochthonous populations happened on by Europeans in the course of uncertain colonial contacts. However, together with the figure of the Australian Girl, these tropes *do* serve as the means by which the flexible ideological work of colonial economies is represented and executed. They deviously determine to recognize and fix the identity of "others"—the Irish and Aborigines in particular—and shore up the hegemony of atrophying class structures. These figures express what is otherwise unrepresentable, and my concern here is to make these tropes speak to what has hitherto been silent.

Franklin's text purports to record the first years of Sybylla Melvyn's life from childhood to young womanhood in the form of a fictive autobiography. Until the age of nine, when her father decided to sell the stations and buy a small farm named Possum Gully, Sybylla's childhood

was spent between the family's Bruggabrong and Bin Bin stations, and the Caddagat station where her grandmother lived in New South Wales. However, the droughts and depressions of 1890s Australia, which destabilized governments and industries, influence Richard Melvyn's failure, and he quickly succumbs to "the influence of liquor" (22). The "full force of the heavy hand of poverty" (27) is then endured by his children and his wife, Lucy, who is said to have an aristocratic lineage that may be traced to "one of the depraved old pirates who pillaged England with William the Conqueror" (5). In contrast, Melvyn is said to boast of "nothing beyond a grandfather" (5). This apparent decline from "swell-dom to peasantry" of the Melvyn settler family is one of the major interests of the text (25). The decline prompts Sybylla to move from her materially impoverished family at Possum Gully to the Caddagat station, where she lives briefly with her maternal grandmother and aunt before her mother orders her to work as a governess for a *nouveau riche* Irish family, the M'Swats at Barney's Gap, to repay the debts her father owes Mr. M'Swat. The text ends following her rejection of a proposal of marriage by Harold Beecham, a leader of the "swell-dom among the squattocracy up country" (73),<sup>1</sup> and her return to her impecunious family.

Since the time of its publication—and it is not incidental that 1901 was the year in which Australia was proclaimed a federated nation—commentators have been concerned with identifying and celebrating *My Brilliant Career* as a founding narrative of nationhood. Indeed, in conventional historiographies of Australia, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries conventionally mark the "subjunctive mood," to borrow Terry Eagleton's phrase, of nationalist appeals against imperial rule over the settler populations in the colonies (25). These protests often produced and privileged ideas of mateship and freedom, which the 'Lone Hand' figure of the bushman represented, and an aesthetic preference for realism.<sup>2</sup> It was this latter "quality" of Franklin's text that caught the approval of Henry Lawson, who is himself repeatedly singled out as one of the key "masculine" producers of a proto-nationalist literature during the 1890s. Lawson contributed an authoritative preface to the first edition of Franklin's text in which he applauded its "descrip-

tions of bush life and scenery” that made the book, according to him, “true to Australia—the truest I have ever read” (v). Contemporary commentators shared his conviction. An anonymous review in the colonial newspaper, the *Bulletin*, for example, claimed that *My Brilliant Career* and its author were “Australian through and through,” and announced that the novel signalled the “time to end the error of seeing Australia through English spectacles” (n.p.). For its early critics, *My Brilliant Career* heralded a new era in Australian literature and nationalism that would refuse imperial prescriptions and focus instead on the narratives of an emerging nation.

However, it is important to recognize that this historical period also marks the beginning of organized feminist movements and the emergence of the Australian Girl. The Australian Girl was one of a number of “wild colonial girl” figures that emerged during the late nineteenth century as Carole Gerson has explained. Like her compeers, the Australian Girl was often linked in the popular press with the New Woman, which was at the centre of the so-called Woman Question debates both in the imperial metropolis and in the settler colonies. For example, the feminist journal *The Dawn*, which was edited by Louisa Lawson (mother of aforementioned Henry Lawson), published an article in 1899 in which the New Woman was applauded as an “an energetic growth,” and compared favourably with the ‘sweet Alice’ of past generations (9). In contrast Ethel Turner, author of the popular children’s book *Seven Little Australians* (1894), warned settler girls against the deluge of “tainted” New Woman books whose arrival in colonial Australia from the imperial metropolis she was anxiously anticipating in 1894 (126). Incidentally, the New Woman-like young Australian Girl figure of Turner’s text, Judy Woolcot, is effectively eliminated from the text by a felled tree. From these two instances alone, and they are by no means isolated examples, it is clear that no consensus was reached in the colonies, as in the imperial metropolis, with respect to the gender challenges the New Woman represented, and with which the Australian Girl also came to be associated.

