

## **CHAPTER 1 - MOTHERS, WRITERS, FEMINISTS AND STRANGERS: THE EARLY PATRONAGE OF MILES FRANKLIN, 1900-1906**

When Miles Franklin's *My Brilliant Career* was published in 1901, the public response overwhelmed the young writer. While not all reviewers were completely positive, many noticed and felt strongly about the book. Written by a young woman with a mixture of nationalist and feminist fervour and published only months after federation, it is perhaps not surprising that *My Brilliant Career* attracted so much attention. Men and women from all over Australia and as far afield as London were moved to respond to the partly autobiographical novel. Many wrote directly to 'Sybylla Melvyn, Possum Gully', saying that they understood, that they too had suffered the isolation, the tedium, the oppression, and the despair that Sybylla had experienced. Some lectured, others preached, a few men proposed marriage, many women sought friendship. Miles Franklin had touched something in the hearts of many resident and expatriate Australians. An account of the patronage that her first novel inspired offers an appropriate opening to the story of Sydney women and cultural agency.<sup>1</sup>

Sybylla Melvyn represents one well-known example of a phenomenon popular in turn of the century fiction, the 'Australian girl'.<sup>2</sup> Briefly, such a figure represented a

<sup>1</sup> This correspondence is concentrated in vols 7 and 8 of the extensive collection located in the Mitchell Library, which see: Miles Franklin Papers (MFP), ML MSS 364.

<sup>2</sup> The following articles discuss various versions of the Australian girl, including the bush girl, girl writers and 'the wild colonial girl': Beverley Kingston, 'The Lady and the Australian Girl: Some Thoughts on Nationalism and Class', in Norma Grieve and Aisla Burns (ed.s), *Australian Women: New Feminist Perspectives*, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1986); Susan Gardner, 'My Brilliant Career: Portrait of the Artist as a Wild Colonial Girl', in Carole Ferrier (ed.), *Gender, Politics and Fiction: Twentieth Century Australian Women's Novel*, (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1985); Susan Sheridan, 'Louisa Lawson, Miles Franklin and Feminist Writing, 1888-1901', *Australian Feminist Studies*, Summer, 1988, pp.29-45; Kerry White, 'The Real Australian Girl?: Some Post-Federation Writers for Girls', in Kay Ferres (ed.), *The Time to Write: Australian Women Writers, 1890-1930*, (Ringwood, Vic: Penguin, 1993); Susan Martin, 'Relative Correspondence: Franklin's *My Brilliant Career* and the Influence of Nineteenth-Century Australian Women's Writing', in Ferres, *The Time to Write*, pp.54-70; Jill Roe, 'What has nationalism offered Australian women?', in Grieve and Burns, *Australian Women*, pp.29-39; and Susan Magarey, 'History, cultural studies and another look at first-wave feminism in Australia', in *Australian Historical Studies*, no. 106, April 1996, pp.96-110. See also, Drusilla Modjeska for her discussion of Franklin's

juxtaposition of nationalist and feminist sentiments in a single female character. Both movements were at their peak in 1901 when federation was achieved, and just a year before national women's suffrage was obtained. Thus, from among the ranks of the writers that spoke of the spirit of Australianness and the campaigners for the advancement of the rights of women came the most tangible forms of patronage and support for Miles Franklin, the author. Men such as Henry Lawson and A.G. Stephens, whose reputations were established during the 1890s, were able to offer Franklin valuable, practical assistance. Yet crusaders for women's suffrage, in particular Rose Scott, claimed Franklin as their own, and sought to assist or promote her writing career through various means. Women who had already succeeded as writers in the colonial tradition appeared to show little interest in Franklin, Katherine Langloh Parker being the only member of the earlier group to make any attempt to meet with her.

Another as yet unrecognised figure arose in support of the unconventional prodigy. Miles Franklin's mother, the apparent ogre of *My Brilliant Career*, in fact contributed tremendous emotional and later material support to her daughter's career as a writer. Many papers that have touched on the relationship between the mother and daughter have seen Susannah Franklin only in light of the respectable, severe figure she represented as the capable wife of a struggling farmer. Her actions, however, deserve reconsideration in a careful weighing of literary and personal evidence. In fact, a tradition of promotion and support of emerging literary figures by mothers, wives, sisters and daughters has long remained buried within biographical material without attracting a great deal of attention. In *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English*, whose entries were deliberately selected and shaped by an awareness 'of the condition of women', the role of close family

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'feminist intervention into the nationalist tradition in the literature of the 1890s', in *Exiles at Home: Australian Woman Writers, 1925-1945*, (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1981), p.34.

women is acknowledged.<sup>3</sup> Susannah Franklin offers just one example of this brand of patronage.

Miles Franklin, therefore, was championed by friends and strangers alike, by members of her family circle and by men and women already participating in the ongoing struggles to raise a national literary tradition and to secure a variety of women's rights. Naturally, the interest here is in the nature of the female contingent of supporters and champions, the cohesiveness or otherwise of that group, the avenues open to them through which they sought to assist Franklin, and the effectiveness of their endeavours. The men against whose efforts their ventures contrast also warrant brief attention in order to show the distinctly different avenues for agency open to Franklin's male and female supporters.

### The Literary Response

Henry Lawson achieved recognition as an Australian writer in the mid-1890s. Thus when Miles Franklin wrote to 'our greatest Australian author' in 1899, he had sufficient exposure to the uncertain publishing prospects for Australian writers, to doubt that Angus and Robertson, with whom he first placed her manuscript, would pay her much attention. He had more confidence in J.B. Pinker, his new literary agent in London. Miles, having gained only advice not hopes of publication from J.F. Archibald, readily assented to Lawson's request to take the manuscript for *My Brilliant Career* abroad, and responded with warmth and gratitude when Pinker placed it with Blackwood and Sons in Edinburgh.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> 'Introduction', in Virginia Blain, Patricia Clements, Isobel Grundy (ed.s), *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English: Women Writers from the Middle Ages to the Present*, (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd, 1990), pp.ix-x.

<sup>4</sup> See Jill Roe, *My Congenials: Miles Franklin and Friends in Letters*, Vol.1, 1879-1938, (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1993), for an overview of the correspondence between Henry Lawson and Miles Franklin concerning publication of Franklin's manuscript; and Colin Roderick, *Miles Franklin: Her Brilliant Career* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1982), p.74.

The obvious role played by Lawson in the vital task of finding a publisher for Franklin's first book is rendered even more conspicuous on consideration of his continued interest in her writing career despite his own circumstances. He and his wife, Bertha Lawson, were experiencing financial and marital difficulties. Yet, despite their problems their vision of a national literature born in Australia but reflecting the late nineteenth century British taste for artistic genius remained intact. Bertha Lawson wrote to Franklin in March 1900, while recovering from the birth of her daughter, Bertha, and just a month prior to their departure for London:

I felt so deeply for you in your trouble, more so because I could not write and express our sympathy ... Australia seems a hopeless place for Art or letters. The people have more sympathy for horse-racing or prize fighting, than they have for poetry or Art. It is the very want of soul in the public that makes the Writer so depressed, and then the critics write of the pessimism of the Australian authors. It wants a strong pen, to wake Australia up and make her realise what she is doing.<sup>5</sup>

The trip to London, an attempt to consolidate Lawson's own wavering career, saw Bertha enter a hospital with concerns for her mental health. Eventually she departed for Australia with their two young children ahead of Lawson. Franklin appeared at least vaguely aware of their circumstances during their stay in London, writing in 1900, '[t]hat you could bother about me so soon in the midst of all your own business and worry has wiped out a lot of my bitterness in one act'.<sup>6</sup> Even after their return, when the Lawsons' home life had deteriorated to a series of crises, the poet took time to write to Franklin advising her to retain Pinker's services as a literary agent in London, rather than attempting to publish her next novel (an early version of *My Career Goes Bung*) with Angus and Robertson. Bertha similarly maintained her personal interest in Franklin, and showed understanding when the latter expressed depression and confusion over a personal romantic crisis and her career as a writer.

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<sup>5</sup> Bertha Lawson to Miles Franklin (MF), 13 March 1900, MFP, ML MSS 364/6.

<sup>6</sup> Miles Franklin to Henry Lawson, 17 Oct. 1900, in Miles Franklin Papers, ML DOC 2211.

Following the publication of *My Brilliant Career* in 1901, Franklin rapidly acquired new friends and supporters. Among those, A.G. Stephens offered valuable assistance. Stephens, as writer of *The Bulletin's* "Red Page" at that time, possessed the ability to create or destroy an author's reputation. During the years immediately before and after federation, he applauded the work of Henry Lawson, Victor Daley, 'Banjo' Paterson, Will Ogilvie, Hugh McCrae, Mary Gilmore, James Hebblethwaite and Roderic Quinn. He also corresponded with the son of a Victorian selector, John Shaw Nielson, and later helped to establish his reputation.<sup>7</sup>

It so happened that Franklin's work appealed to Stephens. He conveyed his approval in an initial letter, reviewed *My Brilliant Career* with glowing praise, deflected the possible attentions of Norman Lindsay, and corresponded with her on a regular basis. He also commented on later manuscripts in a typically candid manner.<sup>8</sup> To Stephens, *My Brilliant Career* deserved recognition for its spirit; a devotion to Australia which pulsed in all the work of the band of new, patriotic writers. 'It is the sunlight dancing through the veins of the author that makes "My Brilliant Career" interesting', he declared.

And her love of Australia is positive rapture: she even loves curlews. ... She "tells you straight". ... She revolts fiercely against narrow conventions, narrow horizons, yet is proud to be an Australian, a child of the mighty bush. She calls things by their right Australian names. ... Her book is a warm embodiment of Australian life, as tonic as bush air, as aromatic as bush trees, and as clear and honest as bush sunlight."<sup>9</sup>

In a similar vein, Henry Lawson had confessed:

<sup>7</sup> See Stuart Lee, 'Stephens, Alfred George', *Australian Dictionary of Biography (ADB)*, vol. 12, pp.66-8.

<sup>8</sup> Verna Coleman, *Miles Franklin in America: Her Unknown (Brilliant) Career*, (Sydney: Sirius Book, 1981), pp. 40-45, for more complete summary of Stephens' interest in Franklin's career. Stephens wrote to Franklin concerning what he believed to be a hint of sadomasochism in a passage from *My Brilliant Career*: See Roe, *My Congenials*, vol. 1, pp. 16-7, 27-8 for this and other important correspondence.

<sup>9</sup> A.G. Stephens, 'A Bookful of Sunshine', *The Bulletin*, 28 Sept. 1901, 'The Red Page' (inside front cover).

I saw that the work was Australian - born of the bush ... the descriptions of bush life and scenery came startlingly, painfully real to me, and I know that, as far as they are concerned, the book is true to Australia - the truest I ever read.<sup>10</sup>

Even Joseph Furphy wrote to Franklin, unsolicited and late, to draw attention to 'some striking parallelisms' between her work and his *Such is Life*. They had both identified 'the existence of a bush-born type somewhat different from the crude little semi-savage of conventional Australian fiction'. As well, he observed, 'the atmosphere, moral and physical, is the same in both books'.<sup>11</sup> Each man was evidently touched by the Australianness of *My Brilliant Career*. They were committed to Australian literature as an expression of the nationalistic spirit attending federation, respectively as critic, poet and writer. Absorbed as they were in that nationalist imperative, they remained blind to the book's other significant theme. Lawson did, however, acknowledge the existence of some 'girlishly emotional parts' in the book, but was prepared to overlook them for the accuracy and poignancy of Franklin's depiction of the bush.

