

The Not Quite Real Miles Franklin: Diaries as Performance

SANDRA KNOWLES, UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

“Did she not threaten us all with her diary, to be published when she was safely dead?”

(Marjorie Barnard qtd. in Carole Ferrier, *As Good as a Yarn with You* 21)

With the recent publication of *The Diaries of Miles Franklin* by Paul Brunton, this famous Australian author has once again entered into our national consciousness. Regarded by both critics and colleagues as a mysterious, private person, Franklin's diaries would appear to provide the long awaited story of her intimate life. In Carole Ferrier's publication of letters, *As Good as a Yarn with You*, she records Katharine Susannah Pritchard's posthumous description of the author as “a simple, loveable person, and yet more than that. Somebody we never knew” (6). Marjorie Barnard similarly commented, “Who knows exactly what Miles felt—even when she told you?” (qtd. in Ferrier 6). Ferrier also writes that in her letters, “Franklin does not generally reveal a great deal about her *personall* life” (6). Brunton's publication has been eagerly received. This edition celebrates Franklin as a national icon, and also conforms to public and private discourses by portraying the Franklin diary subject as an authentic representation of the once living writer. However, there are many features in Franklin's diary manuscripts that indicate they were clearly intended for publication. This essay argues that Franklin's diaries are a performance of privacy and authenticity, through a consideration of her diary audience. Her diaries do not reveal an artificial Franklin, but rather challenge the notion that diaries produce authentic representations of their diarists.

Franklin's reputation as an author of national importance emerges from a life dedicated to the cause of Australian writing. Since *My Brilliant Career*, published when Franklin was only twenty-one, she has been a central figure in Australia's literary history, paving the way for other narratives on our pioneering women and on the bind many faced when confronted with the incompatibility of marriage and a writer's life. She fought tirelessly for Australian writers and argued for the merit of a national literature. Franklin writes in her diaries that the Fellowship of Australian Writers, an organization she was closely involved with, should exist "for the good of Australian Writers to aid Australian writing for the interpretation of my beloved Australia" (6 March 1948). Her connection to a national literature was cemented on her death, for her will announced the establishment of the Miles Franklin Award, which is, fifty years later, one of the most prestigious prizes for Australian literature.

What was also guaranteed by the creation of this award was that the name Miles Franklin would pervade national discourse for a long time to come. This essay argues that Franklin's diaries were also designed to encourage her status as a national icon, an image that is reinforced by Brunton's edition. And because of the assumed intimacy of the diary genre, her patriotic position emerges with a note of authenticity: Franklin's dedication to "the interpretation of my beloved Australia" now appears as a private "truth." In their manuscript form, however, the many features that indicate the intended publication of these diaries disrupt the appearance of authenticity. Subsequently, Franklin's diaries question the intimacy encouraged by common diary reading practices by revealing the performance of a private life.

Recent theorisation of the diary genre considers the way in which the genre's private classification has been complicated by the flexibility of content and form found in diaries. Manuscript diaries are process-texts: they lack textual closure, in both a narrative and material sense (that is, it is often unclear where a diary text begins and ends, or what material constitutes "a diary"). In resisting closure, they also resist generic categorisation and problematise conventional definitions of autobiography. James Olney excluded diaries from his work on the autobiographical genre because they complicate generic definition.¹ Although this exclusion has been less common in recent years, as definitions of autobiography have expanded well beyond Phillippe Lejeune's model of the development of a personality through a retrospective narrative,² diaries occur in such variety that they pose difficulties for genre studies. Diary theorists Cynthia Huff and Suzanne Bunkers argue that the diary's challenge to generic form is a challenge to segmentation at many levels:

Because diaries have often been classified as private texts, they challenge us to question the boundaries between the public and the

private; and they encourage us to assess the social, political, and personal repercussions of segmenting our lives, our texts, our culture, and our academic disciplines. (2)

Extending this idea, diaries could be referred to as a seamless system of signs. In such a post-structural reading, the diary's resistance to closure offers an expanded definition of "text." Diaries obscure the distinction between lived experience and written representation because they proliferate beyond textual boundaries (that is, they are not easily defined by conventional notions of what constitutes a "text"), but also because they encourage an awareness of the writing present. Their lack of editing and organization highlights the writing process, especially when, as with manuscript diaries, the reader has access to the paper on which the diarist wrote and to their handwriting. Diaries are therefore simultaneously illustrative of both the writing of experience and the experience of writing.

