

“We have to learn to love imperially”: Love in Late Colonial and Federation Australian Romance Novels

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Abstract: This article explores Australian romance fiction from the 1880s to 1930s to contemplate how Australian women writers conceptualized romantic love, gender relations, marriage, and the role of the romantic couple within the nation and British Empire. It argues that short stories about love and romance novels prior to Australian Federation (1901) tended to be more pessimistic about the outcome of romantic love in the colonies; both male and female writers of love stories were too aware of the hardships that befell women in the colonies, especially along the frontier. After Federation, however, many of the obstacles to love that had developed in the colonial romance persisted, but in the post-Federation romance novel women writers began to imagine that Australian culture, environment, and character – particularly the two heroic national types, the “Australian Girl” and the “Coming Man” – were ultimately sufficient to overcome such obstacles. Thus post-Federation romance novels are more likely to have happy endings. In these romances, a successful marriage between an Australian and a Briton also served the higher purpose of either nation- or empire-building.

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In Mary Bradford Whiting's *A Daughter of the Empire* (1919), Christina Strafford travels to England after her father's death to live with his cousin, Lady Agatha Strafford. The young Australian woman is dismayed to find the Mother Country "a little fussed-up place where you can't so much as turn round without knocking something over with your skirts". England is a place where people brood over petty problems and imagined slights because they "have too many little things in their lives and too much time to spend on the little things" (Whiting 55 and 131). Although Desmond, the younger son of the aristocratic Strafford family, falls in love with her, Christina—an outback girl brought up in a mining camp who has dealt resourcefully with floods, fires and other natural and human disasters—finds herself generally regarded as an uncouth Colonial and is later banished from the manor because of a silly misunderstanding. Undaunted by her relatives' rejection, she turns her energy to helping a neighbor run a hospital for wounded men when World War I breaks out. It is only after she saves the Straffords from death during a Zeppelin bombing raid that Lady Agatha begins to warm towards her. By the end of this romance novel, the war has claimed the life of Lady Agatha's adored eldest son and left her younger son Desmond an amputee, but it has also left Desmond heir to the ancient baronial estate and freed him to marry Christina. An aristocratic family slowly succumbing to senescence as a result of its sclerotic beliefs is thus reinvigorated by a fresh injection of Australian blood. Romance revives an English family, with far-reaching consequences for the British Empire. In a purely ideological affirmation not just of Australia's ties and loyalty to Britain, but Australia's ongoing importance within the Empire, Desmond declares to Christina:

I have thought sometimes that you and I have been brought together and allowed to love each other not for ourselves alone, but for some special end. I am a typical son of the old world, living and rooted in the traditions of the past, and you are a typical daughter of the new world, vivid and vigorous and full of the interests of the present, and from those two points of view will spring the hope of the future. (Whiting 286-287)

Whiting's novel draws together a number of themes that had developed in Australian romance novels from the 1880s – the late colonial period – to the decades immediately following Federation: the moment when, on January 1, 1901, six separate self-governing British colonies on the southern continent federated to form a new nation, the Commonwealth of Australia. Christina Strafford exemplifies the superiority of the so-called "Australian Girl" – a new type of femininity forged in the young nation – over her English counterparts whose gender ideals, social mores and behavior seem unsuited to the birth of a new nation at the dawn of a new century (Lee 129-132). However, the assertion of national superiority over the Motherland is tempered by a simultaneous recognition of, and cultural deference to, the importance of the English social order, even as this is gently critiqued by Whiting. The success of the "Australian Girl" depends upon her marrying into the landed gentry, and the man she falls in love with exemplifies that class at its imperial best. Despite Christina's love for Australia, the death of her father launches her on a quest for her family's cultural, racial and historical roots in England – a quest that will bring her the fulfilment of romantic love and a new family.

This article explores romance fiction from the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century to consider how Australian women writers conceptualized romantic love, gender

relations, marriage, and the role of the romantic couple within the nation and British Empire. I suggest that the difficulties of achieving romantic love and a happy marriage in settler colonial society were due to the vulnerability of immigrant women in colonial Australia; the problems created by misogynistic masculinity in a frontier society; the instability of identity in a rapidly expanding immigrant and settler society; and the threat of interracial relationships between English immigrants and Aboriginal or part-Aboriginal protagonists. Unhappy love stories dominated colonial romances in the period leading up to Federation, but Federation brought forth a burst of patriotic sentiment and a deliberate attempt in romance novels to craft new relationships that both affirmed ties of loyalty with Britain, while simultaneously emphasizing the superiority of the youthful, vigorous, entrepreneurial new nation, to suggest the cultural and racial benefits brought by former colonials intermarrying into the Old World. Romantic love achieves a happy ending in post-Federation romances primarily because of the superiority of the Australian Girl over the British gentlewoman, as others have argued (Giles 1988 and 1998, Jones, Lee, Sheridan 1995, and Gelder and Weaver); the superiority of the “Coming Man” – the model of new Australian masculinity – over his British counterpart; the redemptive power of the mythical Australian Outback or Bush; the settler colonial work ethic developed among Australian heroes and heroines; and the radical redefinition of Australian “mateship” – traditionally confined to men – to include women in a form of egalitarian romantic partnership. The rewards of successful romantic love stories were not merely personal; they contributed to the building of the young Australian nation and revived the British Empire.