Although the reference to those 'girlish' parts of Miles Franklin's first published work, may have been to her passionate feminist pronouncements, they may also have been to the remnants in her novel of the traditional, colonial romance which numerous Australian women writers such as Ada Cambridge, and Rosa Praed, had employed exhaustively throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. Drawing on Elaine Showalter's delineation of three stages in female literature, Susan Gardner and Frances McInherny placed Franklin somewhere between the 'Feminine' phase that dominated nineteenth century women's writing, and the 'Feminist' phase which protested against constrictive Victorian standards of domestic femininity. Susan Martin argued that Franklin positioned herself against the earlier tradition which depicted genteel ladies at home in the

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<sup>10</sup> Henry Lawson, 'Preface', in Miles Franklin, *My Brilliant Career*, 1901 (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1990), n.p.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Furphy to MF, 17 Jan. 1904, in Roe, *My Congenials*, vol. 1, pp.29-30.



bush, glorified their domestic power, and refused to consider the fate of the tom-boyish bush girl as she grew into womanhood. *My Brilliant Career* may have retained some characteristics of the nineteenth century genre; it was essentially a romance, the heroine's mother had a certain gentility both in background and character, and Sybylla herself represented the independent child of the bush. However, while not offering positive alternatives, Franklin attacked the idea of romance and marriage, frankly portrayed the hardships born by women living in country New South Wales and through the narrator brought to the fore the dilemmas of the tomboy.<sup>12</sup>

Franklin's separation from her predecessors is confirmed by the lack of interaction between the older generation and the younger writer. Ada Cambridge, of Melbourne, moved to London sometime in 1903 or 1904, Rosa Praed also lived in London, and had done so since the 1870s, while Catherine Martin lived in Adelaide and travelled frequently to England and Europe in the very early years of the twentieth century.<sup>13</sup> Geography and identity thus separated the generations. Only one established female author of the era appears to have sought Franklin out - Katherine Langloh Parker. Even Parker did not belong to that group of romance writers: like Franklin she identified with Australia. She wrote the children's storybook, *Australian Legendary Tales* (1896), which drew on her earlier work on Aborigines. While she did not interrogate the colonialist frame of mind, in terms of the settlers' occupation of the land at the expense of the Aboriginal way of life, she did record many aspects of the culture of first the Noongahburrah people, and later many other tribes, accurately and sympathetically.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See Gardner, 'Portrait'; Martin, 'Relative Correspondence'; and Frances McInHerny, 'Miles Franklin, *My Brilliant Career* and the Female Tradition', *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 9, no. 3, May 1980, pp.275-85.

<sup>13</sup> Patricia Clarke, *Pen Portraits: Women Writers and journalists in nineteenth century Australia*, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1988), pp.145, 152, 154.

<sup>14</sup> For a more complete account of her attitudes to the Aboriginal people, and her position in relation to the genre of nineteenth century Australian women's fiction, see: Patricia Grimshaw and Julie Evans,

When Parker expressed to Sir Francis Suttor, President of the Legislative Council, her desire to meet Franklin, it represented a departure, the one and only time that an Australian woman author who had published in the nineteenth century sought the young writer's presence. Thus Suttor wrote to Franklin in 1905, pressuring her to attend a dinner at his place, in order to meet with her. '[S]he takes a great interest in you and your work', he confided, 'and wants to see you'. He would;

arrange for Mrs Parker to come to dinner in a very quiet way, and you can have a good talk with her. She knows the Tennysons very well and might be able to further your interests there.<sup>15</sup>

The only record of the success of the dinner is found in a letter from Rose Scott who had also attended, referring to some breach in Suttor's behaviour which had caused Franklin concern. No mention was made of Parker's presence or her offers of assistance.<sup>16</sup> It is likely that no matter how keenly Parker desired to meet Franklin, she did not pursue her plans to help the budding author. She autographed a copy of *Australian Legendary Tales* as a gift for Franklin shortly before she left for London.<sup>17</sup> No correspondence exists in the voluminous collection of Franklin papers, however, to suggest that the two kept in touch.

Unknown to Parker, Hallam Tennyson, son of the famous poet the first Lord Tennyson, and Governor General 1902-03,<sup>18</sup> had in fact written years earlier, praising *My Brilliant Career*, and offering his assistance. In May 1903, he conveyed his pleasure on reading her 'story of Bush life'. Later that year, he passed on the message that '[i]f she wants to publish another book - let her apply to the Authors Club by my address in

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<sup>15</sup> 'Colonial Women on Intercultural Frontiers: Rose Campbell Praed, Mary Bundock, and Katie Langloh Parker'. *Australian Historical Studies*, no.106, April 1996, pp.79-95.

<sup>16</sup> F.S. Suttor to MF, 4 March 1905, MFP, ML MSS 364/9. See also Ruth Teale, 'Suttor, Sir Francis Bathurst', *ADB*, vol. 6, pp.227-8.

<sup>17</sup> Rose Scott to MF, undated MFP, ML MSS 364/8.

<sup>18</sup> Jill Roe, 'Miles Franklin's Library', *Australian Cultural History*, no. 11, 1992, p.59.

<sup>19</sup> Christopher Cunneen, *King's Men: Australia's Governors-General from Hopetoun to Isaacs*, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1983), p.37.



London ... I am sure that they will help her'. Finally, Tennyson assured Franklin 'I will see what I can do to secure you a reading public in England and America'.<sup>19</sup>

It was Caroline David, wife of geologist, Professor T.W.E. David (later Sir), who had more to do with Franklin's receipt of Tennyson's offers. However, Franklin and David met through their mutual acquaintance, women's rights campaigner, Rose Scott. David's motives, therefore, had as much to do with her feminist as with her literary interests. Her story, and the outcome of Tennyson's efforts on Franklin's behalf will thus be taken up later.

Franklin did seek contact with at least one other woman writer. In 1902 she wrote to the creator of another example of the 'Australian girl', Ethel Curlewis (Turner), author of *Seven Little Australians*. Hoping that Turner would not mind her forwardness, Franklin asked to see the writer:

I wanted to tell you that I love you and I thank you for what you said of my story in the *Book Lover* - I am having such a hard struggle and men are so cruel I thought they would be nice - that is why I wanted to see a girl writer.<sup>20</sup>

Although Turner evidently applauded Franklin's work, and encouraged the young writer during her difficulties, the anticipated meeting did not take place. Aged just old enough to be a mother of young children, rather than a young single woman, Turner's busy life possibly precluded coordination with Franklin's visits to Sydney. However, from her Mosman home Turner sent messages of welcome and continued for many years to look for news of Franklin's progress.<sup>21</sup>

Other contemporary Australian women writers, such as Louise Mack, Henry Handel Richardson, and Katherine Susannah Prichard possibly were aware of Franklin's

<sup>19</sup> Hallam Tennyson to MF, 11 May 1903; Tennyson to Professor Edgeworth David, 2 Nov. 1903; Tennyson to MF, 30 Dec. 1903, MFP, ML MSS 364/9.

<sup>20</sup> MF to Ethel Turner, undated, [1902], Ethel Turner Papers, ML MSS 667/12.

<sup>21</sup> Ethel Curlewis (Turner) to MF, 17 May 1902; and 13 June 1930, both MFP, ML MSS 364/8.

first literary foray and identified with her without establishing contact. Mack had published her first novel *The world is round*, in 1895, followed by two urban Australian girl stories, and joined the staff of *The Bulletin* in 1898. Departing for Melbourne to board a ship for London on 14 April 1901 amidst much emotional upheaval, and arriving excitedly in London during May it is likely that her focus drifted from the concerns of the small collection of literary women in New South Wales, and that she may not have immediately identified with the new writer.<sup>22</sup> Ethel (Henry Handel) Richardson had departed under her mother's wing for Europe in 1888, and conducted her entire literary career from London.<sup>23</sup> Although Franklin and Richardson were in contact in London in late 1931, and Franklin envied the latter's comfort and freedom from time-consuming domestic tasks, she spontaneously recoiled from friendship with her.<sup>24</sup> From a distance Richardson had watched and applauded the elusive quality that the Brent of Bin Bin novels, which she correctly guessed to be the work of Miles Franklin, displayed. Alternately, Katharine Susannah Prichard had not yet matriculated when *My Brilliant Career* aroused interest among readers in Australia.<sup>25</sup> It is probable that *My Brilliant Career* proved inspirational and stimulating when they read it, but they were not in a position to act as colleagues, companions, or confidants to the young and inexperienced Miles Franklin.

Thus the direct literary patronage received by Miles Franklin on publication of *My Brilliant Career*, appears limited and mostly abortive. Henry Lawson's role in locating a publisher in the first place is undeniable. A.G. Stephens' word also carried weight at the time. Thus his approval of Franklin, and encouragement of the young writer must also

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<sup>22</sup> Clarke, *Pen Portraits*, pp.234-35; and Nancy Phelan, *The Romantic Lives of Louise Mack*, (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1991).

<sup>23</sup> Dorothy Green, 'Richardson, Ethel Florence Lindesay ('Henry Handel')' *ADB*, vol. 11, p.382.

<sup>24</sup> Roderick, *Her Brilliant Career*, p.159.

<sup>25</sup> John Hay, 'Prichard, Katharine Susannah', *ADB*, vol. 11, pp.291-93.

have contributed to her acceptance by other writers and critics. However, both of these subsumed Franklin's femininity and feminism to her nationalism. It was her portrayal of the Australian experience that attracted them. Established women writers were not in a position to show immediate and reassuring interest in the new writer: their lives and interests seemingly centred more on the heart of the Empire than its colonies. Miles Franklin's female supporters came from other quarters.

### The Feminist Response

In 1902, Miles Franklin received the following heart-warming praise from women's rights campaigner, Rose Scott:

I have just read your book "My Brilliant Career" and being a fellow Australian I cannot resist writing to tell you - I think your book is wonderful, you have the gift of placing characters as well as scenes vividly before me - I lived your book with you.<sup>26</sup>

This was not unusual for Scott. She had previously written to the radical journalist and late-blooming poet John Farrell, congratulating him on his stirring poem "The Gray Queen of Sixty Years".<sup>27</sup> She suggested that Sands should reproduce the poem on a card framed with wild flowers. Her letter to another belated poet, and politician and teacher Dowell O'Reilly, rung with equally enthusiastic praise, 'I thought your poem in the "Daily Telegraph" yesterday morning worth all the rest of the Paper & a great deal more. I would like to know who you are'.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Rose Scott (RS) to MF, 31 March 1902, MFP, ML MSS 364/8. Grammar, punctuation and abbreviations are reproduced exactly as they occur in Scott's letters.

<sup>27</sup> RS to John Farrell, 22 June 1897, John Farrell Papers, ML MSS 1522/1; also see 'Farrell, John', in William Wilde, *Australian Poets and Their Works: A Reader's Guide* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>28</sup> RS to Dowell O'Reilly, 25 May 1906, Dowell O'Reilly Papers, ML MSS 231/9; and Michael Sharkey, 'O'Reilly, Dowell', *ADB*, vol.11, p.93.