More recent critics have brought together these nationalist and feminist concerns and suggested that, as part of her efforts to contest he-

gemonic gender orders, Sybylla rejects one of the principle means by which nationalist discourses called on settler women to participate in nation-building projects: reproduction. Sybylla rejects Beecham's marriage proposal, declaring that she is "not desirous of being the mother of his children" (215). Further, Sybylla determines to write a book even, or perhaps because, she discloses that such an occupation is "something which a man never pardons in a woman" (305). Hence, it is hardly surprising that late twentieth-century feminist commentaries on *My Brilliant Career* have pointed overwhelmingly to the apparent ways in which *My Brilliant Career*, not unlike the book Sybylla aspires to write, "represents a feminist intervention into the nationalist tradition in the literature of the 1890s," as Drusilla Modjeska has argued (34). Susan Sheridan makes a similar point when she writes that Franklin was not only "working critically within the conventions of domestic romance and its element of 'female complaint,' but also buying into the new nationalist discourse, hitherto a masculinist domain" (43). However, this Australian Girl's feminist nationalism is also staged through colonial tropes. Discussion of these figures must take into consideration the many ways they are activated in relation to anxieties over Sybylla's contestations of dominant gender orders and to the fluctuating fortunes of the Melvyn family.

Consider the first words of the text. Franklin writes:

"Boo hoo! Ow, ow; Oh! oh! Me'll die. Boo, hoo. The pain, the pain! Boo, hoo!"

"Come, come, now. Daddy's little mate isn't going to turn Turk like that, is she? I'll put some fat out of the dinner-bag on it, and tie it up in my hanky. Don't cry any more now. Hush! you must not cry. You'll make old Dart buck if you kick up a row like that."

That is my first recollection of life. (3)

This opening section of *My Brilliant Career*, to which many critics refer, purports to relate an event that occurred early in Sybylla's life when she was "barely three" (3): a snake has bitten the young Sybylla. Coupled with the figure of authoritarian masculinity that features in the recol-

lection, this moment is very often understood as anticipating Sybylla's sexual ambivalence towards Harold Beecham, the squatter whose marriage proposal Sybylla rejects.<sup>3</sup>

I want to deviate from this assessment and its reliance on crude psychoanalysis, and propose instead three reasons why we might want to look again at Richard Melvyn's questioning of the young Sybylla.

First, Melvyn's question—"Daddy's little mate isn't going to turn Turk like that, is she?"—anticipates the tensions that surround the issue of gender identity in this text. In Sybylla's apparent first recollection her father at once identifies her in the settler vernacular as his "little mate," a conventionally white masculine identity, and as a young female, as the pronoun "she" suggests.

Second, if it is accepted that this fictitious life story not only traces Sybylla's maturation, but also registers the conflicting discourses that organize and encode her subjectivity, then the very first words spoken in the text are curiously marked by a hitherto unrecognized economy within which Sybylla's individuation is embedded. Sybylla is warned against behaving "like a Turk," in so far as "turning Turk" is negatively encoded here as an instance of volatile "savage" behaviour, a notion that recycles and reinforces a pervasive orientalism of the time. Indeed, the phrase "turning Turk" was one that found multiple expressions in settler discourse. Whereas Franklin's use of the term evokes barbaric, treacherous behaviour in the work of Sybylla's contemporaries, it further signified a conversion to an idea or suggestion.<sup>4</sup> This latter meaning, seemingly innocent, nevertheless carried interlocking religious and colonial connotations—to convert to Islam, to "go native." As such, it had much in common, ideologically speaking, with Franklin's application of the popular phrase.