Unhappy endings and other obstacles to romantic love

As Ken Gelder and Rachael Weaver’s *Anthology of Colonial Australian Romance Fiction* shows, Australian love stories from the 1880s to the 1920s have been concerned as much with the failure of romantic love to flourish in the colonies as with stories of successful courtship, love and marriage.[1] Among the earliest Australian love stories identified by Gelder and Weaver is “Hal’s” “The Desolate Homestead” (1866, Gelder and Weaver 13-27), which recounts the shipboard ruin of Mark Stanford’s wife (never named) as she emigrates to Australia. The sexual vulnerability of immigrant English women was well-documented, and it was not uncommon for these women to become pregnant on the voyage out to the Australian colonies. For this reason, Richard White observed, the “attitude to female immigrants” among Australian settlers was especially “harsh, since it embodied Victorian attitudes to sex as well as class. J.D. Lang’s view that female immigrants were turning New South Wales into ‘a sink of prostitution’ was a common one among the colonial bourgeoisie” (White 38) even though there was a concerted effort by immigration programs such as the Female Middle Class Emigration Society of the 1860s to send middle-class women out to the colonies. In “Hal’s” story, Mrs. Stanford leaves England to join her husband on his property in the Australian outback but en route to Australia, she falls in love with and is seduced by Arthur Headleigh, the degenerate son of a wealthy squatter (that is, a pastoralist expropriating huge tracts of land simply by dint of being the first European authorized by British legal processes to settle that land). Headleigh had been

sent back to England to be educated and civilized, but the vices and pleasures of the imperial metropole have corrupted him instead. Where sexual attraction would be a marker of “true love” in twentieth century romance novels, desire was often regarded suspiciously by nineteenth-century romance writers who constructed it as the false and often fatal alternative to love. Mrs. Stanford is persuaded to abandon her husband and to live with Headleigh as his mistress. When Headleigh inevitably tires of her and abandons her, Mark Stanford, who still loves his wife, arranges for her to be looked after until she dies. His wife’s infidelity has not only broken Mark; it has also deprived the colony of a valuable worker and pioneer because “Through all their discomforts, and they had many, through all the miseries of the rainy season, Mark was sustained and invigorated by one strong incentive to endurance and energy, and that was the all powerful one – *Love*” (14). When love fails, so does his incentive to cultivate the frontier; he simply abandons his homestead. Mrs. Stanford’s betrayal of her husband is doubly a betrayal of the nation because she undermines his nation-building efforts. If Stanford’s love for his wife is supposed to form a sharp contrast with Headleigh’s fleeting passion, it is too weak to enable him to reconcile with her. He is too bound by the social conventions of the time to countenance living with his adulterous wife, and he refuses to see her again. Only at her death does he realize that since he loved her, he might well have made other choices.

Mrs. Stanford falls in love with Headleigh because he is handsome and charming, but also because he misrepresents himself to her. In an immigrant society so geographically remote from the Mother Country, and during a time when transport and communication were slow, fraudsters could quite easily assume false identities and misrepresent themselves for social and economic advantages, as Kirsten McKenzie (2010) has shown in the case of the convicted forger John Dow who successfully impersonated Viscount Lascelles, eldest son of the Earl of Harewood, in New South Wales during the 1830s. The instability or uncertainty of identity in settler colonial society could thus form an obstacle to the success of love, courtship and marriage, especially in colonial romances. In Mrs. Mannington Caffyn’s short story “Victims of Circe” (1891, in Gelder and Weaver 59-91), a very fashionable, sophisticated lady turns up in an Australian country town with her step-brother and together they charm people in the town. She proceeds to infatuate several men who want to marry her. However, this “woman of the world” turns out not to be a lady but an actress, and her step-brother is actually her husband. In another scenario of duplicity, Rosa Praed’s romance novel *The Maid of the River: An Australian Girl’s Love Story* (1905) recounts the story of a country girl seduced by the Englishman Alex Stewart who promises her marriage but abandons her after she gives birth to their child because, he later reveals, he already has a wife (261). In such cases, women’s feelings of love are not to be trusted. These women are inclined to fall for the deceptions of sophisticated gentlemen – often English – who pretend to a social status or moral character they do not actually possess, who woo these heroines with words and romance, and then cause them to overlook the true “salt of the earth” types of men whose love is less thrilling but more enduring: rough but honest Australian bushmen such as Mark Stanford in “The Desolate Homestead”, or the stolid but ever dependable Willy Chase in Praed’s *The Maid of the River*.

While the Australian romance novel is clearly an English import, there was a perception that English mores could be an impediment to love in the colonies. Romantic protagonists who fell in love with English immigrants found themselves thwarted by the ties of the English past, while English values and morals were sometimes equated with

emotional dishonesty and a consequent lack of authenticity or genuineness in romantic relationships. Mura Leigh's short story, "A Romance of Coma" (1878, in Gelder and Weaver 28-36), exemplifies the extinguishing effects of the English past on love in the colonies. Leigh recounts the story of Mary Guthrie, a pretty postmistress in the country town of Coma who falls in love with Hugh Douglas, a new squatter lately arrived from England. Their love, however, remains unfulfilled. When his sister and her husband visit the colonies, they bring with them Hugh's fiancée – a distant relative for whom he feels only mild affection. In England, he had believed this to be a sufficient basis for marriage. When he emigrates to Australia he finally realises what love and passion might be. In the end, however, the obligations contracted in England outweigh Hugh's love for Mary; he proceeds with an unhappy marriage while Mary becomes increasingly despondent and eventually leaves the town.

Yet colonial Australian society was by no means regarded as naturally conducive to romantic love and marriage, or automatically superior to British society. One of the main reasons why love fails in colonial romances from the mid- to late nineteenth century is because of the misogynistic and irresponsible masculinity that developed along the frontier, a masculinity antithetical to the notion of the domesticated husband who loves his wife. In Australian history, the frontier/outback/bush experience has often been eulogized as the essence of a masculinized Australian culture. Russel Ward's *The Australian Legend* (1958) famously contended that Australian egalitarianism developed as a result of the independence, anti-authoritarianism and spirit of mateship developed in the bush. This idealistic view of the bush and the values it fosters ignores the threat of white men to Aboriginal people, and also to white women. As Marilyn Lake has argued:

In frontier societies white men roamed free, but men's mobility seemed to spell women's misfortune. In feminist discourse, mobile men were dangerous men and the wandering members of the British race — the nomad tribe, the swagmen, the men on the track — became a bunch of marauding white men. (Lake 1996, 12)

The danger the mobility of itinerant white men posed to romantic love can be seen in J.S. Borlase's short story "Twelve Miles Broad" (1885, in Gelder and Weaver), where the romantic hero visits his fiancée Gretchen and her father, Matthew Fallon, a German wine-maker, on a very hot Christmas Day. Their Christmas celebration is interrupted by a dirty swagman who wants to join them for a meal. When he is offered money to buy himself lunch at a nearby bush inn instead, rather than the hospitality and company he wants, he takes his leave but avenges himself by setting fire to the bush and destroying the Fallons' property. The narrator manages to save Gretchen but her father dies in the terrible conflagration that Christmas Day.