The concept of spontaneous diary writing, while expanding textual and autobiographical definitions, also encourages an intimacy between reader and subject that serves to uphold conventional public and private discourses. Popular perceptions of the diary are defined by its seeming "immediacy." Robert Fothergill writes in his article "One Day at a Time: The Diary as Lifewriting," that:

The free conception of "A Diary" depends upon an implicit undertaking that it has not been revised. Edited, perhaps. Expunged even, though we shall be disappointed. But not rewritten. What we are reading now, we need to be assured, must be what was written then. Here is a feature that distinguishes diary from most other kinds of discourse from a reader's point of view. (90)

The spontaneity of diary writing, whether or not it is illusory, is an essential aspect of the genre's private classification. Immediate and unpolished writing promotes the appearance of authenticity, and subsequently the assumption that diaries embody private worlds. Within this private world, the reader presumes access to the "real" self of the diarist.

Diary writing is also commonly defined as an act of solitude: only when diarists write for themselves alone can the content be considered an authentic representation of the "real" self. As Rebecca Hogan argues in "Diarists on Diaries," the presence of a diary audience is commonly understood to introduce "design at the expense of truth" (9). However, Hogan challenges the idea "that writing for an audience will make a writer behave unnaturally, that only when we're absolutely by ourselves are we truly ourselves," because such a perception aligns an audience with "the idea of artifice, design, and perhaps with less authenticity of feeling" (9). The popular perception that diary writing is both an isolated and spontane-

ous act ensures the intimacy of the diary reading experience. Therefore, evidence of a diarist's own editing practice, any indications of masking, could dispel the closeness between reader and subject, dependent as it is on an unmasking process. While Franklin's diaries may not have been "re-written," their pre-published form questions what constitutes immediate and thus authentic writing.

Franklin's adoption of her own editing process could suggest that an artificial diary subject has been produced, but such a reading neglects the ability of diaries to collapse rather than support binary oppositions. Evidence of a diary audience and an artful writing style can be employed instead to reconceptualise public and private domains and remove diary analysis from debates concerning the authenticity or artificiality of the subject's representation. Franklin's performance of her private self in her manuscript diaries need not suggest that there is a "real" Franklin lurking behind her words. The genre's private classification dictates writing as well as reading practices, disguising the silent audience present in all diary writing. As Hogan argues, diary writing can provide a "sense of self" for the diarist (and reader), but the diary is also "a dialogue between parts of self: past and present self, spiritual and earthly self, conscious and unconscious self" (10, 11). As the diary is an expression of identity in its seemingly most candid mode, it is also a site where the indissociable relationship between the subject and its audience, the self and its other, is made particularly evident. Therefore, the overt performance of Franklin's private persona in her diaries signifies the potential of the diary genre to reveal the performativity of identity itself.³ Identity performance in diary writing has been theorised recently by literary critics writing in modernist and post-modernist contexts. Elizabeth Podnieks writes of Virginia Woolf's diaries that "the various identities she gave herself in her diary reflect the diversity of her writing styles, so that just as she can never be relegated to one self, so her diary cannot be reduced to one genre" (98).

The desire for a "sense of self" that is reflected in diary writing and reading practices can also be read as a desire for authenticity—the illusion of privacy suggests the possibility of dissociating from the other and finding an essential self. A diary audience unsettles this possibility by splitting the subject, revealing a multifarious and disintegrated identity. The referenced and organised form of Franklin's manuscripts reveals an attempt to control the diary subject's representation in the public realm, and yet it is this audience that de-authenticates the private self being asserted. In her diaries, she is unable to escape the performance that negates her authenticity and prevents the isolation she finds necessary for the writing process. Franklin describes a writing paralysis in her diaries that occurs because she cannot find the peace to write, or escape an "uncongenial family" that offers no support (25 February 1938). Her diaries offer "a bastard relief for a desire to

write” (25 February 1938). In a 1936 entry, Franklin describes writing as her “only inclination,” and states that obstructions to it unnerve her and keep her in a continual state of expectation (27 January 1936). It would appear as though the writing process is a necessity for Franklin. She identifies herself first and foremost as a writer, and although her diaries are “only a substitute” (25 February 1938), Franklin associates them with the same writing need that drives her fiction. Therefore, it is to be expected that her audience, confirming her writing identity, be apparent in both autobiographical and fictional genres.