Once Scott established contact with new literary talent, they were inevitably absorbed into her circle. The Friday night and Saturday afternoon meetings held at her home, *Lynton*, 'a two-storey cottage on Jersey road', Edgecliff, were famous for the variety of figures attracted to them, and the tenor of the discussions held therein. Franklin recalled:

Here she received the intellectual and political life of the day - a salon unique in Sydney, where under her fusing influence public opinion was voiced & clarified. There went everyone of note whether Australians or celebrities from overseas - dignitaries of the Judiciary, leading lights of all the churches, members of Parliament, artists and the literati. Most of the writers were her warm friends & she wrote verse herself...<sup>29</sup>

Included among the names that 'paved the way of Australian authorship' to be 'found in Rose Scott's card bowl', were: 'Henry Kendall, Victor Daley, Henry Lawson, Bertram Stevens, Barbara Baynton, Jeannie Gunn, Ada Holman, Zara Aronson, Bernard O'Dowd, A.B. Paterson', Sydney Jephcott, and others.<sup>30</sup>

While Scott earned her place in Australia's history books under the banner of women's suffrage, Australian literature remained for her a life-long passion. Like her protégé, Scott grew up in a rural environment, familiar with both the lifestyle and the Australian wilderness so forcibly portrayed by Franklin in *My Brilliant Career*. Her feminist leanings had revealed themselves early when she became familiar with Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* as a young girl, and crystallised when she read J.S. Mill's *The Subjection of Women*. However, the informally educated Scott also avidly read classic and contemporary literature. Her tastes may be gauged from a volume in the Scott Family Papers held in Mitchell Library, which contains her speeches and notes

<sup>29</sup> MF, 'Rose Scott', unpublished draft. MFP, ML MSS 445/37.

<sup>30</sup> MF, 'Rose Scott', in *The Peaceful Army: A Memorial to the Pioneer Women of Australia, 1788 – 1938*, (Sydney: Women's Executive Committee and Advisory Council of Australia's 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations, 1938).

concerning literature. Shakespeare, Dante and Zola make regular appearances, while separate papers address the writings of Keats, Browning, Tolstoy, and Ibsen.<sup>31</sup>

Following the death of her father in 1879, Scott moved with her mother to Sydney. The daughter of a wealthy pastoralist, and cousin of both George Rusden, politician and historian, and David Scott Mitchell founder of the Mitchell Library, Rose Scott was well-connected. She was also financially independent, courtesy of her inheritance she received an annual allowance of £500. Scott was thus set to enter Sydney Society.

In 1889, Scott co-founded the Women's Literary Society. Its membership included 'several women of energy and enterprise', including Maybanke Wolstenholme (later Anderson). It also included the young and occasionally doubtful Ethel Turner. At their first meeting Wolstenholme commented on the issue of women's suffrage. Scott concurred with her. Within two years, a meeting was held 'to consider the need for active work for the woman's vote'.<sup>32</sup> Together with the recently widowed Dora Montefiore, Lady Windeyer, her daughter, and three others, Wolstenholme and Scott formed the Womanhood Suffrage League with Scott as its Honorary Secretary. From that time onwards, Scott's skills were diverted into her multifaceted campaign to advance the rights of women. Rose Scott, the feminist, had come of age.<sup>33</sup>

She did not, however, lose interest in literature in general and the nationalist project in particular. Scott's friendship with the Lawsons demonstrates the curious balance she struck between the two obsessions. During 1899 Scott's friendship with the poet and his wife bloomed. She first sought Lawson out when writing an article on him for the *Review of Reviews*. Following an exchange of letters, Scott finally visited their Lavender

<sup>31</sup> Notebook, Scott Family Papers (SFP), ML MSS 38/26.

<sup>32</sup> Jan Roberts, *Maybanke Anderson: Sex, suffrage and social reform*, (Sydney: Ruskin Rowe Press, 1993), pp.60-61.

<sup>33</sup> See: Judith A. Allen, *Rose Scott: Vision and Revision in Feminism*, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994); Judith A. Allen, 'Scott, Rose', *ADB*, vol. 11, pp. 547-8; and Alec H. Chisholm, 'The Lady of

Bay home. She left with a positive impression of poet and wife, though cautious about his drinking problem. Nevertheless, she was happy to accept Lawson's request to meet for lunch.<sup>34</sup>

Scott and Franklin soon discovered that they both knew and loved the Lawsons. In fact, Franklin received communications from Lawson during her stay with Scott in September, 1902. With regret the latter reported to Franklin in December of the same year that the couple were experiencing difficulties. By early 1903 Scott confirmed that Bertha had taken out a 'maintenance order - for 6 months'. She lamented:

I feel so sad over the Lawsons - He will not give up drinking - She cannot live with him she was so ill - now she is better & has her children in a Room, & she has got some canvassing to do - some books - and she is making rounds, full of hope to make her living - He came here also today - all shaky - I wd not tell him where she was.<sup>35</sup>

Much as her feminist instincts were hurt by the injustices thrust on a woman by a drunken husband, Scott could not turn her back on the literary genius. Franklin recalled years later that she was always prepared to offer help and 'would mix a pick-me-up for [the] inebriate while pointing out to him the error of his ways'.<sup>36</sup>

The feminist remained true in her support of Henry Lawson, the poet, even after his death, involving herself immediately in the Henry Lawson Memorial Society. Yet in the wake of his death in 1922, she also wrote letters to Sydney's major newspapers defending his widow, Bertha, against the criticisms of her role as a wife and mother.<sup>37</sup> Her friendship with the Lawsons extended through three generations, from Louisa Lawson, through Henry and Bertha, to their daughter, Bertha. It appears that neither her passion for

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the Treasure House', *Life*, vol. 11, April-Sept. 1948, pp.7-10.

<sup>34</sup> See Allen, *Rose Scott*, 1994, p.140; Henry Lawson to RS, Feb. 1899; 28 March 1899; 17 April 1899; 24 April 1899, SFP, ML MSS 38/20; and RS, 'Notes of my visit to the Lawsons, April 19th 99', in SFP, ML MSS 38/26.

<sup>35</sup> RS to MF, 15 Dec. 1902; 6 Jan. 1903; 24 April 1903, MFP, ML MSS 364/8.

<sup>36</sup> MF, 'Rose Scott', draft.

<sup>37</sup> Folder of cuttings, Lawson Family Papers, ML MSS 1639/11.



Australian literature, nor her commitment to the emancipation of women, could blind Scott to the greatness of the writer or the trials of his wife.

Thus, Scott's spontaneous response to Miles Franklin emerged from her dual interest in Australian literature and the women's movement. Her patronage differentiated between Miles the writer and Miles the feminist. As a patron of Franklin, the author, Scott submitted a review of *My Brilliant Career* to the *London Sun*. Displaying the prevalent tendency to link all Australian talent with stars of the British concourse, Scott, in her draft review, pointed to Franklin's portrayal of the M'Swats as evidence of her ability. She had read:

very few passages indeed in modern fiction wh surpass in force & poignance. Its delineation of the life at Barney's Gap. It is almost Zolaesque in its wealth of sordid detail - It is almost as good as Dickens in its touches of humour - It is photographic in the sense of reality it leaves on the mind of its writer!

Scott nevertheless hinted at her reservations:

She has in no inconsiderable degree that almost all important gift of Individualising & has a genuine if still rather rough & unformed manner of literary expression & so is worthy not merely of friendly encouragement but of the best advice her critics are capable of offering.<sup>38</sup>

Her review, on its appearance in the *London Sun* in September 1901 without authorial tribute, has since led at least one historian to assume it the work of Henry Murray, hence obscuring this aspect of Scott's patronage.<sup>39</sup>

Alternately, Scott lured Franklin into her ever-widening circle of literary and intellectual friends. 'If you come to Sydney', she enquired, 'will you come to see me?' Later, she repeated her request, 'I hope you will stay with me and we shall have some nice long chats'.<sup>40</sup> By August, Franklin succumbed to the insistent requests, and spent an eventful month under Scott's wing amid the leading figures of Sydney Society. While

<sup>38</sup> RS, 'Her Brilliant Career, *London Sun*, Book of the Week – draft', 1901, SFP, ML MSS 38/26.

<sup>39</sup> Roderick, *Her Brilliant Career*, p.78.

<sup>40</sup> RS to MF, 31 Mar 1902; 2 June 1902; 20 Aug. 1902, MFP, ML MSS 364/8.

Franklin's first sojourn at *Lynton* appears not to have led directly to other literary contacts - she already knew Henry Lawson, A.B. Paterson, and A.G. Stephens - Scott was able to use her connections more fruitfully in 1904. One Thursday she wrote insisting that her protégé join her the following Tuesday (or longer if she wished), in order to meet the Monaro-based poet, Sydney Jephcott:

Tuesday night Mr Jephcott will be here and he wants above all to meet you Dearie & I can not help feeling that you wd be friends. He is a great souled man - a real Bushman but with a huge brain & a whole heart.<sup>41</sup>

Of course other poets and writers were to be invited, but it was Jephcott that Scott wanted Franklin to meet. Possibly Scott thought he could provide the advice she had always felt Franklin needed.

Certainly, the dinner proved memorable. Other guests included the social reformer instrumental in passing the Women's Franchise Act of 1902, B.R. Wise, as well as Roderic Quinn, Mr Brady, Miss Consett Stephens, and Mr Stephens. The politician, B.R. Wise, caused Franklin some concern, making her self-conscious about her womanliness or lack of it. Jephcott, she felt, was too relaxed and too familiar when he slapped Scott on the arm and seated himself on the floor. Their actions irritated Franklin. After reflection, she put it down to youth and inexperience, regretted that she 'did not make more of the hour while its sand was running', and wished to 'up-end the hour-glass and have it over again'.<sup>42</sup> Inevitably, while Scott had sincere intentions, her guests had determined the outcome of her efforts. In the long-run, Jephcott was not entirely deterred from friendship with Franklin, and a year later confided to Scott, '[s]he grows upon further knowledge'.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> RS to MF, 'Thursday' [Nov. 1904], MFP, ML MSS 364/8. See also Ken Stewart, 'Jephcott, Sydney', *ADB*, vol.9, p.483, and 'Jephcott, Sydney', in Wilde, *Australian Poets*.

<sup>42</sup> MF to RS, 2 Dec. 1904, Rose Scott Correspondence (RSC), ML A2282.

<sup>43</sup> Sydney Jephcott to RS, Aug. 1905, RSC, ML A2283.

The exposure gained through Franklin's visit to Scott, and through Scott's constant promotion of her talents and promise, also led to a surge in the young author's correspondence. Numerous figures wrote via Scott, or declared their indebtedness to her for Franklin's address. Henry Hyde Champion, who ran the literary journal, *The Book Lover*, with his wife the feminist Elsie Champion, wrote to Franklin in 1903 soliciting articles. The writer was well recommended to him. 'Miss Rose Scott has talked about you so much', he added. Not long after, Dora Suttor wrote seeking short stories and poems from Franklin for a Society journal that she proposed to launch. She too was indebted to Rose Scott for Franklin's address. When Sir Francis Suttor was uncertain of Franklin's address, which was almost every time that he wrote to Franklin, he similarly turned to Scott.<sup>44</sup>

In terms of her feminist project, Scott's endeavours were similarly multifaceted. Personally, she offered Miles Franklin the feminine encouragement and support she felt women should offer other members of their gender. In the course of a speech in favour of the foundation of an organisation for factory girls, Scott referred to the success of an established Club which offered the girls '[h]elp, comfort, [and] sympathy'. The girls regarded one of the women that ran the Club as 'a friend, to whose sympathy and advice they can & do appeal - And whose desire to help them in every way, they do not doubt'.<sup>45</sup> More specifically, Scott asserted in a speech concerning the movement for women's suffrage in NSW and the formation of the Women's Suffrage League, that 'its birth' heralded 'to a world oppressed with poverty, suffering and sin, the advent of the mother-woman's world wide loving heart and sheltering arms'.<sup>46</sup> Her maternal citizenship not

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<sup>44</sup> H.H. Champion to MF, 30 Sept. 1903; Dora Suttor to MF, 30 Nov. 1903; Francis Suttor to MF, 22 July 1903; 5 Nov. 1904, MFP, ML MSS 364/9.