In many Australian romance novels, masculine frontier culture leads to physical violence and abuse, as in Mary Gaunt's *Dave's Sweetheart* (1894). Of all the romance novels produced during this period, *Dave's Sweetheart*, set in the goldfields of Victoria, considers love at greatest length and is particularly bleak in its assessment of the failures of love on the frontier and of marriage as a degrading, soul-destroying option for women. This would be an opinion shared by some of the most famous early twentieth century Australian women writers such as Miles Franklin (*My Brilliant Career*, 1901) or Henry Handel

Richardson (*The Getting of Wisdom*, 1910; see Bird and McInherny). In Gaunt's novel, Jenny Carter, the daughter of a publican, is in love with the dissolute miner Black Dave Anderson who loves nobody but himself. Jenny holds high ideals about love. For Jenny, love is not merely an emotion or passion for a man; it is unquestioning, self-sacrificing, and unconditional – a conventionally Victorian understanding of love, as Karen Lystra (1989) and Steven Seidman (1991) have shown. Love is, in many ways, blind to reason, but it confers meaning upon life and it has the potential to distinguish Jenny's life from the dozens of worn-out women around her. To Jenny, "love must needs be all-embracing, must demand nothing in return. Before her the lives of the only two women she had known intimately stretched out in their dreary hopeless length, and dumbly, with all her strength, her soul protested against a like fate for herself" (Gaunt 27). Love in such a society is dangerous because it makes women vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Because Jenny does not understand "her own value in a land where women of any sort were scarce, and a pretty unmarried one a valuable commodity" (Gaunt 7), she allows Dave to manipulate her into marrying a police sergeant who is hunting for Dave after the miner killed a German on the gold fields. Jenny eventually abandons her marriage and elopes with Dave, living on the run with him, enduring his physical violence and verbal abuse, until Dave tires of her and leaves her to die in the bush. Australian frontier culture could thus form an impediment to women's opportunity for love. Marilyn Lake has argued that "For white men, the frontier was a fantasy of freedom; for white feminists, it was a focus of fear and anxiety, a place beyond their ken, where undomesticated men turned feral threatened, rather than secured civilisation" (Lake 1996, 13). While most of these romance novelists did not identify themselves as feminists, they nevertheless shared the same anxieties about the dangers women encountered in frontier regions.

For the heroines of colonial romances, the frontier is also characterized by irresponsible fathers and absent mothers who put their daughters in untenable situations where it is difficult for them to marry for love. In Broda Reynolds' *The Selector Girl* (1917), Marion Pike, the "selector" (homesteader) girl of the title, has no desire ever to marry because of her father's abusive treatment of her mother. She tells one of her suitors that a "dear, pretty little wife, gentle and submissive" is "something I could never be with any man, not – not now. I've seen so much of father, and I've longed so often to be in Mum's shoes for just five minutes now and then so that I could flatten him" (44). Dell Ferris, the heroine of Mabel Forrest's *The Wild Moth* (1924), fares even worse initially; she meets the hero when her father tries to kill her with an axe in a drunken rage, and the hero is forced to shoot him. Both novels end happily with the heroines marrying noble, decent and "wholesome" men who are notably different from other men on the frontier, but one of the obstacles these heroes have to overcome is the heroines' aversion to marriage and their belief that a happy domestic life is impossible to achieve because of what Marilyn Lake (1986) calls the misogynistic "masculinism" of colonial Australian frontier culture.

One of the things that made men so dangerous on the frontier was the rampant alcoholism that accompanied the culture of mateship and the concomitant rejection of domesticity, either in the form of lifelong bachelorhood or the not-infrequent abandonment of wives and children (Lake 1986, Spearritt, and Grimshaw et al. chapters 5 and 6). It was for this reason that the Australian feminist movement of the late nineteenth century developed close ties with the international Women's Christian Temperance Union, which originated in the United States and reached Australian shores in the late 1880s (Grimshaw

200). This issue was not emphasized as much in colonial romance novels, but in several post-Federation romance novels the hero's propensity towards alcoholism constitutes the most significant obstacle to romantic courtship and marriage. Justin, the hero of Marie Bjelke Petersen's *The Captive Singer* confesses to Iris that he is a "drunkard" who has ruined his life and squandered his privileges and opportunities in England because of his addiction to alcohol. Only after he emigrated to Tasmania was he able to live a "clean" and healthy life and recover a measure of self-respect, but he fears that if he ever leaves Tasmania and returns to reclaim his aristocratic title in England, he will succumb to temptation and revert to alcoholism again. This, he feels, forms an obstacle to love and marriage because he is "not worthy of such a gift" despite Iris's assurances that her love for him remains unchanged. Where Iris is able to overlook Justin's alcoholic past (until God miraculously cures him through prayer in the Australian bush), the heroine of Mabel Forrest's *Hibiscus Heart* (1927) finds it much harder to disregard the hero's occasional bouts of drunkenness: "Unlike most bush girls, she could not take what they called the state of 'being potted' in a sporting spirit. Even if she smiled, as in duty bound, deprecatingly, in her soul she shuddered" (178). The greatest transformation in this novel occurs in Miranda when she realizes that if she wants to be married to Ted, she has to force herself to ignore his occasional lapses when he is out drinking with the boys.