Franklin’s repeated resistance to her audience—her denial that her diaries were intended for anyone but herself—highlights a further contradiction, revealing a gap between what the form and content of these diaries communicates to the reader. Such a denial is a performance, promoting the intimacy required by her imagined audience. Denying her audience, she undermines her authorial role in the construction of her diaries, and makes possible the identification between herself and her desired self-image. By seeming to be without the other, she can be the Franklin that emerges in her diaries, and disguise the knowledge that she is not a nationally renowned writer unless her audience makes her one. Give that she is a well-known writer, Franklin’s audience is necessarily integrated with the public sphere, associated with critical opinions, the difficult world of publishing, and the necessity of self-promotion. As a woman writer, her personal identity is divided by the adoption of a male pseudonym and an ambiguous relationship to a public voice. As Drusilla Modjeska writes on 1930’s Australian women and their writing lives:

The difficulties women experienced as writers were not only mundane. There was a fundamental contradiction between women’s dependent social position and the mystique of the writer as a culturally transcendent being; a contradiction between their ability to write and their internal barriers against speaking out. Women’s low self-esteem and their lapses in confidence as public people arise from the way women learn to be social beings focused in the personal, and their unwitting acceptance of a limited and certainly ambiguous relationship to a public voice. (12)

Franklin’s “lapses in confidence,” the complex integration of her public and private lives, result in the production of a self-image that simultaneously attempts to promote its public voice and escape its public altogether.

Paul Brunton’s recently published edition of Franklin’s diaries, targeted to a general audience, has been arranged and marketed according to popular perceptions of diary reading intimacy and authentic representation. Publishing diaries necessarily imposes order on what is often a proliferation of material, and while the act

detracts from the privacy of the manuscripts, similar classifications apply to both forms. This edition conforms to conventional public and private modalities, emerging as part of a discourse that celebrates Franklin as a national figure. In 2004, the fiftieth anniversary of Franklin's death, an edition of her diaries was published, accompanied by public lectures and impressive media coverage, and an exhibition on her life and work toured the country. 2004 also saw the publication of Jill Roe's biography of Miles Franklin. Marketing for, and discussions of, the diaries have been framed according to the revealing nature of the diary content, with confidence bestowed in the diaries' faithful representation of the Australian author. A public lecture given by Brunton at the Mitchell Library soon after publication of the diaries was entitled "The Real Miles Franklin." In the *Sydney Morning Herald's* Spectrum section that promoted the publication, Brunton wrote to a potential diary-reading audience that "to read the diaries of Miles Franklin is to be caught up in a remarkable life . . . and to make a new friend" (2). The intimacy evident in his own reading experience of Franklin's manuscript diaries encourages elaborate descriptions of the potential journey a diary reading public could embark on:

I delighted in Franklin's company as I journeyed with her to Chicago, to London, to Macedonia, home to Sydney, by air to Alice Springs, to Melbourne and across to Perth. She liked a convivial lunch and I have now had many with her, as it were, relishing her table talk. (Brunton, *Sydney* 2)

Referring to her throughout the introduction to his edition as "Miles," Brunton also emphasises his personal relationship to the diary subject in his acknowledgements, with a language that is both affectionate and romantic:

My first acknowledgement is to Miles Franklin. No one who has had the privilege of working among the literary papers of this indomitable and brave Australian writer could fail to love and admire her. To publish her diaries is an honour and I only hope I have done them and her justice. She will undoubtedly let me know if I have not. (*Diaries* vi)

Brunton's edition highlights the representation of Franklin as found in the content of her manuscript diaries and aligns this with the authenticity that diaries are presumed to exude. Therefore, it is evident why the pre-published form of Franklin's diary manuscripts is not alluded to in this publication. The introduction begins by informing the reader that these diaries were bequeathed to the Mitchell Library, "making it likely that one day they would be published" (Brunton vii), but to include Franklin's referencing would suggest a performing subject and disrupt a "true" representation. Diary authenticity is strongly regarded in public discourses; the ability of diaries to reveal, and even extract, inner lives is commonly perceived to extend beyond conscious intentions. When I questioned

Brunton about the obviously performative nature of these diaries, he answered that “no-one can keep diaries for almost fifty years, even if they’re trying to put forward a persona, without their true character coming through” (Personal Interview). Such a perception responds to and confirms the private classification of diaries; it is more believable that Franklin’s performance is an aspect of her “true” personality, than that her private self is being performed for us in these diaries. The pre-published arrangement of her diary manuscripts interferes in a reading to complicate the assertion that her audience plays a minimal role in her self-representation.