Third, Richard Melvyn's questions also enticingly, if implicitly, call for this trope of the Turk to be "turned," as it were. To put this simply: an orientalist trope of "turning Turk" is deployed here to instruct Sybylla, whose gender identity at this moment, while not strictly uncertain, is neither entirely secure.

On the basis of this first "recollection" it is not incidental that elsewhere in the text concerns over provisional gender identities and actions

are articulated through colonial figures. For instance, Sybylla is repeatedly said to feel “doggedly savage” (302); to have “wild unattainable ambitions” (219) and a “hot wild spirit” (41); and to answer “savagely” those efforts to produce her consent to the subject positions that class-bound gender ideologies accord white settler women (38). Of course, the operations of these notions of savagery and wildness are now all too familiar. They worked to identify colonized subjects as such, and to construe them as depraved and in need of superintendence in order to justify and authorize imperial rule. In settler Australia, they could both explain to settler subjects the epistemic and material violence directed against Aborigines and license the colonial projects this brutality supported. Yet, in *My Brilliant Career*, these figures are rarely employed in this way. Instead, they articulate Sybylla’s challenges to conventional gender orders.

Sybylla’s eventual refusal to marry Beecham is similarly figured through a sequence of tropes that draws on ideas of the “eastern” and slavery that found expression in the vernacular, in settler feminist discourses and in a number of popular fictions at the turn of the century.<sup>5</sup> In other words, Franklin is not so much carving out new discursive strategies for Sybylla as contributing to the process of naturalizing these figures. For example, as Sybylla ponders Beecham’s proposal of marriage, she declares that this “swell” is “a sort of young sultan who could throw the handkerchief where he liked” (176). Elsewhere in the text, Beecham calls on orientalist discourses to persuade Sybylla to accept his proposal of marriage. He declares: “As for beauty, it is nothing. If beauty was all a man required, he could, if rich, have a harem full of it any day” (304). Whereas the figure of the sultan articulates the wealthy landowner’s economic and sexual power, reference to the harem suggests that Beecham’s designs are at some remove from the supposed eastern commodification of female sexuality.

At the same time that this discursive strategy allows Beecham to proclaim his intentions as “proper,” Sybylla’s recourse to slavery enables her to protest his proposal. She purposefully tosses her engagement ring to the ground and proceeds to announce: “Now, speak to the girl who wears your engagement-ring, for I’ll degrade myself by wearing it no

more... So you thought you had a right to lecture me as your future slave! Just fancy!" (197). Slavery operates here as a means by which to represent the power relations between white gendered subjects. These unequal relations, however, are not its only effect.

In order to examine this point in more detail, it is worthwhile pausing here to consider that slavery ceased "officially" in British colonies in 1807. Although the practice was never formalized in settler Australia, the fact that Aborigines were forced to labour for white settlers cannot go unacknowledged. Yet during the nineteenth century, so-called western liberal discourses regularly called on the language of slavery to represent and censure the structures of power that unevenly organized the lives and relations of white women and men. In a similar manner, in writings that advocated "progressive" social reforms and the rights of white middle-class women, the harem featured as a paradigm of female oppression to which the apparent lot of white women could be unfavourably likened.<sup>6</sup> Importantly though, one consequence of this comparison was that protests against occidental gender orders could be articulated at the same time that western imaginings of the east were upheld. As Joyce Zonana has argued: "the Western feminist's desire to change the status quo can be represented not as a radical attempt to restructure the West but as a conservative effort to make the West more like itself" (594). Colonial figurings of the east not only worked to represent the orient as exotic and tyrannical; they also produced the occident. Yet what further significances do these functions hold for a text that most certainly leaves unquestioned and indeed reinforces the premises of the promiscuous east, but also embellishes very specific anxieties at an outpost of empire whose claims to the "west" are tenuous at best?