<sup>45</sup> RS, untitled speech, 24 Sept. 1900, SFP, ML MSS 38/23.

<sup>46</sup> RS, untitled speech, with corr. to MF, 25 Sept. [1902], MFP, ML MSS 364/8.

only led to her various social reform campaigns, but to a personal, nurturing type of patronage. This is precisely the type of connection Scott sought when she approached Franklin. In her first communication to Franklin, she expressed hope that the author would be her friend, and let Scott serve her 'dear fellow Australian My dear fellow woman ... in anyway I can'. She wanted to know what sort of books Franklin enjoyed so that she could send her some, or if she could help her 'little friend in anyway'. Several months down the track, while in the final stages of her campaign for womanhood suffrage, Scott took time to urge Franklin to cheer up, affectionately calling her 'my little girl'. Scott lamented, 'wish I cd have you with me always'. She appeared to derive inspiration from her friend and happiness from the knowledge that she 'ever did anything to make my dear little girl happy'.<sup>47</sup> When her 'little girl's' depression was at its worst, Scott wrote loving poems for her:

To Stella Franklin

Dear little girl, upon whose face I gaze,  
Let not the wondrous Persic Poet raise,  
A mist of sadness & a golden haze  
O'er that which is of throbbing life - a Phase.

Dream not too sadly of that mystic Life  
Its smiles & tears its melodies and strife,  
Thoughts such as these in struggling bosoms rife  
Cut down our spirits with a surgeons knife.

Why should the half of all we see and know

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RS to MF, 31 March 1902; 2 June 1902; 25 Sept. [1902]; 24 April 1903, MFP, ML MSS 364/8.

Become so great as to become a foe?

Lo, writer's might, the flowers of spring can weave

And tears & gloom, the magic colored bow!

Closed round with tears in love's seductive shade,

Small things are great, & great things are afraid

Seen from the height of Reason's lofty throne,

Nor Life nor Death, are for ourselves alone.

Why then despair? For who can guess the whole,

Or conquering solve the spectrum of the Soul?

Will Earthly discords blend, which harshly roll,

As blazing fires arise from blackened coal?

Amidst roses, women, wine and doubtful pleasure

Great Omar wrote, but who can rightly measure,

The whole of Truth, and all of wisdom treasure

Or, to the final goal, of Pale Endeavour?<sup>48</sup>

This does not represent the only poem Scott struggled over for Franklin. Evidently her appreciation of the art excelled her own ability. Nevertheless, the intent, to cheer and encourage, remains clear. It is this almost maternal concern for Franklin's well being that characterised Scott's relationship with her.

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<sup>48</sup>

RS. unpublished poem, 24 Aug. 1902. MFP, ML MSS 445/41.

Rose Scott offered an explanation for her devotion in a letter advising Franklin to rest:

You go at everything like a burning fire, & you wear yourself out – forgetting how we who care for you you belong to, & you’ve no right to destroy or injure our Property!<sup>49</sup>

The designation ‘we who care for you’ denotes Scott’s feminist circle. ‘[F]riends of mine such dear women, want to know you’, she told Franklin in one of her early letters.<sup>50</sup> The circle included Mary Booth, Caroline David, Ada Holman, Louisa MacDonald, and Melbourne feminists Vida Goldstein and Elsie Champion. These women showed different levels of interest in Miles Franklin and demonstrated their interest in a variety of ways. Some extended their friendship; some lectured or wrote about her; some actively encouraged further literary endeavours or fostered her innate feminist instincts. Others were content to simply meet her. Though they may have known of Miles Franklin before Scott’s interventions, she certainly became a key link between Franklin and her woman sympathisers.

Mary Booth, one of Sydney’s first women physicians, feminist and nationalist, took an early interest in Franklin and her work.<sup>51</sup> Booth at the time was actively involved in the foundation of the Women’s Club and a plethora of ‘intra-club activities’, including the Tuesday, Fawcett and Lecture Clubs. Ruth Mackinnon, the writer of a sparsely referenced unpublished biography on Mary Booth, noted that sometime in 1901-02 Booth gave a lecture at the Tuesday Club on *My Brilliant Career*.<sup>52</sup> This is the only specific reference to any early patronage offered by Booth to Franklin. Direct links between Booth,

<sup>49</sup> RS to MF, 18 Aug. [1903], MFP, ML MSS 364 8.

<sup>50</sup> RS to MF, 31 March 1902, MFP, ML MSS 364 8.

<sup>51</sup> Jill Roe, ‘Booth, Mary’, *ADB*, vol. 7, pp.345-46. Linda Franklin (Talbingo) writing to MF, 16 May 1904, in MFP, vol.49, p.129c noted that a letter had reached Tabingo from Dr Booth; and SMEF writing to MF, 1 Aug. 1903, in MFP, vol.48, p.153 informed her that Miles’ cousin, Edgar Vernon, intended to look MF up at Dr Booth’s in Sydney. Miles’ mother also mentioned that she had not received a letter from Booth.

<sup>52</sup> Ruth Mackinnon, “Mary Booth a biography”, unpublished entry to Society of Women Writer’s competition, 1969, ML DOC 1530, p.4.



Rose Scott and Miles Franklin soon formed, both Scott and Franklin consulting the doctor about each other's health. Decades later, the activities of the Anzac Fellowship of Women founded by Booth, brought the doctor and writer into brief collaboration again this time without the Rose Scott link. Franklin, in the role of seasoned writer and cultural nationalist acted as judge for a writing competition held under the auspices of the Anzac celebrations.

Franklin left a better record of her introduction to Ada Holman by Rose Scott, and of Holman's ongoing interest and friendship. She recalled Holman as '[o]ne of my girlhood company from the Rose Scott days, who called me Stella'. Scott had taken her to the Houses of Parliament. When Franklin remained unimpressed by the members, Scott sent for Mr William Holman, as she felt he might capture the young writer's imagination. Franklin remained unmoved. Undaunted, Scott decided to invite his 'young and lovely' wife, Ada Holman, to see them. The lovely wife obliged, and was struck by Franklin, regarding her as 'a comet of wonder'. Thus they met. Writing about Holman after her death in 1949, Franklin evidently saw her as a friend. Holman had faithfully maintained her interest in Scott's protégé and looked Franklin up when she visited Chicago in the pre-war years. During the 1920s in London, they saw each other several times, Holman and her husband protecting Franklin's name when scandal surrounded the National Housing and Town Planning Council where she worked as a secretary.<sup>53</sup> A journalist and minor writer in her own right, Holman proposed to Franklin the idea of co-writing a novel on the odd genre of historical South America.<sup>54</sup> Though the novel, perhaps thankfully, never eventuated, the friendship continued once both had returned to Australia.

Although Scott introduced the young writer to the Principal of the University of Sydney Women's College, Louisa Macdonald, Franklin's recollections indicate that little

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<sup>53</sup> MF, Diary entry, 7 April 1949. MFP, ML MSS 364/4, It.6.

<sup>54</sup> Roe, Franklin's Library, pp.59-60.

patronage or ongoing friendship took place during the early years. In response to Scott's requests for Macdonald to visit and meet the protégé, Macdonald and some friends stopped briefly at *Lynton* on their way to a ball. Her manner was 'dignified', and her response to Franklin 'cordial'. However, she did later invite Franklin to the Women's College. On that occasion, Scott and Macdonald spent most of the afternoon discussing 'important matters', while students at the college willingly took charge of Franklin.<sup>55</sup> Later, in London, the Macdonald link assumed greater importance, perhaps more so than the Holman one.<sup>56</sup> Although not all of Scott's colleagues and acquaintances appeared to join the initial clamour over Franklin's talent or feminist inclinations, despite the energy expended on making introductions, it appears that connections of longer term significance were made.

Leading Victorian feminists showed an early interest in Miles Franklin, offering literary, ideological, spiritual and emotional encouragement. The Goldstein sisters, including the feminist Vida Goldstein, as well as Elsie Champion, who ran the Book Lover's Library and assisted her husband Henry Hyde Champion with the *Book Lover* journal, warmly welcomed her appearance and took an earnest interest in her well-being.<sup>57</sup> Having heard of Franklin through Scott and solicited an article, Elsie Champion befriended her. As early as August 1902, she sent books of poetry, having heard that Franklin experienced difficulties obtaining them. In the accompanying letter she wrote of how much she loved *My Brilliant Career*, which she had made available to readers

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<sup>55</sup> MF, Diary entry, 7 April 1949, MFP, ML MSS 364/4, It.6.

<sup>56</sup> Franklin came into contact with McDonald's sister, Isabella (or 'Bella'), a qualified doctor, in 1917, when she joined the Scottish Women's Hospital and departed for six months service in Macedonia. The connection was maintained following Franklin's return to London and Louisa MacDonald's arrival there following her resignation from the Women's College in Sydney. See H. Alexander, 'MacDonald Louisa', *ADB*, vol. 10, pp. 253-4; and Roe, *My Congenials*, vol. 1, pp.120-21. See also diary entry, 7 April 1949, notebook, MFP, vol. 4, item 6.

<sup>57</sup> See Janice N. Brownfoot, 'Goldstein, Vida Jane Mary', *ADB*, vol. 9, pp.43-45, for more on Vida, and their father, Jacob; and Geoffrey Serle, 'Champion, Henry Hyde', *ADB*, vol. 7, pp.603-5.

through her lending library and journal. She assured Franklin that ‘every class of reader’ similarly enjoyed it and eagerly awaited her next book.<sup>58</sup> While resident in Melbourne, secretly working as a maid, Franklin inadvertently gained first hand knowledge of the scale of Champion’s role in promoting the novel. Her mistress, she told Scott:

[i]s a great admirer of yrs & went to hear you speak while you were over & she comes to Mrs C’s library & had my book out four times - Isn’t it fun?<sup>59</sup>

As the above jubilant comment suggests, Franklin also saw the Champions while in Melbourne, and thought ‘Mrs Champion ... one of the greatest dears alive’. Thus, Champion’s relationship with Franklin and her career approximated most closely to that of Scott’s, though on a lesser scale. A feminist, with an interest in Australian writers, she offered warm encouragement to Franklin and promoted her work to others.

Though it is likely that Elsie Champion brought Miles Franklin to the attention of her sister, the Victorian suffrage campaigner, Vida Goldstein, it appears that Rose Scott also initially acted as a mutual point of reference. During her stay in Melbourne, Franklin reported on ‘Colonel Goldstein’s’ response to Scott’s loving poem. Vida Goldstein wrote to Franklin from *Lynton* when she visited Sydney.<sup>60</sup> However, the sort of support extended by the radical suffragist differed from that offered by both Scott and Champion. Certainly, Goldstein supported the Women’s Writers’ Club at some stage, and did use her resources as owner and editor of the journal, *The Australian Women’s Sphere*, to publish a short article on Franklin in April, 1904. However, when Franklin complained of difficulties or depression, Goldstein did not offer the motherly sympathy of Scott and Champion. Instead she outlined a philosophical approach to life and its challenges founded on her belief in Christian Science. Her sisters, Aileen and Isabella, also wrote repeatedly and urgently

<sup>58</sup> Elsie Champion to MF, 6 Aug. 1902, MFP, ML MSS 364/8.

<sup>59</sup> MF to RS, 3 March 1904, MFP, ML MSS 364/8.