The final obstacle to romantic love in love stories from this period was the racial threat posed by Aborigines. In the mid-nineteenth century, the threat consisted of Aboriginal attacks on settlers in the outback, but such external threats could create the opportunity for strengthening romantic ties if the couple survived the violence. Douglas Sladen's "The Inside Station" (1866, in Gelder and Weaver 202-214) features a "plucky", "pretty", graceful "bush-bred" girl who "looked from head to foot almost as much like a man as a woman" and disdains men, especially Englishmen. She is brought to see the error of her misanthropy when a "new chum" – an English immigrant – saves her from an Aboriginal attack on her bush station in "the Never Never country". The attack was a revenge massacre for the abduction of an Aboriginal girl by a white man. In return, the white men massacred the Aborigines. At the end of the cycle of retaliatory violence, "There was a tribe less of the fast-disappearing aborigines of Australia" (212), but in the author's view, this is merely a footnote to the successful conclusion of the Englishman's courtship. The racial threat to the success of white romance could also come from the possibility of miscegenation, especially in post-Federation novels. In Mabel Forrest's *The Wild Moth* (1924), a part-Aboriginal woman referred to in the novel only as "the handsome half-caste" tries to create trouble between the heroine Dell Ferris and the hero Tom Resoult, because she is in love with Tom. Not that the "half-caste" really knows what love is. Because she is not a pure white woman, she does not understand love, nor do white men really feel love for her. Forrest writes that "only one thing looked out of men's eyes at her. It was Lust, not Love" (4). Being in love with Tom, the "half-caste" makes plans to kill Dell, but the heroine is saved by another Aboriginal woman who reveals that the "half-caste" is her cousin. When her racial heritage is discovered, the "half-caste" gives up all pretensions to marrying a white man, thinking that: "Had she been Eurasian, half Maori, Samoan, it would have been different – but Australian aboriginal in Australia! It was like negro blood in America. And it was 'no good'" (192). Although the men in the novel (apart from the hero Tom) might desire her, they would never marry her. In the end, she runs away into the bush, falls into a

river and drowns. It seems that the colonial or Federation love story could only ever be a white story.

Clearly, the obstacles arising specifically from the Australian colonial context and from frontier life are many, and many of these issues continue into the post-Federation period. What, then, makes love, courtship and marriage succeed in Australian romance novels of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century?

Happy endings and reasons why love succeeds

The Australian colonial romance novel began to take shape in the 1880s at a time when the idea of being distinctively “Australian” gripped the collective imagination and intercolonial talks proposing a federation of the six colonies got underway. Australian literary culture of the *fin-de-siècle* was dominated by the nationalist, anti-imperialist, masculinist *Bulletin* magazine which championed the mythical ideals of the Australian bush while pushing an anti-feminist, racist agenda summarized in its masthead slogan, “Australia for the White Man”. Despite the fact that the *Bulletin* in the early days ran a “women’s page” and published the work of women writers, the periodical later gained a reputation for its masculinism. The cluster of male writers who became associated with the “Bulletin school” of Australian literary culture had little time for women, the romance genre or Britain. Yet Australian women who wrote fiction during this period subscribed to its nationalist, bush-celebrating ethos while striving to insert women into a national narrative from which they were excluded (see Bird’s discussion of Miles Franklin), and being conscious that although their fiction often appeared first as serial publications in Australian weekly periodicals (Sheridan 1986, 51), British readers would eventually constitute their biggest market. Indeed, some Australian women writers including romance novelists such as Rosa Praed and Alice Grant Rosman resided in London and wrote many of their Australian novels in the heart of the Empire (Woollacott *passim*). The result was an attempt to write love stories which foregrounded the distinctiveness of the Australian culture, character and environment, while weaving these stories back into the fabric of the British Empire.

That romance novelists in the far-flung outposts of Empire should be “writing back” to the imperial center was inevitable, for London was the center of Anglophone book-publishing and the Publishers’ Association of Great Britain controlled the publication and distribution of books throughout the Empire (Teo 2012). In many colonial and early Federation romance novels involving British and Australian protagonists, romantic love succeeds *because of*, rather than *despite*, the specific Australianness of the characters, environment, gender relations, or cultural values. The insistence by a number of authors that the Australian ingredient in the romance novel made a happy ending more likely was as much a response to insecurity about British condescension as to nascent feelings of truculent nationalism. Many love stories began by emphasizing the ways in which the British misperceived and did not bother to understand Australians. Mrs. Mannington Caffyn’s short story “Victims of Circe” (1891, Gelder and Weaver 59-91) summed up Australian resentment of British attitudes in the following words:

To the well-constituted British mind Australia is invariably connected either with sheep or convicts. If a rich Australian goes home and dispenses his coin as befits him, we give him the benefit of the doubt, and talk sheep; if he is not quite rich enough, or sticks to his gettings, we make a wild effort to find out what his father or his more remote ancestor was sent out for. (60)

Against such stereotypes of Australians, Australian romance novelists constructed counter-stereotypes particularly of the English upper classes. Cold, snobbish, ignorant, condescending, overly formal, hidebound in tradition, relics of a time gone by, and fairly ineffectual in the modern age, they needed to be shaken out of their cultural stupor by Australian vigor and enterprise. In Alice Grant Rosman's post-Federation romance, *Miss Bryde of England* (1915), the English heroine Helen Bryde is considered by her relatives to be on the shelf and cannot support herself because she has not been brought up to do anything "useful". When her Australian cousin Katherine visits, Helen is particularly supercilious. She knows nothing about Australia, thinks of it "as a wild and desert country, full of impossible adventures", imagines her uncle, a Judge of the Supreme Court of South Australia, "distributing justice to dark ladies and gentlemen dressed in war-paint", but agrees with a neighbor that "Colonials are always so delightful" (15-16). She tries to patronize Katherine, little realizing that her Australian cousin's knowledge of the world, cultural richness and experience of life far exceed her own. But it is only through Katherine that Helen gradually realizes how unsatisfactory her life has been. Association with the Australians humbles her, changes her attitude towards others and makes it possible for her to fall in love and to be loved in return.