After all, and contrary to Nicholas Thomas's recent assertion that at the end of the nineteenth century, settlers in colonial Australia "took their membership of the British race for granted" (95), and to employ a phrase Ann Laura Stoler uses in her recent analysis of the role played by health manuals and housekeeping guides in the instruction and disciplining of colonial populations of the Dutch occupied lands of Southeast Asia, settler subjects in colonial Australia were often feared to be "fictive Europeans" (102). As Chris Tiffin has suggested, commentators, both in

England and in the colonies in Australia, singled out the climate as the particular cause for this regrettable condition (46–62), and some observers, such as R.E.N. Twopeny, claimed to “see” differences between colonial-born subjects and English settlers, as well as between these two colonial types and the European inhabitants of the imperial metropolis (82).

For many contemporaries, these developments were of some concern. When the English author Anthony Trollope toured Australia during the early 1870s, for instance, he noted the apparent emergence of a new colonial type and was prompted to inquire nervously as to “whether the race will deteriorate or become stronger by the change” (453). One consequence of this apparent fictitiousness, of course, is that the privileges and powers accorded white subjects under colonial conditions, and indeed whiteness itself, are understood to be neither secure nor essential.

Hence, it is necessary to note that in this text slavery is also obliquely deployed to signal the social position of a white woman who labours in the service of the Melvyn family. As part of her efforts to reconstruct the apparently appalling years of her life spent at Possum Gully, Sybylla relates the way in which Jane Haizelip, “our servant-girl” (15), also disliked this station by recalling Jane’s complaint that:

I don’t think much of any of the men around here. They let the women work too hard ... It puts me in mind ev the time wen the black fellers made the gins do all the work. Why on Bruggabrong the women never had to do no outside work ... Down here they do everything ... It’s slavin’, an’ delving,’ an’ scrapin’ yer eyeballs out from mornin’ to night, and nothink [*sic*] to show for your pains. (16–17)

Race, gender, and class are crucial components in this complex figuration. References to slavery and the supposed gendered distribution of labour in “primitive” Aboriginal societies are made here in order to represent and remonstrate against the work that white working-class women are called on to take up in settler Australia. That is, Jane Haizelip’s statement is not concerned with the material practices of slavery or the supposedly coarse social relations of the Aborigines that it represents. Indeed, Jane’s allusion here to Aboriginal women in the past



tense works to displace these women from the present social conditions that are at issue in her assertion. It also reinstates the then very popular ethnographic idea that Aboriginal relations and subjects are anachronistic and uncivilized, which works alongside the useful fiction of *terra nullius* that was reaffirmed as recently as 1971 and overturned only in 1992.<sup>7</sup> Instead, this scene, together with Sybylla's declarations against the slavery of marriage, denote an operation of displacement whereby these figures, which abut otherwise unconscious colonial economies, come to represent and execute their labours for the reason that they find expression in other discursive fields.

A case in point is Sybylla's spontaneous recital of Henry Longfellow's poem, "The Slave's Dream" (85) at Caddagat, the homestead to which Sybylla is sent following her family's "descent into peasantism," and before she is required to labour for the M'Swat family as a governess. At first glance, this performance might seem unlikely—a young Australian Girl in the settler colonies quoting poetry written in and for a particular location temporally and geographically distant. Yet, the bookshelves at Caddagat are lined with a variety of far-reaching texts including volumes of Henry Lawson's poetry, "Trilby" and a text by "Corelli" (62). In this context, Sybylla's knowledge of Longfellow's poem is not entirely implausible. More important though, it is a recognition that the Australian Girl's interest in the poem stems from aesthetic, rather than political, motivations.

Longfellow's mid-nineteenth century poem offers a critique of slavery in the United States in the years prior to the emancipation proclamation of 1863. Even as the poem rests on the troubling presumption that death is the only means by which the male African slave of the text may escape "the driver's whip, / [and] the burning heat of day" (69). Yet the representational politics of this poem are arguably less perplexing than the assumptions and effects of Sybylla's performance. Whereas Longfellow's poem at least signals the historical practice of slavery, slavery is aestheticized at this moment in Franklin's text as a class and race specific form of entertainment that promises to form the basis of a profession that could render her "independent" (161). After all, it is this performance that prompts Sybylla's cousin to comment on her fine voice,

and prompts him to plan a “brilliant” career for Sybylla on the stages of Sydney. Hence, Sybylla’s imagined career, facilitated by her admittedly provisional class position whose gender ideologies she challenges, is also expressly constituted through an aestheticized economy of slavery.

Furthermore, immediately following this performance of Longfellow’s poem, Sybylla mimics “a fat old Irish woman” by making herself up, replete with “a smudge of dirt” on her face (85).<sup>8</sup> She then performs a skit that commences with the speech: “shure, sir, seeing it was a good bhoj yez were afther to run errants, it’s meself that has brought this youngsther for yer inspection” (85–86). Again, this performance may seem harmless enough, but in the context of examining the text’s operations of colonial displacement, it is of great consequence.

Sybylla’s theatricalities seems to affirm the Australian Girl’s class position by unifying her maternal relatives at Caddagat: “Uncle Jay-Jay was laughing like fun; even aunt Helen deigned to smile; and Everard was looking on with critical interest” (86). This point is crucial because Sybylla’s own class claims appear somewhat provisional on the basis of her immediate family’s supposed decline from swelldom to peasantry, and the concurrent rise of the *nouveau riche*.

Indeed, as Ken Buckley and Ted Wheelwright argue in their study on settler capitalism in Australia: “by the end of the [nineteenth] century a new rural petty (*petit*) bourgeoisie was emerging, and class alignments were changing. The position of selectors (small farmers) was shifting and ambiguous” (9). Furthermore, as Paula Hamilton points out: “in the period 1880 to 1900 ... women’s role in the economy was being defined, and female servants increasingly left live-in domestic service for factory employment or unpaid work in the home” (9). These class shifts eschewed and called into question those ancestral lines that are explicitly gendered in Franklin’s text—you will recall that it is Sybylla’s mother who can trace her aristocratic lineage—but which are ultimately confirmed.

Before this argument can be elaborated in more detail, what is imperative to note in relation to these debates is that “for most of the nineteenth century at least one-third of the working-class was of Irish origin,” as Buckley and Wheelwright argue (5). Furthermore, “reservations about the Irish component of the Australian community were high,” accord-

ing to Fritz Clemens (57). Clemens's assertion is supported by the observation that innumerable jokes, cartoons and narratives lampooning the working-class Irish were published in settler journals and newspapers including *The Dawn*, the *Bulletin* and the *Melbourne Punch*. They took as their prompt the English press, which responded to political agitation for Home Rule in Ireland by presenting the Irish labouring-classes "as the most savage, most desperate and most uncivilized people on the face of the earth," as Richard Lebow has argued (46). It would seem that the Australian Aborigines were not the only colonized subjects to be accorded this dubious privilege and, meaningfully, such representations of the Irish relied on value-laden racial figures that encoded them as black and, by implication of the logic, barbaric.

So, if the English press drew on racial hierarchies to render ineffectual protests against the ongoing colonialization of Ireland, what is their function in Franklin's text, a book that is hardly interested in Irish colonial politics? As Hamilton suggests, representations of the "brutish" Irish in Australia "reveal[ed] considerable conflict and an institution under strain" (10), and that institution under strain is the colonial class system. Hence, it is of particular interest that the settler Australian Girl in Franklin's novel deliberately smudges her face with dirt—"blackfacing"—while mimicking a working-class Irish woman. Not only does it say much about the flexibility of colonial figures. It also suggests the importance of race in the establishment, or rather re-establishment, of this Australian Girl's class position.

Sybylla's "blackfacing" takes on great significance when considered in relation to the Irish M'Swat family, for whom the Australian Girl later unwillingly works. Sybylla's move from the Caddagat station, where she confidently mimics the blackened Irish working-class woman, to the M'Swat homestead, where she is called on to take up a position not entirely dissimilar to the one she mocks through her performance, gives some pause. It suggests a radical inversion of the class-based relations of power on which Sybylla's mimicry depends, and the text works to reinstate this class order by appealing again to ideologies of race.