<sup>60</sup> See correspondence in Roe, *My Congenials*, vol. 1, pp.30, 37-8.

about Science. The suffragist inevitably wrote about her various campaigns, as well, and urged Franklin to visit America, offering introductions to various feminist organisations or individuals. The sisters, however, hoped that Franklin might meet with some of the Scientists while in America.<sup>61</sup> Thus, Goldstein responded differently to Franklin's needs as a female writer constrained by her gender, class and social circumstances. Instead of the passionate outcries of the maternal Scott - 'I felt with you & I with them [domestic servants] & with all the victims of environment and heredity & the squeeze for existence' - Goldstein spoke about realising 'that we reflect the one mind, the one intelligence, & thus have dominion over every false condition'.<sup>62</sup>

Another friend Scott introduced to Miles Franklin, was Caroline David. Wife of eminent geologist, (Sir) Tannant William Edgeworth David, Cara David became associated with University circles through her husband's academic appointments.<sup>63</sup> Her links with Scott were inevitable. In fact, Scott's uncle had helped Cara David (as she was known) with the manuscript for her book, *Funafuti*, an 'unscientific account' of an expedition to 'an atoll in the Ellis Islands' in 1897.<sup>64</sup> During the First World War, she made notable contributions to the campaign for 6 o'clock closing. A decade later, David began an association with the Girl Guides Movement that lasted for the rest of her life. These are the details that stand out in biographical accounts of her life. However, they do not reflect the scope of her progressive, or as her daughter put it, 'avant garde', views. She encouraged her daughters to ride bicycles, not a widely accepted mode of transport or recreation for young women at the time. Further, David rejected the wearing of corsets on

<sup>61</sup> Isabella, Aileen, and Vida Goldstein, to MF, various corr., MFP, ML MSS 364/10.

<sup>62</sup> RS to MF, 22 May [1903], MFP, ML MSS 364/8; Vida Goldstein to MF, 16 Oct. 1904, MFP, ML MSS 364/10.

<sup>63</sup> Sir Edgeworth David became a celebrated member of Ernest Shackleton's 1907-09 Antarctic exhibition, in which David led successful attempts to scale the active volcano Mt Erebus, and later to the magnetic South Pole. See T. G. Vallance and D. F. Branagan, 'David, Sir Tannant William Edgeworth', *ADB*, vol. 8, pp.218-21.

<sup>64</sup> Vallance and Branagan, David, *ADB*, p.219.

the grounds that they were unhealthy. She 'was always trying something new, in religion, in diet, or in physical culture'. When any member of her family required medical attention, David insisted on a female doctor, as she 'had great sympathy for and confidence in those courageous pioneer women who were receiving rough treatment at the hands of their male colleagues'. She also proved 'an excellent public speaker', 'practical and methodical, and invaluable' as chairwoman on a variety of women's committees.<sup>65</sup> Included in the long list of committees on which David served was a branch of Rose Scott's Women's Political Education League.

It was no wonder that such a woman, one who not only applauded advancement of the rights of women, but insisted on practical changes in her own life, should make more substantial efforts to assist Franklin's career than any of Scott's other contacts. It was David who helped consolidate the admiration of Lord Hallam Tennyson into formal offers of introductions and assistance in London. Tennyson had written to Franklin in May 1903, praising *My Brilliant Career*. In July, David wrote, telling of a conversation she had held with Tennyson over lunch the day before. He had expressed his appreciation of the novel and confidence in Franklin's ability to improve on it in future works. David jumped at the opportunity:

I told him as much as I knew about you, and said I thought you had been hardly dealt with by your publisher. Then Lord Tennyson said "If she has another book written send it to me and I will see that she is not badly treated by a publisher." I know he means this. Will you let me know the exact terms on which you stand with your publisher - also if you have received any money for your book?

Don't think me officious please, or cheeky, but if you have another book will you let me read it first and then after discussion with you - either you or I could send it on to Lord Tennyson.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Mary Edgeworth David, *Passages of Time: An Australian Woman, 1890-1974*, (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1975), pp.17, 20,42, 83.

<sup>66</sup> Cara David to MF, 24 July 1903, Miles Franklin Papers, ML MSS 3639. It.B.

Thus began an increasingly complex and difficult scheme to brush up a manuscript, possibly that of *My Career Goes Bung*, worthy of the attention of the former Governor General. Between April and December 1902, Franklin had corresponded alternately with the Sydney publishing company Angus and Robertson, and her previous publisher, Blackwood's of Edinburgh, concerning the placement of a sequel to *My Brilliant Career*. Apparently its characterisations were too harsh and close to the mark for George Robertson, and A.B. Paterson referred to its 'attempts at introspective philosophy which are the drivel of the usual schoolgirl sort'.<sup>67</sup> Franklin and her supporters thus appear to have decided in mid-1903 that it needed some work before they again placed it before prospective publishers. Involving Cara David, Rose Scott, David Scott Mitchell, and the moody young author, the scheme progressed spasmodically between Scott's frantic schedule prior to the first election since female enfranchisement, David's weekly residential shift from city to mountain and back, and Franklin's domestic service. Initially Scott had offered to read those parts that troubled Franklin, or to arrange for 'Mr Mitchell' to read them if 'Dearie' wished. The subject lapsed for nearly a year until David sent a letter that implied that she too had offered her assistance to Franklin. She explained that she only intended 'motherly kindness' by seeking to assist her. Ten days later Scott answered a letter from Franklin explaining David's scheme and the Tennyson offer, with willing compliance. She hoped Franklin would send the 'MS' immediately, although she stipulated that she 'cd not read it with Mrs David, but I cd read it & read it aloud to Mr Mitchell - & send it to Mrs D afterwards'.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> A.B. Paterson to George Robertson, 14 April 1902, quoted in Anthony Barker, 1982, *George Robertson: A Publishing Life in Letters*, (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1993), pp.45-6. See further correspondence and notes, pp.46-50.

<sup>68</sup> RS to MF, 25 Sept. [1902], MFP, ML MSS 364/8; Cara David to MF, 10 Aug. 1903, MFP, ML MSS 364/9; RS to MF, 18 Aug. [1903], MFP, ML MSS 364/8.



Scott intended to keep her word, and to read the manuscript promptly. However, while Scott was touring NSW over the ensuing months, David wrote that she had only received the first fourteen chapters. In relation to what she had read, she made the guarded comment that Miles Franklin 'needs further experience of the world'. Light-heartedly she added that Franklin could visit her at Woodford, and thus obtain a little of the required experience. By November, both she and Franklin were losing patience with Scott:

I am ever so sorry that I promised Miss Scott to meet her & go over the book with her after she had read it to M. Mitchell. She is off on her tour up north, & sent me the last half of the MS without a word.<sup>69</sup>

David's uneasiness about commenting directly on the manuscript in writing manifest itself in her repeated request that Franklin visit her. If they perused the new book together, she felt she could provide more valuable assistance. In particular, Franklin could explain the pessimism evident in the plot. Ever diplomatic, she tempered her criticism with expressions of confidence in Franklin's genius:

I do think I could help you a wee bit - not by trying to tie the wings of your genius, but by helping to teach your genius how to guide its own flight.<sup>70</sup>

Although Tennyson continued to write to Franklin with assurances of assistance David, Scott and Franklin appear to have dismissed the manuscript as a possibility by the end of 1903. By the following April, David had turned her sights to 'Mary Anne', the story of Franklin's experiences in domestic service. Once again, David offered her home at Woodford, in the Blue Mountains to Franklin. It was a peaceful haven, ideal for writing. During the weekdays, the David family would be away in Sydney, and Franklin would have no interruptions. Sadly, the much-vaunted Mary Anne project failed to become the 'brilliant hit' David and others anticipated. The failure was as sad for David and Scott as it must have been for Franklin, for it represented the last substantial attempt at direct

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<sup>69</sup> Cara David to MF, 7 Nov. 1903, MFP, ML MSS 364/9.

<sup>70</sup> Cara David to MF, undated [Sept.-Oct, 1903], MFP, ML MSS 364/9.

literary patronage of the *My-Brilliant-Career*-era. Swayed by Vida Goldstein, Franklin soon turned her sights to America. There, she channeled her talents into journalistic work in aid of various feminist causes, thus putting her career as a writer of Australian fiction on hold.

Ironically, Scott had little idea of Franklin's intentions to travel. The women's rights campaigner may have contributed to the decision through her careful nurturing of Franklin's feminist inclinations. Putting aside all Scott's literary interests, her social connections and maternal instincts, she was passionate about anything that involved the rights of women. To her, Franklin's rejection of the social conventions that condemned women to domestic drudgery in marriage, and ostracism in spinsterhood, must have provided encouragement and joy. What was the purpose in fighting so hard, if a new generation - if other women in general - did not care for their new freedom, or take up the fight themselves? Thus she gushed:

It gave me real happiness to hear or see yr words about "The Subjection of Women" [by J. S. Mill] ... He was so just to women! It is so easy for men to love women, so hard for them to be just to them.<sup>71</sup>

Similarly, when Franklin's experiences as a maid revealed the conditions of work in the domestic service, they rallied each other with cries of protest and the imperative of action. Finally, when Franklin shared her grief over her looks, Scott spoke with vigor of her contempt for men who were satisfied with mere appearances, and cared little for 'the soul of women'.<sup>72</sup>

In Miles Franklin, Scott already had a believer. However, Scott was anxious to know how Franklin's mother felt about her work for women. To her relief, Franklin confirmed that her mother was a 'dear friend' and a supporter of the cause. The extent to

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<sup>71</sup> RS to MF, 24 April 1903, MFP, ML MSS 364/8.

<sup>72</sup> RS to MF, 'Monday' [1905], MFP, ML MSS 364/8.

which Susannah Franklin sympathised with Scott's work and her daughter's views, the degree to which the mother supported the writer's literary endeavours, and the conditions governing the actions of both mother and daughter now warrants particular and careful attention. The significance Scott placed on Susannah Franklin's interest in the women's movement is instructive - she understood the potential role a mother could play in a young female writer's career.

### **The Family Response**

Many writers have glossed over the question of Franklin's relationship with her mother. They talk of the mother figure in the novel as a symbol of the idealised gentility of women in the bush as found in traditional romances; as a rejected role model; as a severe, unthinking slave to domesticity; and as a woman trapped by marriage. Few writers, however, have attempted to relate Mrs Melvyn to Mrs Franklin in any great detail. Marjorie Barnard, in her biography of Miles Franklin simply assumed the realism of the portrait of the mother figure. When writing about the mother-daughter relationship in *My Brilliant Career*, Susan Gardner touched briefly on the relationship between the real-life and fictional mother. In her biography of Miles Franklin, Verna Coleman makes probably the most concerted attempt to understand Susannah Franklin. Yet, she predicated her argument on the assumption that *My Brilliant Career* and *My Career Goes Bung* represented reality.