Franklin’s diary material is proliferative; despite their well-organized form and polished style, the diaries problematize their own generic categorisation. The Mitchell Library holds Franklin’s pocket diaries from 1909, and the Diary Notebooks and the Literary Notebooks she kept after her return to Australia in 1932. These are the manuscripts from which Brunton has made his selection. But her vast archive contains other material that can be, and has been, defined as “diary.” Franklin kept a book that the Mitchell Library has catalogued as “thoughts and impressions,” which is treated as a diary notebook in Drusilla Modjeska’s *Exiles At Home*.⁴ There are many features that distinguish these various diary types from one another, and these differences raise the question of what constitutes “a diary.” For Franklin, diary definition extended beyond Fothergill’s two-sided, although not absolute, model: “the first summarizes what ‘I’ did today; the second gives vent to a state of feeling” (Fothergill 84). The pocket diaries are a daily account and necessarily short, but regularly express her moods, as Brunton’s edition attests to. Her Literary Notebooks contain a large amount of literary commentary, but commonly cross over into more personal diary content. Her Diary Notebooks are the most personal of all, but they also include much discussion of literature, and their elaborate narrative style and sporadic temporal structure gives the impression of an autobiography as much as a diary. The categorization of these diaries is not simple; the parallels between her Diary and Literary Notebooks reveal the extent to which she associated the personal and the literary. It is also these notebooks that are referenced and make up the largest proportion of her diaries by far, and will, therefore, be discussed in this paper.

The Diary and Literary Notebooks prioritise a thematic over temporal structure. They contain in-text referencing, which relates material across entries and notebooks. Content from the Diary Notebooks also references the Literary Notebooks, for example, “See Vol XV pp761–2 for other ref. to A. J” (7 April 1949). Franklin numbered the pages of those diary booklets that did not include their own numbering, which allowed for her referencing system and further creates the impression of a published work. People, places and events are underlined and ticked to

indicate that they have been included in her extensive index to these diaries. Corrections are often made, substituting one word for another, and paragraphs are imposed with a bracket (I), presumably on re-reading. A detailed re-reading process is also indicated by the vast amount of extra-textual material included in these notebooks. They contain newspaper articles, invitations, letters, programmes, and other additional material, all of which serves to advance the narrative, and in some instances responds to an entry made several years before. An asterisk (*) serves a similar purpose throughout these notebooks, functioning in a footnote type fashion to provide additional narrative information. Franklin's re-reading and re-writing practice raises the issue of the diary subject's performance. These diaries were no doubt a source of comfort and curiosity for Franklin and provided a relief from her inability to write fiction, which in part accounts for a rigorous referencing and editing policy. But re-readings also, as Hogan suggests, "compose the diarist who has composed the entries" (13). Such a practice asserts control over self-image and attempts to polish, organise and validate identity.

The form of Franklin's manuscript diaries would seem clearly to indicate the consideration of an audience in their construction. As previously mentioned, in her diaries Franklin attests to the solitude of her writing practices. One of the most revealing entries on this topic is from 1953, when Franklin discusses the writing of her autobiography *My Childhood at Brindabella*, adamantly and repeatedly stating that she writes for herself alone: "I have long contemplated writing, as I am writing this journal for my own entertainment, the facts of my childhood, just to see how clearly I can remember before my phenomenal memory shall become moth-eaten" (9 March 1953).⁵ Franklin asserts here that she is writing both her heavily referenced diary and her soon to be published autobiography without any consideration of an audience. She continues on this point throughout her lengthy account of how the autobiography came about. She insists to publisher Frank Clune, who wants her to write an autobiography of her later life, that she is too much of a nonentity, claiming she "wasn't even a fly on a notable wall," and that no-one would be interested. She declares that she does not have the type of engaging and immoral life that the genre of autobiography requires: "I could not help it that I was too virtuous, respectable and humble for spicy autobiographical confessions." She writes of her refusal to go beyond her tenth year in the writing of an autobiography, stating that such a book would be "a record to please myself of an isolated and happy childhood." She is unconcerned with Frank's "scornful and dismissive" reaction to this planned autobiography, dismissing his argument that "no one wanted to hear that baby silliness" with the comment, "I'm not writing it for others, but only for myself." According to this account of Franklin as an isolated subject, she can face an onslaught of negative responses because she has no audience to consider: "I did not expect or desire anyone to be