Sybylla pledges to relate her time at Barney's Gap, the homestead of the *nouveau riche* M'Swat family, with the fidelity and sincerity that

Lawson praised, declaring that: “I will paint it truthfully—letter for letter as it was” (231). Notably, the very idea that the truth is painted undermines the investment in the unproblematic referentiality of language that Sybylla’s determination to recount her experiences “letter for letter” implies. This detail is crucial for the reason that the assumptions which inform her mimicry of the Irish woman shapes the language Sybylla calls on to represent the M’Swat family. For example, Sybylla declares that:

on account of ignorance and slatternliness, [the children] were the dirtiest urchins I have ever seen, and were so ragged that those parts of them which should have been covered were exposed to view. The majority of them had red hair and wide hanging-open mouths. (232)

The descriptions of the M’Swat children evoke stock evolutionary ideas of savage primitivism with their overhanging jaws and grotesque, improperly attired bodies. These figures also generate an uneasy anxiety in the Australian Girl that strikingly contrasts with her assured impersonation of the working-class Irish servant. She records that: “One wild horrified glance at the dirt, squalor, and total benightedness that met me on every side, and I trembled in every limb with suppressed emotion and the frantic longing to get back to Caddagat which possessed me” (233). This sensationalistic account of Sybylla’s first meeting with the M’Swats, which recalls the “ethnographic encounter” that functions as the tropological centrepiece of settler romance adventures and rehearses what Anne McClintock has identified as the imperialist notion of “domestic degeneracy” (52–53), partly accords Sybylla a position of virtuous authority that is connected with the class specificities of Caddagat. Moreover, it is racially articulated.

As they scramble to describe the new governess to their eldest brother, Peter, who had been absent from the house on Sybylla’s arrival, the M’Swat children offer him the following observations:

“Wor’s she like?”

“Oh, a rale little bit of a thing, not as big as Lizer!”

“And, Peter, she hes teeny little hands, as wite as snow, like that woman in the picter ma got off of the tea.” ...

“She ain’t like ma. She’s fat up here, and goes in like she’d break in the middle, Peter.”

“Great scissors! she must be a flyer,” said Peter. “I’ll bet she’ll make you sit up, Jimmy.”

“I’ll make *her* sit up,” retorted Jimmy, who came next to Lizer. “She thinks she’s a toff, but she’s only old Melvyn’s darter, that pa has to give money to.”

“Peter,” said another, “her face ain’t got them freckles on like yours, and it ain’t dark like Lizer’s. It’s reel white, and pinky around here.”

“I bet she won’t make me knuckle down to her, no matter wot colour she is,” returned Peter, in a surly tone. (237–238; original emphasis)

The presumption of whiteness as a marker of authority and moral superiority, an axiom of colonial racial ideologies, is the detail that the M’Swat children identify with Sybylla. However, they also challenge this hierarchy and the power relations it energizes. Peter, for example, forcefully proclaims that he will not “knuckle down” on account of the “colour” of the new governess who is “wite as snow.” From this, it is equally meaningful that the children, with their freckled and dark faces, are themselves encoded as not white and unclean, just as the Irish woman Sybylla mimics is marked as black. This figuring is consolidated by a letter Sybylla writes to her mother in which she states that Barney’s Gap is a “Black’s Camp” (257). With this comparison, the Australian Girl brings to mind Jane Haizelip’s statement, with its construction and identification of Aborigines as dirty and uncivilised, even as the principal reason for the activation of racial hierarchies here is the confirmation of Sybylla’s otherwise provisional class position in settler Australia.

Even before she arrives at Barney’s Gap, Sybylla’s imaginings of the M’Swats recall the dirtying or blackening involved in her mimicry of the Irish woman. Sybylla conjectures: “Even if they [the M’Swats] were dirty, they would surely be willing to improve if I exercized tact in intro-

ducing a few measures" (232). With her prognostication "fulfilled" by her initial meeting with the family and with her whiteness recognized, if contested, by the M'Swat children, Sybylla goes on to instruct them in their dress, manners and table etiquette for which, Sybylla notes: "I was insulted by their father" (248). However, Sybylla eventually overcomes this resistance by violently superintending the conduct of one of the M'Swat children: she strikes him with a "switch" (253).

Importantly, this disciplinary effort contrasts with Lucy Melvyn's hope that the "M'Swat's [*sic*] will tame her [Sybylla]" (245), a desire that recalls Sybylla's "savage" and "wild" protests. Moreover, it neatly brings together the gender and class concerns of the text. After successfully reprimanding the young boy's "uncivilised" behaviours, Sybylla states: "I knew I had won" (254). Sybylla refutes masculine power and, together with the colonial civilizing mission and the racial relations these undertakings activate and depend on, Sybylla is endorsed as "properly" middle-class in the face of economic circumstances to the contrary. In other words, race is a means by which to represent and resolve class conflict. Sybylla is white because she is an "authentic" Australian middle-class subject. In contrast, the M'Swats are encoded as black because they are colonial *parvenus*. It is not white subjects who are fictive in settler Australia, Franklin's text suggests, but rather Irish middle-class aspirants whose fictiveness finds expression through race.

Hence, these racial metaphors do not simply serve as an independent discursive field through which class conflict is represented. They function as figures in a nascent nationalist discourse—Sybylla is an Australian Girl, after all. But they do so at the same time that they give expression to, and do the ideological work of, this text's otherwise unspoken colonial unconscious.

Indeed, much of the critical attention of postcolonial studies has focused, quite rightly, on the ways in which those subjects marked as other were constructed as such by colonizing cultures. Yet what this essay has attempted to point out is the ways in which colonial ideologies take on deviant forms, transferring their significances to tropes in cultural productions such as Franklin's text. These colonial discourses, which elaborate specific material economies, are nevertheless far-fetched: they may

be reinvented with various manifestations and material consequences across historical and geopolitical contexts, and the ideological power of this arrangement is demonstrable to the degree that the tropes around which class anxieties and the feminist commitments of Franklin's text turn are mechanisms of colonial discourse *de facto*.

With its wide-reach *My Brilliant Career* circulated these operations of displacement and their effects under the guise of articulating uncertainties over dominant gender and class orders in settler Australia. The fact that scholarly engagements with this cultural production have declined to acknowledge or comment on these processes suggests just how useful the ideological technique of displacement is for the material and discursive economies of colonialism that might otherwise be under strain in the face of nascent nationalism. Of course, what this also suggests is that at the same time nationalist projects sought to reject the authority the centre of empire presumed for itself, they also often involved ideological premises that were similar to the structures of power they apparently opposed. They too excluded and denigrated indigenous subjects, and continue to operate "extensive systems of exclusion and exploitation of both "indigenous" and "alien" people ... through a variety of coercive, ideological, legal, administrative and cooptative mechanisms," as Daiva Stasiulis and Nira Yuval-Davis point out (4). The effects of these systems are now being explicitly articulated: the 1997 *Bringing Them Home* report, which includes testimonies by Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, painfully registers the devastating and *ongoing* damage of British colonialism and neo-colonialism in Australia on indigenous subjects and social relations. That these processes continue to operate in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, not least as a consequence of the lack of critical attention they receive in their disparate forms, makes a punctilious elucidation of their multiple configurations, including the tropes and their textual representations that I have sought to discuss here, all the more necessary.

## Notes

- 1 The 'squattocracy' is a term that denotes, some times derogatorily, the landed classes of colonial Australia.
- 2 See Ward. For a feminist critique of masculine nationalist ideologies, see Lake.

- 3 For example, see Hooton, 291–292.
- 4 For example, see Boldrewood, 34.
- 5 Here I have in mind the adventure romances of Rosa Campbell Praed and J.D. Hennessey, among others.
- 6 See Ahmed.
- 7 For discussions on some of the wide-ranging implications of this decision, the Native Title Act of 1993, and the 1996 Wik decision, see Attwood; Rowse and Murray; Groot; Hiley; National Indigenous Working Group on Native Title.
- 8 The now familiar theories of mimicry that Homi Bhabha and others have thoroughly theorized, cannot accommodate this particular mimic mode which sees a white settler woman mimic primitive Irishness in order to shore up her otherwise provisional class position in the colonial economy.

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