*My Brilliant Career* was written after Miles Franklin and her family moved from the idyllic mountainous terrain of the high Monaro to *Stillwater*, a small, dry farm in the uninspiring 'ragged' hills south east of Goulburn. In the midst of the declining fortunes of *Stillwater* where, without servants and surrounded by a horde of siblings, Franklin was burdened with the never-ending domestic duties assigned to the eldest daughter of a

household, she wrote her first novel. Although a work of fiction, it appeared to mirror her reality: the childhood paradise; the distant genteel home of grandmother and aunts; the constant struggle in worsening conditions on the new land; the heroine's creative yearnings and rebellious nature. It is no wonder that Marjorie Barnard assumed that the unforgiving portrait of Mrs Melvyn was drawn almost directly from life. Following the Franklins' move to *Stillwater*, she reasoned:

Miles and her mother were out of tune with one another. Mrs Franklin was a practical woman, of sturdy common-sense, a good mother and a good wife. No matter what reverses the family suffered she never lowered her standards. Displays of emotion were quite out of bounds. She herself was stoical and uncomplaining. She expected her children to be the same. She lacked imagination and thought any sort of fantasy was nonsense and lies.<sup>73</sup>

Compare with Sybylla's reflections concerning her mother:

The professions at which I felt I had the latent talent to excel, were I but given a chance, were in a sphere above us, and to mention my feelings and ambitions to my matter-of-fact practical mother would bring upon me worse ridicule than I was already forced to endure day by day. ... My mother is a good woman – a very good woman – and I am, I think, not quite all criminality, but we do not pull together. I am a piece of machinery which, not understanding, my mother winds up the wrong way, setting all the wheels of my composition going in creaking discord.<sup>74</sup>

Susan Gardner linked the discordant nature of the relationship between mother and daughter to the question of “matrophobia” – the fear of becoming like one's mother, “who stands for the victim in ourselves, the unfree woman, the martyr”. For Sybylla, Gardner reasoned, the catalyst for writing was ‘confrontation with the archetypal evil mother, partially overlapping with the personal mother’.<sup>75</sup> Gardner thus implied a parallel between the roles played by the fictional mother in Sybylla's life, and the author's mother in her

<sup>73</sup> Marjorie Barnard, *Miles Franklin: The Story of a Famous Australian*, with introduction by Jill Roe, (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1988), p.50.

<sup>74</sup> MF, *My Brilliant Career*, pp.26, 28.

<sup>75</sup> Susan Gardner, ‘Portrait’, p.32. In fact, both Sybylla and Miles expressed regret over the ‘hopeless net of circumstances’ that conspired to waste their mother's ‘immense capability’. See MF, Black exercise book, n.1, entry, 5 Dec. [1943?], MFP, ML MSS 364/4, it.1.

own life. As her discussion turned in a different direction, Gardner provides no further explanation of these parallel roles.

If, like Verna Coleman, we take *My Brilliant Career* and *My Career Goes Bung* as reflections of reality, Susannah Franklin lacked understanding of Miles' artistic nature, was well-entrenched within a conservative acceptance of her own lot in life as a woman, and sought nothing but the preservation of the order engendered by that dull, personally restrictive existence. However, Coleman, in her partial biography of Miles Franklin, tempered her portrayal of Susannah Franklin with sympathy. S.M.E. Franklin (as she signed herself), grew up in a more genteel environment, had played the piano, painted, and read Shakespeare and Milton. Coleman's assessment of Susannah Franklin's character as a more educated, thoughtful woman than that characterised in the two novels, receives some support from a later study by Jill Roe. Religious material contained in Miles Franklin's library provides 'evidence of [Susannah Franklin's] interest in advanced religious thought'.<sup>76</sup> Coleman also argued that 'the armour of self-control did not entirely suppress' Susannah Franklin's artistic and independent intellectual impulses. At Brindabella, Miles' mother struggled to create the impression of grace and comfort, but at *Stillwater*, with six children, the drought, and her husband's failing 'auctioneering venture', her life became increasingly trying. In such circumstances, Miles' sister, Linda, who was two years her junior, sweet-tempered and docile, would have provided more comfort than the wilful Miles to their mother.<sup>77</sup> This would explain why Franklin in reality may have felt misunderstood by her mother, just as the two novels suggest. At the same time, the argument does not deny Susannah Franklin the possibility of artistic impulse and independent thought. Coleman, however, did not pursue her own thesis in her narrative of

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<sup>76</sup> Roe, 'Franklin's Library', p.58.

<sup>77</sup> Coleman, *Her Unknown*, pp.24, 28.

Franklin's early career. Concerning the reception to *My Brilliant Career*, she concluded that:

since supposedly fictional Sybylla's life so closely paralleled Stella's, the unsophisticated country people of her blood or acquaintance saw themselves caricatured in the book. Her humourless mother was furious at the picture given of their lives and at the trouble caused in the family.<sup>78</sup>

No evidence exists to confirm this version of the mother's reaction, except in the fictional mother's behaviour in *My Career Goes Bung*. Initially, Mrs Melvyn was horrified. She doubted the publishers' wisdom in printing her daughter's novel, was assured that she, too, would have to suffer for Sybylla's errors, and disavowed any knowledge of her daughter's intentions to write such a novel to friends and strangers alike.

Thus the question begs: how close to reality was Franklin's portrayal of her mother? Little direct evidence exists to confirm Susannah Franklin's views on Miles' venture as an author. Can we rely on the novels as historical records? In the foreword to *My Career Goes Bung*, Franklin rejected the literalness imputed on her first novel, and explained that she wrote the sequel both as a corrective, and as a work of fiction. Elizabeth Webby has since observed that the published version moved away from 'specific personalities'.<sup>79</sup> Reality and fiction, it appears, merged. For instance, the actual reaction of relatives, neighbours and friends to *My Brilliant Career* is readily gauged through perusal of the Franklin papers. The general tenor of the response sometimes corresponds to the account given in *My Career Goes Bung*. Thus, a letter 'from an old neighbour' to 'Ma', attacking her for 'aiding' Sybylla 'in making fun of him', may have in reality been from an Uncle to whom Franklin replied on behalf of her mother, her mother having injured her hand. Miles assured the Uncle that she had not written 'malicious lies' about him, because she had written a 'story tale'. It was he who saw himself in the character she created. In

<sup>78</sup> Coleman, *Her Unknown*, p. 35.

<sup>79</sup> Miles Franklin, *My Brilliant Career*, *My Career Goes Bung*, with introduction by Elizabeth Webby,



the novel the 'old neighbour' accused Sybylla of uttering, '[m]alicious lies without a cause, for it is not a bit like us'.<sup>80</sup> In other places, Franklin definitely improvised, creating new characters for parallel roles. According to Sybylla, 'Grandma' was shocked. She personally felt disgraced by Sybylla's behaviour. Yet, in reality:

Grannie wanted to see it [the book] to see if the price was on it. She has nearly read it all & seems to like it. Nearly killed herself laughing at parts of it & I can't get her nose out of it.<sup>81</sup>

It was fortunate that Linda, Franklin's generous warm-hearted sister was at *Talbingo*, her grandmother's place, to record her response to the publication of *My Brilliant Career*. Naturally Linda loved it, and proudly told everyone that she was 'the sister of an authoress'. She and her Aunt Lena also defended Miles against those relatives who lacked a sense of humour.<sup>82</sup> If, in real life, three of Miles Franklin's closest and most revered female models applauded, defended and to some extent understood what she had done, is it not possible that the fourth and most important figure also approved?

Immediately after the publication of *My Brilliant Career* Franklin rejected the suggestion of any resemblance between fiction and reality. When writing to A.G. Stephens, following his review of *My Brilliant Career*, Miles Franklin flatly denied any correlation between Mr and Mrs Melvyn and her own mother and father. Quick to correct the 'dreadful mistake' Stephens had made when he reported in the *Bulletin* that her work was true to life, she assured him that 'F. and M. are both wonders to me'.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, within the text of *My Career Goes Bung*, Sybylla affirmed that she 'made up a woman with no resemblance' to her mother 'on purpose'.<sup>84</sup> Perhaps such statements were made in an attempt to deflect the attention from her parents, and undo a little of the damage that

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(North Ryde, NSW: Angus and Robertson, 1990), p.xvii.

<sup>80</sup> MF, *MCCGB*, p.63; Roe, *My Congenials*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>81</sup> Linda Franklin to MF, 16 Sept. 1901, MFP, ML MSS 364/49.

<sup>82</sup> Linda Franklin to MF, 16 May 1903, MFP, ML MSS 364/49.

<sup>83</sup> MF to AG Stephens, 10 Oct. 1901, MFP, ML MSS 364/7.

she had already done. The process of deflection gained further impetus in the sequel. In the same passage as her denial of a resemblance between Mrs Melvyn and her own mother in the first novel, Franklin sketched a new portrait of a reasonable, resourceful and well-respected woman, a person who stood apart from her neighbours. This more flexible, even progressive character may be correlated with Franklin's comments about her own mother to suggest that it offers a more realistic impression of Susannah Franklin than the model taken as true in *My Brilliant Career*.

Franklin subtly introduced the new characterisation of the fictional mother in her description of the Melvyn's reaction to Sybylla's book. Sybylla recorded her mother's response:

She said she was relieved that it was not as bad as she had expected, for how could a girl without EXPERIENCE write a book? She said it was lacking in discretion... There would be unpleasantness with worthy people who would think themselves ridiculed. She also said it was unfilial to concoct an uncomplimentary exaggerated fabrication in such a way that outsiders would think it represented Pa and her. This was very mild and handsome of Ma.<sup>85</sup>

These criticisms, in reality, were mostly true and fair. If they echoed Susannah Franklin's own comments, she was neither an uncomprehending tyrant, nor an unliterary 'char-woman', but simply a pragmatist. She was also, according to Sybylla, a capable woman:

Ma is the most wonderful housekeeper in the district. The result is that the neighbours for miles around come to her when they want anything. They send to her when there is an accident, and more than once she has set an arm or leg in such a way that the doctor coming later has highly recommended her skill and left it untouched.<sup>86</sup>

This certainly sounds like Susannah Franklin. Stories circulated for many years in Penrith, where the Franklins took up residence in 1903, of her 'impromptu midwifery'.<sup>87</sup> Likewise, in *Childhood at Brindabella*, a collection of simple reminiscences about the most idyllic

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<sup>84</sup> MF, *MCGB*, p.64.

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*, p.57.

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*, p.64.

<sup>87</sup> *Some Everyday Folk and Dawn*, with introduction by Jill Roe, (London: Virago, 1986), p.xii.

years of her life, Franklin recalled her mother's natural ability to deal with all medical emergencies. These recollections included the setting of broken bones and on one occasion the sewing on of a toe completely severed from a boy's foot by his brother's tomahawk.<sup>88</sup>

'She can make dresses like a picture', Sybylla wrote of her mother's tailoring skills. A cutting preserved in the Miles Franklin Papers suggests that Mrs Franklin was also an accomplished seamstress. Next to an article about Madame J.W. Weigel, a pioneer 'of the Australian paper press pattern industry', Franklin wrote:

It takes me back to my childhood & my teens. Mother was a regular subscriber to "Madame Weigel's Fashion Journal". It was an "elegancy" to which she clung throughout the leanest lean years. It was one of the touches of her upbringing that set her above the other women to whose company she was reduced at *Stillwater*. Mother always dressed herself & us by Madame W's paper patterns, which were renowned for their accuracy & style. Mother was equally capable of executing them & we were always turned out as no others were.<sup>89</sup>

Clearly the sailor suit Franklin wore at Rose Scott's was not an example of elegance, but nevertheless a product of motherly resourcefulness and skill.

Mrs Melvyn's baking and hospitality was also famous. Miles Franklin's descriptions of her mother's proclivity to hospitality in real life suggest a further correlation of personality. Mrs Franklin was a generous hostess. In the 1930s, having returned to Sydney and settled in her mother's home in Carlton, Franklin refused to invite her literary friends over. She knew that her mother would insist on 'the old style of entertaining and giving all to guests of material things', when they could not afford such generosity. Even during her dying days, Susannah worried about the comfort of her guests, an example of the 'generous hospitality, wh. made of [her] home a free boarding house. [She was] never caught without provision, never unpunctual, never flagged'.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>88</sup> MF, *Childhood at Brindabella*, first published 1954, (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1979), p.12.

<sup>89</sup> MF, notebook entry, untitled, undated, [1940?], MFP, ML MSS 364/3, it.X.

<sup>90</sup> MF, notebook entry, 14 June 1939, MFP, ML MSS 364/4, It.7; Black exercise book, no.4, entry, 13 June 1939, MFP, ML MSS 364/4, It.4.