interested. . . . I had merely written for my own ease in loneliness and exile from any stimulating human contact.”

Despite Franklin's indifference to the opinions of others, she writes of the interest that *was* aroused in the autobiography by her friends Jean Devanny (who was resistant to the childhood theme but broke down in tears on reading the manuscript)⁶ and Pixie O'Harris (who originally suggested the venture). In her interaction with Pixie, Franklin rejects her audience as a form of self-protection, fearing that she would open her innocent childhood memories to persecution. She turns Pixie's suggestion down at first by arguing that such a book “would appeal only to erudite child psychologists, who would most likely misunderstand and distort it and deduce I was some kind of a monstrosity, utterly at variance with the facts of my innocence.” It is not until Pixie argues to her, “Don't write it for children or for anyone else; just write it,” that Franklin is able to begin. Franklin is comfortable with writing for the sake of writing, she is not comfortable with writing for others: “It was easy to write a few chapters of ‘I remember . . .’—my pen flew.”

By denying her audience in this entry, Franklin encourages the view that her autobiography is an authentic representation of her childhood, a view that is further enforced because it appears in the most private genre of all—the diary. Franklin represents herself as a modest writer unconcerned with fame and self-promotion, and thereby writes herself an “authentic” persona. While appearing to undermine her importance, Franklin asserts her status as a celebrity by producing a diary manuscript arguably designed for the purpose of self-promotion. It is intriguing that her discussion of this autobiography, supposedly written with no thought of its potential audience, occurs in a notebook that has “M.F. Autobiography” scrawled on the cover. This notebook reads more nostalgically than her others, with reminiscences throughout her adult life triggered by the death of a friend or acquaintance. Perhaps this diary material was potentially to be the “adult” autobiography Franklin refused to write.

Franklin's performative method is similar to that of Gertrude Stein who wrote her autobiography, titled *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, through the narrative voice of her wife Alice—an approach that served to distance and legitimate her categorisation as “a genius” in the text. Franklin's alter ego is not a lover, however, but her pseudonym Brent of Bin Bin. Throughout these diaries, Franklin is reluctant to praise work written under her own name, generally complimenting her writing through the opinions of others, as is indicated by her account of Devanny's emotional response to her autobiography. However, she unashamedly encourages a celebrity status, in her Literary Notebooks, for the Brent identity she wrote under for many years. She promotes Brent as “the only novelist of magnitude who

is interpreting Australia from the inside,” and “one of the few who has it in his bones to realise Australia’s own personality” (August 1936). Franklin uses Brent in her diaries to assert her own writing ability and encourage her fame, but at a distance. Through this pseudonym she can be the positive critic of her own work, performing both audience and writer and escaping the “lapses in confidence” that prevent the shameless self-promotion of her own name.⁷

Franklin’s manipulation of the diary genre, while serving to promote her as a national writer, also complicates the distinction between autobiographical and fictional forms, a distinction that is necessary to “authenticate” her promoted image. Fothergill argues that diaries come “close to reflecting a true universal” (82) through their emphasis on the day as the founding unit, and that “a narrative impulse is necessarily governed by rather different codes than is the impulse to give vent to ideas or emotions” (85). Franklin fashioned a diary that refuses to support this opposition between “the experience of life’s continuum” and narrative (Fothergill 82). Her diaries are testament to her belief that “humanity craves the stuff that yarns are made of and the yarns that are made of little stuff” (26 June 1937). Her storytelling manner is assisted with dialogue, which she writes as conversation or in script form. She also occasionally titles her yarns, such as “Miss Gillespie’s Tragedy” and “Poor Papa” (14 January 1936). For Franklin, stories are part of experience, and play an important role in our understanding of and contribution to Australian culture. She was also writing in an era where it was not unheard of for an Australian woman writer to publish her diaries. Nettie Palmer’s *Fourteen Years: Extract of a Private Journal 1925–1939*, originally published in 1948, is reviewed by Franklin in her *Literary Notebooks*. In this context, Franklin treats a diary publication much like any other literary work.