Katherine is, of course, an example of the "Australian Girl" that so many scholars (Giles 1988 and 1998, Sheridan 1995, Dalziell, Gelder and Weaver) have discussed in relation to the colonial romance, for it was above all this figure of Australian womanhood that distinguished Australians from Britons, and made it possible for Anglo-Australian love stories to end happily. The Australian Girl developed as a national type towards the end of the nineteenth century, a categorization based on the dubious science of the day that tried to descry physical, psychological, moral and social characteristics in particular "races" (White 64). As Richard White has observed,

when visitors commented on the Australian girl, they praised her freshness, beauty, good sense and lack of affectation. The colonial Miss was the salvation of English visitors trapped into endless colonial balls and tea parties. What delighted most observers was what they called her independence. (77)

Much of the extant Australian scholarship (Giles 1988 and 1998, Sheridan 1995, Dalziell, Gelder and Weaver) on the colonial romance novel has focused on the Australian Girl because colonial women writers used this figure to insert themselves into a masculine narrative of nationhood and national identity that deliberately marginalized or excluded women (Sheridan 1986 and 1995). Giles argues that colonial romance novels contributed to the creation of women as heroic "national types" (1988, 223) because romantic heroines were exemplified by the "Australian Girl" – often motherless, wild, free, innocent, pure and symbolic of the new nation. This figure has been the subject of Tanya Dalziell's (2004)

interrogation of the role of Australian women romance writers in furthering the objectives of capitalist settler colonialism, as well as Ken Gelder and Rachel Weaver's (2010) suggestion that the colonial romance "provided a crucial site for the struggle" over what Australian womanhood should mean: "social restraint and maturity", sublimating sexual and other desires to social and familial responsibilities as a subject engaged in the nation-building process, or "freedom and possibility" (2-4). Both models resonated with the emerging nation as it tried to assert its independence from Britain. In the era around Federation, the heroine contended "with the idea of being Australian, in either the national or the colonial sense, and the ways in which this intersects with her quest for love and the process of her formation as a heroine feminine subject" (Giles 1998, 171). Far from being an antiquated colonial product of British culture, as contemporary male writers and later Australian critics contended dismissively (Giles 1988, 226-227), Australian women's romances actively contributed to the cultural imagining of the new nation-state.

Giles has traced the development of the Australian Girl as romantic heroine in several colonial love stories, beginning with Rosa Praed's *An Australian Heroine* (1880, published under Praed's maiden name R. Murray Prior) which features Esther Haggart as the eponymous heroine, "a daughter of the bush with a special spiritual quality" who astonishes her English relatives with her "outstanding moral integrity and stamina ... fortified by her Australian origins" (Giles 1988, 232). Praed would go on to develop an impossibly idealistic image of the Australian Girl as romantic heroine in "The Bushman's Love Story" (1909, Gelder and Weaver, 251-269). In this short story set in London, one of the Australian characters praises the heroine Theodora Swifte who is currently making her mark in London society, particularly in suffrage circles. Theodora is

just my model of what a woman ought to be: can talk and laugh and dance, and will have every man in the place stepping to her tune. ... Whoever else goes under, she will always come out on top. And not a bit because she sticks out for what she supposes are her rights. She don't care about rights. She smiles, and the thing is done. ... There's nothing she can't do – ride as well as any stockman, sit a buckjumper and cut out a scrubber on a cattle camp. And she can cook a dinner that you'd enjoy eating, and make her frocks – and look stunning in them too. And as for brains. Why, she's taken her M.A. degree in Sydney University, and now she's training herself to deal with the Woman Question. (256)

Gelder and Weaver (5) have observed that there is a measure of ambivalence about this quasi-feminist figure, affiliated with but also differentiated from the New Woman by the fact that although she is politically progressive and highly educated, although she has casually achieved what British women are still struggling so hard to obtain and is now teaching the British how to deal with the Woman Question, "she don't care about rights".

Other Australian Girls in post-Federation romance novels share a similarly ambivalent attitude towards feminism, partly as a result of Australia being the second country in the world (after New Zealand) to grant female suffrage to its population upon Federation. The English feminist governess in Mary Bradford Whiting's *A Daughter of the Empire* (1919) acknowledges the Australian achievement when she tells Christina Strafford: "I was forgetting that you come from Australia. Woman has asserted herself more

successfully there than we have been able to do at present. But our day is coming" (106). For Christina, that day is already here and she sees no need to go on about it. Praed's heroine in *The Maid of the River: An Australian Girl's Love Story* (1905), Marion Pike in Broda Reynold's *The Selector Girl* (1917), Christina Strafford in Whiting's *A Daughter of the Empire*, and Miranda Garry in Mabel Forrest's *Hibiscus Heart* (1927) are all Australian Girls who are beautiful, intelligent, practical, resourceful, independent, and they do not waste their lives waiting around for men to court them, pining for love. Their lives are already full and fulfilling, and this is why the heroes – British and Australian – fall in love with them. These love stories succeed because the fortitude of the Australian Girl and her work ethic (discussed below) enables the romantic couple to overcome all kinds of barriers: temporal, geographical, social, economic and cultural.