Philosophical similarities were also apparent. Sybylla attributed the following views to 'Ma'. She:

Was not at all a slavish advocate of marriage. She said if women had the sense to organise themselves and refrain from marriage till they had won better conditions there wouldn't be so many wives wishing they had had some other chance to earn their living, nor so many spinsters either thankful they had escaped marriage or regretful that they had not known the fulfilment of love.<sup>91</sup>

This was certainly a departure from the mother image projected by many commentators on Miles Franklin's life and work. Here she portrayed a mother figure with possible feminist inclinations.

Initially, the suggestion of a feminist inclination might seem out of character for the Mrs Melvyn of either novel. She was always scolding Sybylla for her waywardness, and her impropriety. Yet Mrs Melvyn's behaviour was consistent with that of a woman who did not see marriage as the only option for her daughters. She never pushed Sybylla towards marriage or insisted that she should consider a particular suitor. It was the invented grandmother who insisted in both novels that Sybylla should be married off for her own sake. At one stage the grandmother harassed Sybylla's mother:

It was disgraceful, she said, for a girl to be so much talked about as Sybylla was. What on earth could mother be doing to allow it?

On this occasion, 'Ma was the least off my side I had ever known her'. She simply advised that if Sybylla 'intended to marry' she should consider a rich man as her father 'was useless as a provider'. 'Grandma' was more specific, 'if Beauchamp was in earnest it would be a lucky disposal of [Sybylla]'. On a separate occasion, when 'Old Grayling', who had previously sent a note proposing to Sybylla visited the farm, she hid until he had departed. Forced to offer some explanation, she eventually told her father about his intentions. Her mother, when informed, refrained from reprimanding Sybylla for her

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<sup>91</sup> MF, *MCGB*, pp.99-100.

unsociable behaviour and abrupt departure from the task of washing up to the accompaniment of tears. Instead, she offered words of consolation and allowed her daughter to retire early, both unusual concessions for Mrs Melvyn. On Sybylla's return from Sydney some time later, it was Aunt Jane, not 'Ma', who interrogated Sybylla about possible suitors.<sup>92</sup>

Throughout the novel, the fictional mother thus struck a strange silence over the issue of marriage. The real mother acted in a very similar way. She helped discourage unwanted suitors, and never lectured over missed opportunities. It is difficult to measure the extent of Susannah Franklin's knowledge of Banjo Patterson's advances. Miles' sister, Linda, knew but did not indicate that she had discussed it with anyone else. Knowing Miles' tendency for secrecy, it is possible that she revealed very little about that episode to her mother. Susannah Franklin did, however, know about the attentions of Miles' cousin Edgar Vernon. While Franklin was earning money as 'Mary Anne' in 1903, Vernon visited her parents' new home at Penrith. He hoped to see Miles, and intended to 'look [her] up in Sydney'. '[W]e did not tell him where you are' the mother assured her daughter.<sup>93</sup> This appears to be the only example of Susannah Franklin's involvement in her daughter's romantic life. None of her letters, whether from the immediate post-*My-Brilliant-Career*-era, or later, suggest that she held matrimonial hopes for Miles or for grandchildren from her eldest daughter. She accepted Miles' spinsterhood without comment. In terms of her views on marriage she thus appears to resemble Mrs Melvyn. She was not 'a slavish advocate of marriage'.

In her own marriage Susannah Franklin revealed not just resourcefulness, but also a tendency to progressive and feminist values. We already know that Susannah Franklin

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<sup>92</sup> MF, *MCGB*, pp.99, 100, 104.

<sup>93</sup> Susannah Franklin (SMEF) to MF, 01 Aug. 1903, MFP, ML MSS 364/48.

was a capable woman. Miles Franklin lamented '[l]ife was very wasteful of her outstanding ability and quality'. On practically no income she fed, clothed and educated her children. Holding independent ideas on constructive education, the informal instruction that she offered did not condone traditional children's books, but did approve the *Picture Alphabet of Birds* procured for the bird-loving Miles. She also allowed 'Dr Wood's *Natural History*'. Fairy tales were taboo. In her adulthood Miles approved this discretionary policy:

Mother dismissed fairies as unwholesome imaginings and guarded her infants' minds from the heavier kind of fantasy also because in her own childhood she had been harrowed by the sorrows and trials of the children in them. Little Red Riding Hood eaten by a wolf two babies dying in the woods, lost and covered by leaves: Jack and the Beanstalk, with the gruesome slitting of the giants' stomachs - horror stories with starving match-girls and frozen children.<sup>94</sup>

Susannah Franklin's independent judgement of juvenile literature was reminiscent of Cara David's approval of bicycles for her girls and prohibition of corsets. Neither followed convention unquestioningly. Aware that her mother exhibited a progressiveness more often observed among key feminists and Society women than in the local neighbourhood (both rural and suburban), Miles Franklin acknowledged in the 1940s that Susannah Franklin was 'ahead of all her associates in thought and wisdom'.<sup>95</sup> It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that for her time Susannah Franklin was forward thinking, that her hopes for Miles were not constrained by traditional expectations of marriage and domestic enslavement, and that she endorsed Miles' pursuit of a literary career.

When Rose Scott entered Miles' life, Susannah Franklin, though relatively ignorant of the specifics of the women's movement, was intellectually receptive to its message. Scott rejoiced in the knowledge that she was sympathetic, and encouraged her to

<sup>94</sup> MF, *Childhood*, pp. 62, 81.

<sup>95</sup> ME, notebook entry, 14 June 1939, MFP, ML MSS 364/4, It. 7.



write and to discuss their newly won 'political freedom'.<sup>96</sup> Their correspondence over the next three or four years, reveals not only a deepening friendship, but a mutual interest in the political education of women. In 1903, Miles' mother became actively involved in establishing the Penrith branch of the Women's Political Education League (WPEL). The concept, structure and impetus for the League all originated with the intrepid Rose Scott, who hoped that women would learn to use their newly won right to vote to their gender's best advantage. A letter, signed S.M.E. Franklin, reached Rose Scott in November 1903;

Now about a meeting here, I have not been able to arrive at any thing definite... I will just tell you what I have done & then perhaps you could give me some idea how to act, I would be glad & most willing...

It turned out that after approaching the Mayor, the local Member of Parliament, the Secretary of "The School of Arts" who then introduced her to the President of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, Susannah Franklin had not been able to find anyone to help stage a meeting at which Rose Scott could speak. She did, however, have an idea:

I have conceived a plan for I do not like to say die, to one who has done so much for our sex. I believe I could get a Committee of ladies sufficiently interested in our work, then we could get the hall, & advertise the meeting charging a silver coin admission to defray expenses & money over to go to the local Hospital. What think you?<sup>97</sup>

Two days later, uncertainty had gripped her again. Unwilling to give up she persevered in her efforts, together with another supporter, to arrange a meeting. Eventually, they booked rooms at the School of Arts, at which Scott could hold an afternoon reception, 'giving the people interested in your news, an opportunity of meeting you, & perhaps arranging for a proper meeting at a future date'.<sup>98</sup> Within two months of the reception, a formal branch of the WPEL had evolved, although, as Susannah Franklin

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<sup>96</sup> RS to MF, 2 June 1902; 25 Sept. [1902], MFP, ML MSS 364/8.

<sup>97</sup> SMEF to RS, 23 Nov. 1903, RSC, ML A2278.



pointed out, 'it was poorly attended'. In order to raise interest and confidence (Franklin as Vice-President and 'Miss Hamilton' as Secretary felt too inexperienced to properly undertake their respective tasks), the League invited Scott to deliver another speech. Six months later, Mrs Franklin still felt the need to educate herself, and that the 'Political Addresses' by 'Candidates for the Coming Election' provided a valuable opportunity to learn more.<sup>99</sup>

The first election after the acquisition of female suffrage occurred during the lifetime of the Penrith branch of the WPEL. Miles Franklin translated much of the local experience of the pre-election campaign into the context for *Some Everyday Folk and Dawn*, which was published in London in 1909. In one of a series of black notebooks in which she made occasional diary entries, Miles recorded her memories of that chapter of the Franklins' life. It confuses some details by alleging that the League worked for 'Bertie' Kelly during the election season. This could not have been true, as the women's committee established in support of Kelly operated in direct opposition to the WPEL, and Rose Scott herself was ardently against party support. Confused details aside, Franklin recalled that her mother worked for a political committee, and that her father supported the opposition. Joking, he had placed a placard advertising his candidate on one side of their front gate and urged Susannah to place one in support of her choice on the other side. She would not consent. Nevertheless, members of Penrith Council attacked Mr Franklin over his wife's independence. They assumed that a woman's vote should reflect the political loyalties of her father or husband.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> SMEF to RS, 25 Nov. 1903, 27 Nov. 1903, RSC, ML A2278.

<sup>99</sup> SMEF to RS, 15 Jan. 1904, 9 June 1904, RSC, ML A2273.

<sup>100</sup> MF, Black exercise book, no. 5, entry, 19 May 1948, MFP, ML MSS 364/4, It.5.

Susannah Franklin was also open enough to consider arguments that interrogated national policies. In 1905, Cara David delivered a speech at a Penrith branch WPEL meeting on 'The White Australia Policy'. Franklin duly wrote to Scott:

[i]t appears to me a question that should involve deep thought, there are so many points to view it from – the poor dark races seem so despised.<sup>101</sup>

This was certainly a novel and forward-looking approach to the question of race. Possibly she simply echoed the 'avant garde' sentiments voiced by David (the exact arguments put forward are not known), but it still took a mind that was open and inquiring to seriously consider the injustices embodied in the racial policies of the day. Susannah Franklin's actions suggest that while she may not have had the advantage of ample leisure-time, a formal education, and the experience of committee work concomitant to the activities of middle class women, she possessed an active contemplative faculty unfettered by conventional dogma. Even when the branch foundered in the concluding months of 1906, as key members moved out of the district, Franklin was one of the small core of active participants who steadfastly struggled through pouring rain to the council chambers for the last of their meetings.

Evidence thus suggests that Susannah Franklin held a progressive outlook and supported the feminist movement in particular. Whether this made her an avid supporter and promoter of her daughter's writing career requires further consideration. Proof may be found in Miles Franklin's recollections following her mother's death, which reveal that through several motherly strategies, Susannah Franklin exerted a subtle form of patronage. First among these was the practice of 'treasuring', the careful preservation of items of significance to her children and close family. Years after her mother's passing, for example, Miles Franklin discovered her sister Linda's wedding shoes, carefully packed

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<sup>101</sup> SMEF to RS, 24 Feb. 1905, RSC, ML A2283.

away in an old trunk and lovingly preserved. Linda had died of pneumonia shortly after the birth of her first child in 1907. A letter from Franklin's Aunt Bertha also survived, accompanied by a cheque for £2, as yet uncashed, sent during 'those impoverished days at Stillwater'. Many other items were found stored away. Anguished by the memory of her mother, Franklin paid a poignant tribute to her:

You kept these tokens so faithfully all those hard years when I was in USA & you had no home. When Father got really on the rocks. Faithful & tenacious under cruel odds you kept even my trivial things – not one missing - & only in rough cases that you had to construct yourself. Oh, Mother how you struggled! You never let go, never missed a stitch. You had unrelaxing fortitude.<sup>102</sup>

In the Foreword of *My Career Goes Bung*, Franklin tells of her rediscovery of a copy of the original manuscript written during the *My-Brilliant-Career*-era. While Elizabeth Webby suggests that the Foreword does not convey the entire truth, and the manuscript would not have been packed away until after Blackwood finally rejected it in 1911, Franklin attributes the preservation of the copy of her manuscript to her mother's valiant care. This seems to hold some truth when considering Susannah Franklin's proclivity to preserve such 'treasures'.