As her fictional autobiographies *My Brilliant Career* and *My Career Goes Bung* indicate, Franklin’s writing often collapses fictional and autobiographical categories. For Franklin, fiction resembles autobiography: she felt that her writing had a responsibility to accurately represent reality. The author’s “real” Australia is, however, a highly spiritualised place. She writes to colleague Kate Baker about her novel *All That Swagger*, “I only hope that the book will contain something to help, however humbly, in furnishing the Australia of our dreams—those dreams which are stronger than reality, more nourishing to soul and mind” (9 September 1936). Her flexible definition of autobiography and abstract reading of reality was not shared by her public—*My Brilliant Career* was commonly presumed to be a novel about her own life. She writes in a preface to this novel’s sequel, *My Career Goes Bung: Purporting to be the Autobiography of Sybylla Penelope Melwyn*, “The literalness with which *My Brilliant Career* was taken was a shock to one of any imagination. *My Career Goes Bung* was planned as a corrective” (6).

Writing a second fictional autobiography in response to the public's literal reading of the first is an extreme attempt by Franklin to control her public self-image. Also in the preface, which was written thirty-eight years after the first version of the novel was composed, Franklin writes a disclaimer that both discourages an autobiographical reading of this book, and complicates its generic categorisation:

Though a work of fiction, the people in it are oddly familiar: their story has with time shed any character but that of reality. It is now an irrefutable period piece, and, in the light of EXPERIENCE, it is to be discerned that while intentionally quite as little, unintentionally it was equally as autobiographical as my first printed romance; no more, no less. (8)

By undermining her authorial control over a reading of the novel's autobiographical content, Franklin dissociates from her audience and encourages the work to be read as an accurate representation of "real" Australia. She impels this authentic reading even further when she writes that she "remained faithful to the girl that once [she] was by not meddling in corrections" with the original manuscript (7). And yet, as Elizabeth Webby writes in her introduction to the novel, more than one draft was discovered amongst Franklin's papers. Indeed, there are significant differences between the 1902, 1910 and 1946 versions of this novel, originally titled *The End of My Career* (Webby xiv). Franklin continues to downplay her textual influence in a poem, immediately preceding the beginning of the novel *My Career Goes Bung*, which distinguishes her intention from an audience's reception by playing with the notions of "truth" and "fiction" in "what we would now see as a characteristically postmodern way" (Webby xiii). It begins:

This tale's as true as true can be
For what is truth or lies?
So often much that's told by me
When seen through other eyes,
Becomes thereby unlike so much
These others tell to you,
And if things be the same as such,
What is a scribe to do? (9)

It is the sight of herself "through other eyes" that Franklin is trying to escape from with these disclaimers.

In the novel's story, her protagonist is also designed to argue Franklin's authorial distance, but the similarities between writer and subject ensures the presence of Franklin's voice within the text. Sybylla discusses the reception of *My Brilliant Career* and expresses a desire "to make hay of the pious affectations of printed autobiographies as I know them" (30). She describes autobiographies as necessarily egocentric works, arguing that her "burlesque autobiography" *My Brilliant*

Career was intended as “a protest against over-virtuous lay figures” (37). Franklin uses Sybylla here in the same way she uses Brent in her diaries, to escape ego and remove herself from the processes of self-representation. Franklin and Sybylla share the same experiences in this text, making their detachment impossible. Franklin writes in the preface that she discussed with her father “the absurdity of girls from all over the continent writing to tell me that I had expressed their innermost lives and emotions” (6), while Sybylla also recalls that “girls from all over Australia wrote to say that I had expressed the innermost core of their hearts” (62). Sybylla’s response to a disgruntled reader who read *My Brilliant Career* as an autobiography is another example of Franklin’s rejection of authorial responsibility:

I wrote humbly that I had not known the specific people but had meant simply to make fun of general reality . . . and then something came up in me and I jabbed down a postscript: I don’t know you and am sorry than you are angry, but if the cap fits and you make a noise and wear it, I can’t help it. (63)

Sybylla’s claim that she “can’t help it” echoes Franklin’s resistance to and rejection of the opinions of others in her diaries. Sybylla pleads ignorance of generic conventions, arguing that she did not have “any conception to what authorship of fiction might entail” in the writing of *My Brilliant Career*, and relating the novel’s reception to “the abnormal power of what is printed” (6, 64). Franklin performs the naïve and removed author here as adamantly as she performs the isolated and modest writer in her diaries. In both cases, she downplays her authorial role and attempting to escape an audience that is an integral part of her identity. Franklin would not need to elaborately attempt to convince her audience or herself that she “can’t help” their reading practices if she was independent from her audience, nor would she construct her diaries for publication. Franklin uses her pseudonym, Brent, and her fictional protagonist, Sybylla, to cast off writing insecurities and mould the author she desires to be, much like Sybylla “creates the girl of [her] admiration” (37) in *My Brilliant Career*.

It is significant that *My Career Goes Bung* was, as Webby writes, originally intended as a parody of its predecessor and, in the 1902 edition, to be published under a pseudonym (xvi). The 1910 version was comically sub-titled “A Study in Self-analysis (Not necessarily a sequel to ‘My Brilliant Career’)” by “Miles Franklin’s Understudy” (Webby xvii). Not only is there a serious, and not-so serious, attempt to create further distance between herself and her novels through the authorship of these earlier manuscripts, there is also a narrowing the gap between life and fiction, complicating the binary by demonstrating that “the values people acted on in life may, in fact, be derived from the novels they read” (Webby xiii). It is particularly curious that Franklin changed the ending of *My Career Goes Bung*, where Sybylla originally married Harry Beecham (presumably as a parody of

traditionally romantic novels), to one that echoes her own life—Sybylla leaving on an overseas journey. By representing this 1946 ending as having been originally conceived in 1902, through the suggestion that the manuscript had not been meddled with, Franklin's novel appears to pre-empt rather than echo her life. This act on Franklin's part, though bringing the novel closer to reality, suggests that any similarity between the novel's ending and "real" life is purely accidental and, indeed, that life can be derived not only from novel's read but from those written as well. Whether the sequel is regarded as a parody and/or correction to *My Brilliant Career*, it is certainly an intricate author that emerges, and one that carefully considers her readership.

In a dream that Franklin recalls in her diaries, her contradictory relationship to her audience highlights the performative subject. Franklin begins her account of her dream by undercutting its significance, thereby downplaying her role in its interpretation. A distance is set up between Franklin, who is retelling this dream, and the subject of the dream. She writes that she "rather poo-hoo[s] dreams," criticising the "many garrulous and woozy egoists who will insist upon detailing their dreams" (12 January 1936). She states that her respect for dreams has been further alienated by Freud's "extraordinary oblique interpretation" of them, a contempt which is supported by her "own comparative freedom from dreams." Claiming only to dream when she has offended her digestion with "too big a slice of cheese before retiring," she finds it is this alone that "militates against [her] belief that they can have any psychic significance." In regard to the dream she recalls in this entry, "an over-ripe mango" is the culprit. An account of the dream is then offered, seemingly free from any interpretative interference: "I dreamt. It was a coherent dream and it remains with me some hours later." By undermining her authorial role, Franklin leaves it up to the reader to derive meaning from her dream. Encouraging the illusion that we are accessing the depths of her subconscious as not even she has explored it, Franklin effects maximum diary reading pleasure.

This dream has obvious literal significance to her life at the time. It begins with Franklin at a party where she voices a desire to be escorted back to the place at which she is staying. She is scared to leave on her own and so a young man named Jimmy volunteers his services. This home turns out to be "a vast apartment with walls of glass and no blinds." Admitting that she has "a great dislike of being in a lighted room where anyone can look in at me," Jimmy takes her

to the centre of the big place where there was a little sunken square containing a desk and a chair. "No one will see you here," he said. "Besides, there's no one living within a hundred miles and no one will hurt you." (12 January 1936)

A desk and a chair in a room within a room signifies Franklin's desire for a space to escape and write, and also echoes Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, an essay Franklin was more than familiar with. The comfort that comes from her identification as an Australian is also here. As the dream continues, Franklin becomes paralysed with fear in her small space, sitting in "goosefleshed horror" as she hears people enter the room. She loses this fear when she realises, "These people did not know I was there. They were in another dimension. They were all Australians. There was complete harmony between them and me. They were ghosts." Safety ensues for the dream subject when the realisation of national identity occurs, but accompanying this is the comforting knowledge that these people are not "real," were not part of her reality, and are without any knowledge of her existence. The dream goes on to reveal that these ghosts were men who had returned from the war with mutilated bodies: "All were maimed, but all were in the high spirits of war time, telling yarns, laughing." Franklin's Australia provides her with a "sense of self" that abates her anxiety, but the dream undercuts this with the subject's anonymity; it is necessary for her to be separated from the nation with which she identifies.

Franklin's contradictory desire for both isolation and companionship is suggested by this dream. Finding herself in a lighted room where she can not escape being seen parallels Franklin's desire for anonymity, but her lighted and glass-walled room also allows her to be seen, preventing isolation. The room within a room seems the ideal compromise for these two contradictory states, but as ghosts enter, penetrating her walled fortress, this space also fails to provide her with the safety she is looking for. Franklin fears the gaze of the other, but cannot escape from it. Despite her intricate attempts to cut herself off, Franklin's dependency on her audience makes her placement centre stage in a lighted room a necessary discomfort. Much like the mutilated bodies of wartime, with a "leg," "arm," "eye" or "ear" missing, Franklin is a fragmented subject. Her performance both of and in this dream exemplifies her dependency on her reader. She is not able to detach from her dream subject or successfully to undermine her authorial role in her dream's interpretation.

Franklin's diaries were written to be published posthumously and to project her future fame: they are a performance of privacy and authenticity. She is a reluctant author, taking comfort in a writing form that, whilst designed for an imagined audience, does not need to be protected from the criticism that her fictional autobiographies were subject to. Because diaries are presumed a faithful representation of the diarist, regardless of their performative potential, Franklin can more convincingly divorce from her authorial control over her self-representation than is possible with her fiction. But because diaries pose a challenge to categorisation,

they also reveal the ultimate contradiction—Franklin is her audience, as surely as self is other. Therefore, Franklin’s diaries displace the authenticity they appear to endorse. Her performance is not artificial but integral to her identity as an author, and as both diaries and fiction attest to, Franklin is nothing if not a writer. Although Brunton’s edition overlooks the extent to which Franklin is an author to her diaries, it is a confirmation of the sway still held by notions of diary “truth.” Franklin is, after all, now widely available to an audience that is “relishing her table talk” and validating her status as a national icon.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Olney’s definition of autobiography can be found in the introduction to his edition *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*.
- 2 This definition can be found in Lejeune’s “The Autobiographical Contact.”
- 3 I am using the term performativity here as it is theorised by Judith Butler, a definition of which can be found in Chapter One of *Gender Trouble*.
- 4 References to this notebook can be found throughout Chapter Seven, entitled “Miles Franklin: A Chapter of Her Own.”
- 5 All quotations regarding her autobiography are from the same entry, as dated here.
- 6 Franklin’s description of Devanny’s highly emotional response clearly indicates her concern with the opinions of others: “Jean too fell silent regarding the MS. I thought she was too bored to continue, which I accepted as normal, and it did not disconcert me. . . . To my surprise she burst into heavy sobs. ‘Why couldn’t I have had a childhood like that! Not the mean cruel childhood I knew.’ Increasingly disturbed, she continued: ‘Why can’t I write like that! Why do I even try to write! I’m only a rough ignorant old hack. Miles this is glamorous writing! It is exciting! It moves and stirs me, it is so beautiful, so different!’”
- 7 Franklin’s use of Brent as a pseudonym generally is more complicated than suggested here. The name freed her authorship from the shackles of *My Brilliant Career* and its reception, as well as providing her with the gender disguise she originally intended Miles Franklin to be. As she requested of her first novel in a letter to literary agent J. B. Pinker, “I do not wish it to be known that I’m a young girl but desire to pose as a bald-headed seer of the sterner sex” (Webby vii).

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