The counterpart to the Australian Girl is the Australian hero, patterned after what was known in the era around Federation as the "Coming Man", a new racial type of masculinity forged by the environment and specific Australian experiences, and characterized by "independence, manliness, a fondness for sport, egalitarianism, a dislike of mental effort, self-confidence, a certain disrespect for authority" (White 76-77). These were characteristics of the iconic Australian bushman much eulogized by the *Bulletin* magazine: a highly influential anti-imperial, nationalist literary periodical which supplied *fin-de-siècle* Australian culture with so many of its masculine stereotypes, and which denigrated romance fiction as "un-Australian or culturally deficient" (Giles 1988, 226). But in the hands of romance novelists, the hard drinking, gambling and misogyny of the bushman were substituted with characteristics that were shared by Empire-builders in other dominions who tamed the wilderness and made domestic life possible in frontier regions (Teo 2004). Praed's *The Maid of the River: An Australian Girl's Love Story* featured just such a hero in Willy Chase, the "superintendent of a station on the outblocks" who, "Like many another young Australian, bred in the backblocks, ... was a splendid, kindly, honest creature, full of pluck and common sense, but not remarkable for the finer qualities of intellect or emotion" (25). Unfortunately, this "Coming Man" lacks the glib charm and flattering words of a visiting Englishman who seduces Nuni Destiac and abandons her, unwed and with child. Willy, however, shows his sterling qualities in that he continues to show his love for her in practical ways, clearing the ground around her alcoholic father's home, "civilizing" the bush and making it possible for the Destiacs to survive. Most surprisingly for a romance novel during this period, Willy's love for Nuni enables him to overlook her affair with the Englishman and he marries Nuni regardless of her illegitimate child. Such a romance novel would be unthinkable set in England at this time, where virginal heroines who are seduced are fit for little else but a sad decline into death. In Australia, however, the qualities of the Coming Man and the Australian Girl, and the strength of their love forged through social, physical and environmental hardship, are sometimes enough to defy the conventions – social, moral and literary – and to grant Nuni and Willy a happy ending.

Romantic love also succeeds in the colonial and Federation romance novel because of the redemptive power of the Australian bush, and in this regard, women's romance novels differ in important and significant ways from other Australian literature of the period. Where colonial literature had represented women as being out of place in the Australian bush or frontier regions (an echo of the adage that "the Empire was no place for a white woman") Kay Schaffer has argued that the physical absence of women in the bush

does not mean the absence of the feminine, for the bush itself – “the Interior, the outback, the red centre, the dead heart, the desert, a wasteland” – is anthropomorphized as a harsh and unforgiving mother (Schaffer 23). In most colonial representations the bush is an object of desire, “to be possessed, conquered and tamed”, but it is “also a loathed and feared plain of exile which threatens madness and defeat. And Woman, metaphorically, resides here” (Schaffer 23). Not so, however, in colonial and Federation romance novels.

In romance novels of this period, the Australian bush purifies, transforms, strengthens, unifies, shelters lovers and enables love to succeed. Broda Reynolds’ *The Heart of the Bush* (1910) and Praed’s *Miss Jacobsen’s Chance: A Story of Australian Life* (1886) and *The Maid of the River* (1905) all feature love stories where the bush plays a significant part in forming the character of the Australian Girl or the Coming Man, uniting the lovers and developing the romantic plot. The bush can be harsh, frightening and destructive – the hero and heroine of Reynolds’ *The Heart of the Bush* get lost in the wilderness for eight days, getting caught in a bush fire and nearly dying of exposure – but those who can survive and thrive in its harsh environs are a superior species to all others and more likely than most to make love succeed. Likewise, Theodora Swifte in Praed’s “The Bushman’s Love Story” (1909) has had her character molded by the Australian bush, and she overcomes droughts, floods, agrarian recession and other difficulties to redeem the hero’s property and restore it to him. Life in the bush also permits women certain latitude in gender roles. Because Miranda Garry in Mabel Forrest’s *Hibiscus Heart* (1927) lives in the bush, she is able to take on many tasks or roles considered “masculine”, and it is she who tames the wilderness and makes a home in it, rather than her stepbrother to whom the bush property belonged. In Marie Bjelke Petersen’s *Jewelled Nights* (1923), the heroine cross-dresses as a young man in order to restore her family fortunes by engaging in mining activities in Tasmania, where she proves to be a far more successful miner than the other men. Jeanette Delamoir (2003) has argued that Bjelke Petersen subverts gender expectations through the transvestism of the heroine and “that, in the end, gender is irrelevant to the formation of the couple” (123), but this can only take place in the fluid social and cultural space of the bush.

Bjelke Petersen, a Danish immigrant, was among the most ardent promoter of the beauties and transformative influence of the Australian landscape (Alexander). Her Tasmanian romance novels published between 1917 and 1937 are “amongst the earliest literary eulogies of the State’s wild and sublime landscapes” (Haynes 2001, 62) which promote “the therapeutic power of wilderness” (Haynes 2010, 43). Bjelke Petersen’s *The Captive Singer* (1917) exemplifies the purifying effects of the bush, where the alcoholic English hero finds the lost English heroine, finds God, and finds the strength to stop drinking, thus allowing him to marry the heroine in good conscience and to resume his position as the heir to an earldom. At the end of the novel, an American woman comments that “they are the real thing; only England can produce such types!” (308), but the reader knows that without their transforming experience in the Tasmanian bush, neither would have found love nor their calling in life.

In Australian mythology, the homosocial bonds of “mateship” – more profound, more emotionally fulfilling and more enduring for men than the ties of heterosexual romantic love and the nuclear family — were forged through the experience of men along the frontier. However, Australian romance writers transformed the meaning of mateship to define it as a heterosexual companionate partnership, often held together by the hero’s and heroine’s specifically Australian work ethic. These qualities bind them together to ensure a

successful outcome for love, courtship and marriage. The discussion of work was very much in the air from the 1880s through to Federation. Australia was believed to be “a workingman’s paradise” (White 41) and this was confirmed by the landmark Harvester Judgment of 1907 whereby Justice Higgins held that employers must pay their male employees a “fair and reasonable” minimum wage sufficient to meet “the normal needs of an average employee, regarded as a human being in a civilized community” (Ex Parte H.V. McKay, 1907). In Australian love stories of this period, Australian industriousness and enterprise were singled out for comment by British characters who, because of their class privilege, were not used to working. That the Coming Man should work is hardly surprising since the Harvester Judgment enshrined a “living wage” that would enable a working man to support his family. But the Australian Girl too possessed a remarkable work ethic, one based on the pragmatic realities of colonial life, especially frontier life. As Bernice McPherson observed, Australian colonial ideas of femininity were patterned on British models, but Australian women did not accept the middle-class English notion that “it was not ‘feminine’ or ‘ladylike’ for a woman to work in paid employment outside the home” (12). Persistent labor shortage in the colonies meant that “It became acceptable, indeed desirable, for middle-class women to take on all sorts of jobs deemed unsuitable in England. And it became a model for the daughters of the household to take on responsibilities” (McPherson 13).

As McPherson has suggested, Ada Cambridge’s short story “A Sweet Day” (1897, Gelder and Weaver, 150-163) is an early example of the Australian Girl’s work ethic. Lord Thomas de Bohun, twice-married son of a duke who was “sick and tired of womenkind” comes out to Australia because “He thought a year or two of travel in a savage country, free of all the trammels of civilization, would give him a rest” (150). He is rich, idle, bored and restive, but “as soon as he escaped into the country he was all right. Clad in moleskins and a Crimean shirt, with a soft felt hat on his head, and big spurs on his heels, he galloped about at kangaroo hunts and cattle musters, a simple bushman of the bush” (150). He meets Letty Kemp, the daughter of his country host, and is fascinated by her because she isn’t interested in flirting with him. Instead, her attention is entirely absorbed by her bee-keeping and she works incredibly hard “with an energy interesting to contemplate in a person of her sex and years” (155). He is intrigued because she understands commerce and has ambitions to expand her honey business. He falls in love with her because she teaches him to be “useful”. When he marries her, this Australian Girl makes “an excellent duchess” because she manages “great households”, rears “young dukes”, and “transferred her interest in honey to the wives of her husband’s tenants”, teaching them to become financially independent themselves (163).

Alice Grant Rosman made the same point about hard-working, entrepreneurial Australians as opposed to their idle British counterparts in two of her novels. In *Miss Bryde of England* (1915), Katherine is particularly critical of the supposedly English propensity for idleness. She tells her English cousin Helen that her class:

had been brought up to do nothing, because no one ever imagined they would have any necessity to do anything. That is the general rule among your leisured classes The girls are brought up to marry, and the eldest boy to inherit the property; then when some unexpected calamity happens, they have to go and fight their way in the world without the slightest preparation

or equipment. Even if *no* calamity happens, many of the girls don't marry, and there is very little money. Then, I suppose, they become what you call decayed gentlewomen by and by. (133)

When Helen is accidentally embroiled in a silly and baseless scandal involving the local vicar, she is forced to seek help from her competent and capable Australian cousin. Under Katherine's tutelage, Helen learns secretarial skills, earns her own living, changes to become a more considerate and humble person, and thus the hero falls in love with her. The superiority of Australians' work ethic is especially emphasized in Rosman's *The Back Seat Driver* (1928) where, it is suggested, love and affection develop more naturally among Australians because they are used to hard work. Again, the English heroine Constance looks down on Australians and scorns their preoccupation with commerce. By contrast, the Englishman she is to marry, Bill Trevor, has been wounded in the First World War and as a result, "had settled down into a dull but comfortable rut of inaction" (23). Constance sees little wrong with Bill's attitude and lack of ambition, but their relationship progresses unevenly until Bill meets his Australian friend and fellow war veteran, Dick Dumaresq. Bill realizes that while he has been wasting his life and opportunities, Dick has been busily getting on with building a new world:

The Australian had his Government behind him as well as important commercial interests, for his experience with the Air Force during the war and his pioneering work at civil aviation since had given him authority. He was not in the least overawed by the magnitude of his task, and obviously looked forward to it with delight. (42)

The capacity and willingness of the Australian Girl to work qualifies her as the hero's "mate", ensuring that theirs will be a companionate marriage and partnership. In Rosman's *Miss Bryde of England*, when Katherine's husband Jim comes to London, she deals with all practical matters such as finding accommodation for them. This is because she

belonged to a nation that out of its very youth, out of the significance and struggle of pioneering days and all they meant of gallantly shared labour and effort, had evolved a saner attitude on the eternal question of the sexes, recognizing that in the fitness and equipment of its women, no less than of its men, lay the surest way to economic strength and prosperity. (25)

Rosa Praed's *Lady Bridget in the Never-Never Land* (1915) emphasizes the same point. The hero Colin McKeith is an imperialist who wants to be a Cecil Rhodes in Australia, pioneering a station in the outback, but to do so he needs the aristocratic Lady Bridget to be his "Mate" as well as his "Ideal" woman. "You don't know the Bush ideal of a real mate," he tells her, where they work "shoulder to shoulder, back to back — no getting behind one or the other — giving up your life for you mate, if it comes to a pinch" (97). After many trials in the bush, after nearly giving up on their marriage, Lady Bridget finally learns what it means to be "a thorough-going "mate"" to her husband. Lady Bridget, daughter of an Anglo-Irish peer, has to learn what the

Australian Girl Theodora Swifte instinctively knows in Praed's "A Bushman's Love Story". Theodora is one of those

true women who are spiritually advanced enough to *know* that love is the most sacred, the divinest thing in God's universe, and that it may not be given to any but the God-ordained mate. Then, the woman and the man are as one perfect whole, and there can be no question of injustice to the one or to the other, for the rights of both are equal. (264)

In this way, the masculinist "Bush ideal" of Australian mateship, which excludes women, is conflated with "mate" in its heterosexual meaning of a partner or spouse. These romance novelists insisted that the qualities of homosocial mateship could be found in a relationship with a heterosexual mate; that mateship could encompass romance, companionate marriage and a gender equality in rights that depended not on legislation but on love – and hard work, of course.

In the end, the success of romantic relationships between Australians or Britons and Australians rested on supercilious but simultaneously anxious claims about the superiority of Australian culture. The bush, the pioneering spirit, and the work ethic which produces the Australian Girl and the Coming Man also produces a culture which makes love more natural and authentic, and which makes a display of passion "pure". This "purity", this "cleanness", is contrasted with a Europe that was either artificially repressed and inhibited, or decadent and corrupted. The repression and awkwardness of expressing emotions among the English arises in Rosman's *The Back Seat Driver* where the English heroine Constance regards embraces and public displays of affection as "merely an eccentric integral part of being engaged", and when her fiancé hugs her in public, admonishes him: "Don't, Bill. Somebody might see" (43). In Bjelke Petersen's *The Captive Singer*, even before she visits Australia, Iris Dearn waxes lyrical about the land and its people: "I love their great, almost primitive, simplicity; it has something of the same grand force about it as their immense tangled bush! Australians have lived so near the heart of Nature that they have retained a wonderful, natural integrity. I should imagine they are more natural than any other civilised type" (152). Her friend Mrs Henderson adds: "Natural integrity has almost died out in certain parts of Europe, and an artificial culture has taken its place" (152); artificial, and also materialistic and cynical. In the same novel, the English aristocrat Lady Maud scoffs that love and "its servant, passion" are "hopelessly ancient sentiments" (3). There is no room in the modern age for "the kind of love which would lay down life itself for the object of its devotion", for "That kind of affection died with Romeo. In these days," says Lady Maud, "we flirt with the good-looking men, but we marry the rich ones" (3). By contrast, gender relations in Australia were ostensibly more "pure" and "natural" without the flirtations, game-playing, petty proprieties or constant fear of scandal and shame. This is why the English hero and heroine have to come to Australia to be transformed by its bush-inflected culture before they can fall in love, and when they do, their passion is purified by the bush. In *Miss Bryde of England* Australian Katherine has the advantage over her English cousin Helen because she

like other Australian girls, grew up in the unrestricted, sane, healthy atmosphere her brothers knew, an atmosphere in which ignorance was never paraded as virtue, nor evil given the glamour of mystery. She had always had plenty of friends of both sexes, who were little less the friends of all the rest of the household, and were always welcome there. ... The result was natural. She was pure-minded in a way that so many otherwise virtuous women are not. Sordid things had no attraction for her (89).

Being “purer”, Australian characters in these novels are quicker to recognize love and more “natural” and idealistic in their pursuit or protection of it.

Short stories about love and romance novels prior to Federation tended to be more pessimistic about the outcome of romantic love in the colonies; both male and female writers of love stories were too aware of the hardships that befell women in the colonies, especially along the frontier. After Federation, many of the obstacles to love developed in the colonial romance persisted, but in an access of post-Federation nationalistic fervor, women writers insisted that Australian character and culture were ultimately sufficient to overcome such obstacles; thus, the post-Federation romance novels are more likely to have happy endings than the colonial romances. As Giles (1988, 1998) and Sheridan (1995) have argued, late nineteenth and early twentieth century Australian love stories provided women novelists a way of writing women back into the story of the nation at a time when the “*Bulletin* school” was intent on constructing a very narrow, nationalistic, xenophobic masculinist Australian culture and identity. Australian women adopted the veneration for the bush and transformed the bushman into a romantic hero, matched in quality and character by the Australian Girl. The distinctiveness of Australian culture and character was dwelled upon almost obsessively in these novels.

However, because women novelists were aware that their primary market was in Britain (Alice Grant Rosman’s novels were published in Britain first before being imported to Australia, as was Bjelke Petersen’s *The Captive Singer*), they had to reconcile arrogant assertions of Australian superiority with obsequious assurances of Australian loyalty to Britain. As Sofia Eriksson (2012, ch. 3) has shown, British travelers to Australia from the 1880s onwards became increasingly preoccupied with the question of how the issue of independence could coexist with declarations of devotion to Queen and Empire. Australian romance novelists’ solution to this problem was to knit British and Australian interests together through marriage for the advancement of Empire. The imagined debilitation of English culture and, particularly after the First World War, the weakening of the English economy would be reinvigorated by Australian youth, culture and enterprise. The linking of imperial loyalty and commerce is exemplified in Australian Dick Dumaresq’s attitude towards Britain and the empire in Rosman’s *The Backseat Driver*. Staunchly Australian, Dick nevertheless affirms his loyalty to Britain, telling the scornful Constance that “you’re wrong if you think England is just one little island. It is several hundred and a continent or two, wherever English men have carried the English law. The chap who said it is sometimes a corner of a foreign field knew a thing or so” (89). Just as Dick had proved his loyalty to Britain by fighting in the Great War, now, he claims, he and his English fiancé will prove that loyalty by embarking on “the adventure of building up a new enterprise” that will benefit Australia and Britain (89). Dick’s claims are rejected by Constance, but such sentiments are articulated by the English Desmond Strafford in Whiting’s *A Daughter of the*

Empire, with which this article began. In loving the Australian Christina, Desmond has found a new mission in life after the First World War. He proposes that after they are married, he and Christina will “visit all the Dominions and study the conditions of life in them, and see how they affect the conditions of life at home” because he should “like my special work to be in connection with questions of Imperial policy” (287-288). The marriage of an Australian to a Briton always serves the higher purpose of either nation-building or empire-building:

We have been told in the past to think imperially and we have learnt the lesson, though it has come with pain and bloodshed; but now we have to learn to love imperially, and with that knowledge will come the true fellowship of the sons and daughters of the Empire which will help to bring peace and goodwill to all mankind. (288)

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