Like Rose Scott, Susannah Franklin also spent a lot of time acting as a contact for the increasingly mobile Miles. While Miles played Mary Anne in 1903 and 1904, her mother redirected mail and acted as a channel of information. Decades later, she continued to faithfully play the role of Sydney contact for her daughter, the writer. In 1931, for example, Mrs Franklin sent a letter on Miles' behalf to George Robertson, and delivered collections of cards sent by Miles through her mother to her Sydney acquaintances.

More powerfully, Susannah Franklin was an attached mother. Partly for pure domestic practicality, but mostly because of her devotion to her eldest daughter, she lamented even Miles' shortest absences. However, she did not resist Miles Franklin's

desire first to visit Sydney, and later to live and work abroad. Like Mary Richardson, mother of the writer, Henry Handel (Ethel) Richardson, Susannah Franklin displayed a sometimes reluctant but ultimately supportive acceptance of her daughter's career choices.<sup>103</sup> Thus, when Miles began her Mary Anne episode in Sydney, Susannah lovingly assured her of a warm welcome on her return home but did not attempt to impede her departure. Similarly, when her child expressed the intention to embark on a much greater adventure to America, unchaperoned, she seemed, by not opposing it, to support the decision. As Franklin's mother advised Rose Scott in 1905, when her nephew, an actor, set off to tour Australia with a theatre company, 'I'm sure you will miss your nephew but we cannot always keep the young folks with us'.<sup>104</sup> Following Miles' short return visit to Australia nearly twenty years later, Susannah Franklin displayed a more pronounced mix of conflicting emotions. Wishing Miles well, while simultaneously wishing she would stay, the saddened mother wrote:

I begin to feel you are gone now, & miss you so much. I would always like to keep you near me, but knowing yr work calls you to other lands, I must not be selfish ... I shall always be thinking of you & if at any time I can help you moneytarily let me know.<sup>105</sup>

This offer of monetary assistance was repeated throughout her correspondence with the absent Miles, and voluntarily endorsed when she mailed pound notes to London during the Depression. In each case, it is evident that Susannah Franklin was prepared to set aside her own comfort for the sake of her daughter's career, and encouraged others to appreciate such an outlook.

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<sup>102</sup> MF, notebook entry, 25 Feb. 1947, MFP, ML MSS 364/3, It.XII.

<sup>103</sup> Axel Clark demonstrates convincingly Mary Richardson's resignation to and constructive support of the strong-willed Ethel's choices, whether it involved the pursuit of a musical career through piano training in Leipzig or the decision to give up her studies to marry. See Clark, *Henry Handel Richardson: Fiction in the Making*, (Brookvale, NSW: Simon and Schuster Australia, 1990), pp. 178, 181, 194, 196-97.

<sup>104</sup> SMEF to RS, 24 Feb. 1905, RSC, ML A2283.

<sup>105</sup> SMEF to MF, 17 March 1924, MFP, ML MSS 364/48.

During the 1920s and 30s, Susannah Franklin experienced a series of personal losses, as members of her close family one by one passed away. Yet despite her inevitable grief, she never insisted on Miles' return home. When her husband, Miles' father, fell ill, she kept her daughter informed of his progress, but assured her, that 'if you feel your surroundings are congenial to your work, do not hasten home'. On another occasion, following a report on her husband's health, Susannah continued, 'Now, I don't want to make you gloomy, work on, in the line you feel is marked out for you and may it turn to good account for you'. 'If you can carry on your business better in England, than here, & happy amongst kindred spirits, do not hurry home', she again assured Miles following the passing of her father, 'I would not like to think of you being unhappy here'. During that Australian summer, three other close relatives died, the Depression wiped out Miles' financial resources, based on savings from the sale of her books, and her own health suffered in the damp London air. Finally, twenty five years after her daughter's departure from Australia, Susannah Franklin began to hint that perhaps she should permanently return to Sydney:

I am so sorry for you & your surroundings I could send you some money, but this horrid exchange would deprive you of nearly half, & I do not know what to do, it is no use my keeping money I'll not need it much longer, & it is better to help now than when I am dead, if you would be content here, in a few years a country like this must look up.<sup>106</sup>

Susannah Franklin offered her support under difficult circumstances, and the assistance she could feasibly offer Miles was limited. Yet she was generous, thoughtful and committed in her desire to help the writer. Even on her deathbed she urged Miles to take £50 to spend on new furniture for entertaining her friends, and £10 for a new

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<sup>106</sup>

SMEF to MF, 'Wednesday', 192[?], 9 June 1931; 10 April 1932, MFP, ML MSS 364/48.

typewriter. Her final words were 'I have done my best. I have done my best'.<sup>107</sup> It seemed that she felt that her chief task in life was to serve her children as fully and ably as she could. Under the severe limitations imposed by her marriage to an unlucky farmer with bad business sense, she still managed to run a clean house, offer generous hospitality, preserve the treasures of her sisters and children, found and participate in the local branch of the Women's Political Education League, and deny her own maternal longing for the company of her daughter for the sake of her daughter's career. These are subtle things. Yet, they all add up to suggest consistent support of Miles' ambitions.

This overview of the patronage offered Miles Franklin in the wake of the publication of *My Brilliant Career*, is in some respects a little depressing. A lot of people expressed interest in her. Many tendered offers of support and assistance. Initially, two men, odd heroes of a nationalist era made substantial contributions to the launch of Franklin's career. Otherwise, her most consistent, intrepid and energetic patrons were women inspired by feminist ethics. Yet, many of Miles Franklin's feminist well-wishers only fleetingly noticed the young author. Only Rose Scott and Cara David from among the Sydney crowd, and the Goldsteins and Champions from Melbourne appear to have maintained a consistent interest in Franklin's progress. Ultimately, even the well-placed Rose Scott and Cara David were prevented by the business of their own lives, and the perceived inappropriateness of Franklin's follow-up work, from achieving any sound victories on her behalf. Further, Susannah Franklin, unlike the better-funded Mary Richarson who possessed sufficient means to move the family to Leipzig and pay for Ethel's (Henry Handel) musical tuition, could not personally bring about any physical advance in her daughter's writing career. Other established women writers no longer lived

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MF, notebook entry, 25 Feb. 1947, MFP, ML MSS 364/3, It.XII.



in Australia; of those that did, none possessed the time or health to offer consistent and crucial assistance.

Miles Franklin herself gives a clue to the hiatus in her career that followed her brilliant appearance on the Australian literary scene. Her one little cry to Ethel Curlewis for help and understanding suggests that this was the form of support she probably needed the most – contact with other female writers. The feminists did not have enough literary experience to assist Franklin with the practical side of publishing, and the task of writing a second successful novel, and her male supporters either did not understand or overlooked her strong views on the status of women. Franklin once wrote that she had fallen between two stools for lack of ruthlessness and self-confidence. It may also be appropriate to say that she symbolically fell between the two stools of feminism and nationalism. No one was there to fill the gap. She had no acquaintances with mutual aims and experiences; a network of women writers did not exist in Sydney at the dawn of the twentieth century.

The same could be observed for women practicing in any of the arts at the time. Expatriatism among women writers, artists and musicians partly represented the impact of new womanhood, but it also represented a dependence on European, particularly British cultural practices. Where Australia may have seemed a socially and politically progressive nation, culturally it showed much less certainty. With the sudden influx of expatriates trained in the arts and crafts, the arrival of teachers with European training and of British society women, Sydney women suddenly caught up with the western world's latest artistic responses to the rise of modern civilisation. These responses drew modern womanhood into the search for creative excellence and blended international influences with nationalist symbolism. Yet the arts and crafts movement of the first two decades of the century in Sydney preserved a persuasive air of respectability. The world of vice-regal patrons and Society women's committees might seem a long way from Miles' lonely world of letters,



but through them women practitioners in the arts and crafts acquired what neither Rose Scott nor her mother could secure for her – an interested public and financial independence.

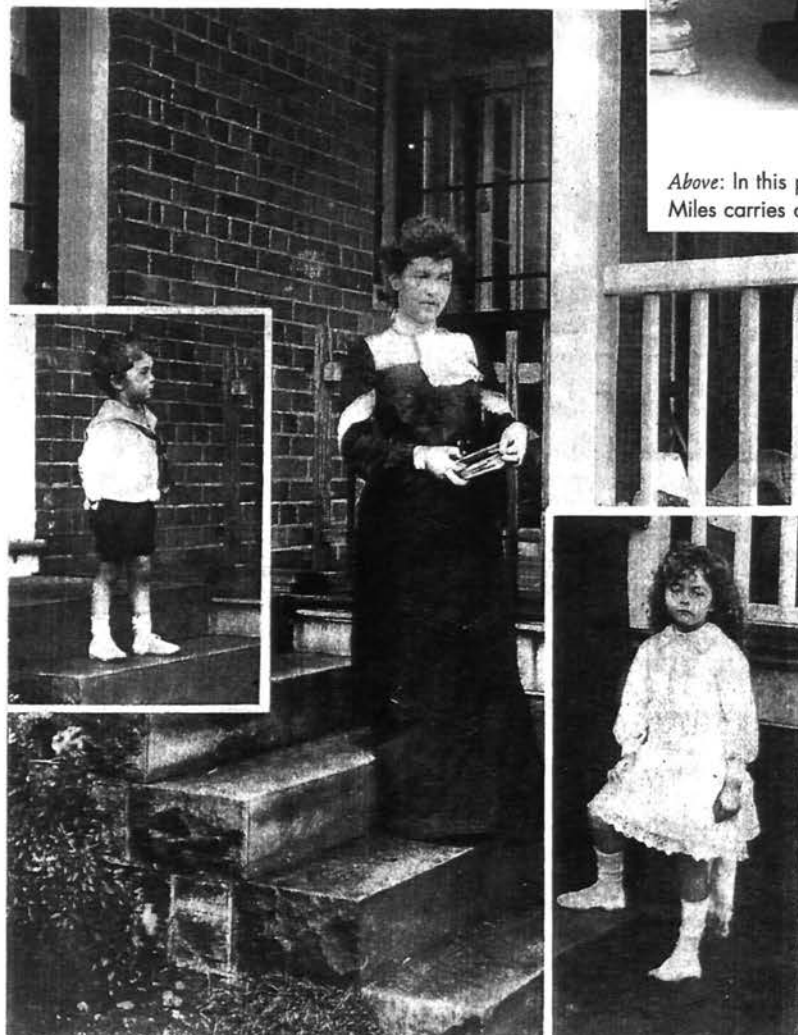
Top right: Miles Franklin, 1902, in Colin Roderick, *Miles Franklin: Her Brilliant Career*, (Sydney: Lansdowne, 1982) not paginated, original in ML.

Bottom right: Cover design of first edition, *My Brilliant Career*, in Roderick, *Her Brilliant Career*, original in ML.

Bottom left: Ethel Curlewis (Turner) and her children, in *Sydney Mail*, 4 May 1904, p.1109.



Above: In this photograph taken in 1902, the twenty-three year old Miles carries a whip. Mitchell Library



"ETHEL TURNER" AND HER OWN "LITTLE AUSTRALIANS."





MRS. DAVID,  
Vice-president.



Top: Cara David, in 'The Girls' Realm  
Guild: some of the workers', *Sydney  
Mail*, 23 April 1911, p.29.

Right: Rose Scott, 1903, in Judith  
Allen, *Rose Scott: Vision and Revision  
in Feminism*, (Melbourne: Oxford  
University Press, 1994), plate, n.p.

Portrait of Rose Scott, 1903. (Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW)