

# ‘Altogether better-bred looking’: Race and Romance in the Australian Novels of Rosa Praed

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Rosa Praed once had a reputation for being something of a radical. Ranging in her novels from staunch support of the squatterarchy to sentimental sympathy for the common man, her political instincts were basically paternalist and landlordist, but for all the general conservatism she was typically understood as an independent spirit, a straight talker unafraid of challenging convention especially where her sense of justice was at stake. In the 1980s when a small selection from her prodigious output was reprinted in the Pandora Australian Women Writers series, the idea of Praed as a prototype feminist and a champion of black causes was strongly mooted. Pam Gilbert’s introduction to *Lady Bridget in The Never-Never Land* (1915), for example, claimed that the chief protagonists of that novel were ‘women who think, argue, make decisions for themselves, value independence and acquire it’ (vii). Dale Spender’s introduction to *Outlaw and Lawmaker* (1893) similarly saw Praed exploring ‘some of the injustices of the world’ (xi). In her brief biographical account in *A Bright and Fiery Troop*, Spender gave this exploration a specific racial dimension: ‘Years before it became acceptable to appreciate the culture of these persecuted people [the Aborigines]’, she wrote, ‘Rosa Praed was not only including them as characters in her novels but was eloquently pleading their case for justice and dignity’ (202).

Over the last twenty years these claims have been energetically contested and for good reasons (Ferres 2003, Dalziell 2004). Praed’s relatively knowledgeable reconstructions of Aboriginal language and culture may have appealed, but they also confirmed how primitive and essentially Other the Aborigine was in literary reproduction. If Praed advocated ethical Aboriginal care, as she did in novels like *Lady Bridget in The Never-Never Land*, she did so from a position that could be toe-curlingly paternalistic and condescending. There is, for instance, the spectacle of Bean-Tree Bessy being dressed up for her nuptials in Lady Waveryng’s near finest:

Bean-Tree Bessy was actually married in a crimson moiré skirt, trimmed with black Chantilly lace, which had peeped modestly from under Lady Wavering's dress in the Royal enclosure at Ascot, and had thus been, so to speak, in very touch with Imperialism personified, to say nothing of the fashion and aristocracy of England—so do extremes of the Empire meet. (*Outlaw* 231)

Or there is the extraordinary moment when Lady Bridget, friend to the blacks, meets one of those employed by Colin McKeith as a 'stock boy' under feudal conditions. 'What! Another delicious black boy! He looks like a Christy Minstrel. I thought you hated blacks, Colin' (*Lady Bridget* 125). There are also the familiar objectifying, dehumanising narrative perspectives—like the one taken on Womba's gin 'almost an excrescence upon the black trunk of a gidia tree except for an old red blanket slung around one shoulder, which only half covered a woman's dusky form' (*Lady Bridget* 163), or on Womba himself who on being beaten by McKeith responds, not surprisingly, with 'a scowl of hate . . . A flogging will rouse the semi-civilised black's evil passions like nothing else. There was a defiant way in which he faced his former master' (*Lady Bridget* 175). Most typifying of all, there is the representation, familiar in settler literature everywhere, of a native culture that is determinedly Other, plugged into dark, alienating instincts dangerously positioned at the very antithesis of the civilised. Thus the corroboree in *Outlaw and Lawmaker* which begins with a 'warwhoop' and 'a queer savage chant in long monotonous cadences . . . The gins leaned forward, their bare, black bosoms palpitating' and the dancing began:

All were painted in white and red and yellow; some to represent skeletons . . . others in a nightmare pattern, meaning nothing . . . The shouts grew louder and wilder. The gleaming forms went faster. The red lights became lurid. The acrid barbaric odour intensified. Elsie felt giddy and became faint. (*Outlaw* 222-24)

This essay aims to develop the account of Praed's political and cultural instincts with particular reference to the wider contexts of the race issue. In this account Praed's first-hand experience of Aboriginal Australia remains saturated with the familiar ambiguities of European race fantasies and anxieties, but the concern with race becomes shaped by a broader range of perspectives—anthropological, linguistic, occultist, eugenicist and so on—and is far from being focused purely, or even primarily, on the Aboriginal question itself.<sup>1</sup> The ambiguities and contradictions of Praed's reaction to the most pressing Australian race issue are here still in place, but how such reactions are shaped and determined by debates about the more generic race concept, perhaps the single most important idea through which late-nineteenth and early-twentieth society and culture thought itself, becomes a much more central affair.

## HISTORIOGRAPHICAL

As with so many writers at the *fin de siècle*, Praed is nothing short of obsessed with race and race discourse in all its forms—Anglo-Saxonism/Aryanism, Celticism, Social Darwinism and eugenics, for example—all once understood as highly prestigious forms of knowledge. The great interest of Praed's Australian novels, then, from a race perspective, lies only partly in their anthropologised reconstructions of Aboriginal life. The wider issue is the extent to which they demonstrate the full pervasiveness of race consciousness both in the 'bohemian' circles of late Victorian and Edwardian intelligentsias and in popular culture as it was being formulated by popular novelists. These precise contexts, while characteristic of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, cannot, however, be confined to those historical periods. They were, of course, themselves products of much longer histories and historiographical interventions.

'Neo-grammarian' historical linguistics has played a prominent part in almost all accounts of how ideas about racial difference became formulated as prestigious 'science'.<sup>2</sup> As early as the 1650s, Justus Georg Schottel, the 'chief grammarian of the period' (Poliakov 93) was articulating the language principle that was to form the foundation of European Aryanism:

When the languages split up and mankind was dispersed across the world, Ashkenaz, the supreme head of the family, crossed Asia Minor and settled in Europe, where he made the land fertile and divided it . . . He was the ancestor of the Germans, and had brought from Babel the old Cimbric of German language . . . Today we still observe, everywhere in Europe, the presence of root-words of a German language, though these differ from one another in consequence of all kinds of changes and confusions, having been deformed and damaged by the admixture of foreign words. (qtd. in Poliakov 93)

On the back of linguistics, and the entirely false assumption that language is a racial characteristic, the Germanic idea became key to the Aryan myth. By the early nineteenth-century Schiller was defining the German people as 'the kernel of mankind, elected by the universal spirit to strive eternally for the human race'. He maintained the hope that the German language 'might prevail throughout the whole world' (Poliakov 98). According to Michelet, Germany was the powerhouse behind the entire European phenomenon. It 'gave her Swabians to Switzerland and to Sweden; her Goths to Spain; her Lombards to Lombardy; her Anglo-Saxons to England, her Franks to France. She gave both a name and renewal to all the peoples of Europe' (Poliakov 33). Similarly, Fichte was able to ascribe 'all the peoples of Europe, excepting the

Slavs', to Germanic stock; but drew a line between an 'original race' (*Urvolk*), namely the Germans, and the 'neo-Latin peoples' who were deficient, de-Germanised and sterilised through the loss of the original language (Poliakov 99).

Linguistics had a central role in this respect, but hardly an exclusive one. By the late-nineteenth century, scientific racism had become invigorated by the biological sciences and scarcely a single branch of social science or the humanities remained unaffected. Now liberals, progressives and conservatives alike were subject to what were perceived to be the hard facts and inexorable logic of Lamarckian and Darwinian biological science.<sup>3</sup> Archaeology, anthropology, history, paleoanthropology and sociology, all became crucially defined by race. Positioned in a framework provided by linguistics and Darwinism, such forms of knowledge worked in quite contradictory ways to prove on the one hand the workings of 'progress' in the social as well as the natural world and yet, on the other hand, to identify a process of social and cultural degeneration so powerful as to be thought potentially capable of throwing human history into reverse. This theoretical disposition led many Western intellectuals, at the *fin de siècle* and beyond, to understand modernity as a degradation of originary Enlightenment idealisms or, indeed, as a cultural condition that had been disastrously reared on flawed ideas of 'natural rights' and false principles of 'equality'.

Thus supported by evolutionary theory and racial anthropology, both the rise of the West and its perceived degeneration could be understood scientifically. The explanation for the obvious inferiority of the primitive races, and the astonishing success of industrial culture, was no longer dependent on a historical extrapolation from linguistics, or divine favour, but could be finely positioned in terms of progressive and evolutionary schemas underpinned by hard science formulating in Europe and America around the new science of eugenics. Similarly the degeneration supposedly apparent in the West's own populations was rationally grasped. The process which allowed 'European elites to proclaim their superiority over non-European peoples also revealed an inferiority of the masses within their own nations' (Malik 82). The working classes represented in the work of early sociologists such as Rowntree and Booth, like their counterparts in the anthropological tradition, were marginalized, and exoticised. Augustin Morel, the French founder of the science of degeneration made the obvious connections in a particularly nuanced way, indicating just how fundamentally the degenerate masses, as opposed to the primitive races of the third world, were responsible for producing the really important issues facing modernity. 'Between the intellectual state of the wildest Bosjenian', he

wrote, 'and that of the most civilized European there is less difference than between the intellectual state of the same European and that of the degenerate being' (qtd. in Pick 51).

#### ANGLO-SAXONS, ARISTOCRATS AND THE COMING MAN

Praed's novels, especially the novels of Australian life, are awash with these discourses of breeding and blood applied in the contexts of race and nation. Characters come from 'good stock', like Brian Cordeaux in *The Lost Earl of Ellan* (1906) and Susan Galbraith from the same novel who 'would have been noticeable anywhere for her dainty charm and air of breeding and distinction', or they come from bad (*The Lost Earl*, 156, 4). Thus the moral deficiencies of the bushmen and bullock drivers in *Lady Bridget in The Never-Never Land* are signified by physical characteristics, the stunted growth, red hair or 'sinister foxy eyes' (*Lady Bridget* 127). The eugenicist strategy worked here applies upwards of course, so that high moral status and physical distinction are invariably paralleled and, indeed, underwritten by social position. Lady Waveryng's high status in *Outlaw and Lawmaker* is quite inseparable from her aristocratic standing. 'High bred and yet simple', she, like her husband, 'is the natural product of centuries of civilisation'. She carries the 'nameless stamp of the old-world aristocracy' (*Outlaw* 251) and it is this stamp that guarantees the nobility and selflessness of her responses. Especially where tragedy takes over, as this novel shows, true breeding comes to the fore and sparkles. At the same time as being accompanied by obvious symbols of status, the power of authentic aristocratic blood, almost mystical on occasion, is such that it cannot be effectively disguised. True distinction is organic and overrides all exterior trappings, so that James Wolfe, the lost earl in *The Lost Earl of Ellan*, despite 'humming bluey' and being dressed like a 'labourer', carries himself with 'proud impatience'—he has the 'unmistakable look of a gentleman'. 'Burke and Debrett and tables of precedence' may be of no 'consequence in the Bush', but as Mr Galbraith puts it, 'Wolfe comes of pure stock. He's got pedigree marked on him so plain as you may see it on any thoroughbred' (*Lost Earl* 7, 63).

As with so many romance writers of the period, Praed's spirited defence of aristocracy took on clear racial and eugenicist-sounding tones.<sup>4</sup> So much is explicit in *Lady Bridget in The Never-Never Land* where a breeding program has Colin McKeith, an Australian squatter, searching for a mate in Europe, more specifically in European aristocracy. He reveres 'the blood, breeding and tradition' which carried enough aristocratic *hauteur* to send 'a woman to the block with a sure step and a proud smile'. His attraction to Lady Bridget is

decisively shaped by his sense that 'though she might have been brought up in a castle and never done a hand's turn that could be done for her, she's still got in her veins the blood of fighting ancestors' (*Lady Bridget* 18). Incidentally, this blood heritage is put precisely to the service of quelling social dissent when Lady Bridget is later to face an angry mob of disaffected workers. 'I never supposed that I would be howled at by a revolutionary mob in the Australian Bush', cries an exhilarated Lady B. '*A bas les aristocrats*. It's quite exciting. I think I should have enjoyed the reign of Terror' (*Lady Bridget* 131).

The more orthodox eugenicist position, however, was reflected not in Praed's return to traditional aristocracy but, rather, in the very firm place she reserved for 'natural' aristocracy, the distinction that, still the product of breeding, went unmarked by title and rank. In Praed's notorious *The Bond of Wedlock* (1887), a novel not of Australian life but of decadent London bohemia, Arianna the main protagonist 'was a daughter of the people', but 'nature' models her 'after the most approved patrician type' (*The Bond* 2). A similar bounty was extended to the colonies, to young Australian heroines like Elsie Valliant and Susan Galbraith and also to the young male members of the squatterarchy. Thus Colin McKeith in *Lady Bridget in The Never-Never Land*, a self-proclaimed 'barbarian' who 'may some day be a millionaire', is much admired by Lady Bridget as a 'real' man who at his compelling best combines glamour with solidity, hardness with chivalry. Possessed of 'a lean, lanky muscular frame', McKeith is dominant—a prime physical specimen in the age of dark concerns about national efficiency (*Lady Bridget* 120, 123). Indeed Lady Bridget will eventually marry Colin, and their survival of a sequence of social, economic and personal disasters will image how order and continuity in the New World might just be managed and maintained—by a blood mix of the old aristocrats of culture with the new aristocrats of nature.

Similar associations surround Dyson Maddox in Praed's earlier novel *Policy and Passion: A Novel of Australian Life* (1881). Maddox, too, is a 'typical Australian of the second generation . . . lacking somewhat the graces of society, but rich in an air of native distinction, and in the chivalry that arises from intuitive good breeding' (*Policy and Passion* 65). Except that here, rather than commune with old aristocracy, Maddox eventually marries Honoria Longleat, heiress to 'the great Tarrengula tin-mine', daughter of the Leichhardt's Land Premier and another natural aristocrat. This produces an all-Australian resolution to the crucial issue of social cohesion and consent, a response that Praed seems to have favoured especially in the 1880s and 90s. In *Outlaw and Lawmaker*, for example, the fascinating but hugely dangerous proposition that marries Australian youthfulness and vivacity to Celtic passion, wild adventure and Irish

nationalist politics is irrevocably contained when Morres Blake, wounded and cornered by the forces of law and order, throws himself from the precipice of Baròlin rock. Elsie Valliant 'the penniless daughter of a defunct scab inspector and a pretty dressmaker' who is also 'a noblewoman and a true woman' (*Outlaw* 175, 202), never recovers from this tragedy. Locked into a private world, she is removed from that mandatory restoration of a harmonious social order invariably signified by marriage in romance novels. Thus the final image of an arrested Elsie is thoroughly interiorised: 'she thought of Blake only as an embodiment of an ideal love and, as such, in her heart, she worshipped his memory' (*Outlaw* 307). It is Ina, Elsie's more stable sister, who, in the end, enables this novel to look forward and she marries the bushman figure Frank Hallett. Once more Praed constructs an all-Australian ending, insisting emphatically on Hallett's authenticity in this respect. He is 'that typical young Australian'. As his failed attempts to win Elsie have shown, by comparison with Blake, Hallett may be staid, even dull. But these things are relative. In his own way, Frank also is 'a hero and a gentleman' (*Outlaw* 191, 193) and he possesses in addition the high virtues of absolute loyalty, consistency and stability. It is precisely these qualities that the novel requires in order to find resolution in the wider social world, which makes it highly significant that Frank in his final incarnation becomes a 'prominent Australian politician' (*Outlaw* 307). Whatever the permutation of these endings, however, and this is the main point to be emphasised here, they always remained inextricably linked to ideas of good breeding—whether 'natural' or matured by generations of civilisation.

As the above suggests, these indicators are not just the stock-in-trade of a romance writer dealing in commercial stereotypes, although there is no question that Praed writes for the commercial market. The race and breeding discourse penetrates to the heart of these novels, shaping the narratives into engaging political metaphors, expressive of complex and often contradictory racial, sexual and national identities. Praed's notion of the natural Australian aristocrat played out against various combinations of relationships with the old order of aristocracy is highly suggestive. At a time when degeneration myths had the status of science in Europe, Praed's texts, which show many signs of the decadent and declining, are nevertheless bolstered by a strong and, again, eugenicist, sense of renewal under the Coming Man, who is accompanied by a variety of New Woman. Novels like *Policy and Passion* image a resurgence of natural beauty and manliness, linked to a female genius that is 'frank, daring and original' (*Policy and Passion* 69). Both flourish in Australian bush and station life, against all the odds of natural disaster, cultural backwardness and potential social chaos. Characters like Colin McKeith, Frank Hallett and

Dyson Maddox, even where they struggle in competition with Old World glamour and tradition, are versions of the Coming Man idealised elsewhere in writers of empire such as Haggard and Kipling.<sup>5</sup> The true inheritors of Anglo-Saxon or, even, Viking strength and valour, these figures constitute nothing less than civilisation's best bet for survival and progress in the age of modern decadence and debilitation.<sup>6</sup>

#### THE ROMANCE OF THE CELT

The Anglo-Saxon condition in its Australian incarnation was an important focal point in Praed's fiction, as it was for most writers of Australian romance.<sup>7</sup> It shapes the real fascination with race in these novels where Englishness features as the key signifier against which all other races are compared, if not measured. Colin McKeith's racial markers, for example, are predominantly Anglo-Saxon, and Viking, even if there is an originary Gaelic root—thus 'his accent was an odd combination of the British drawl grafted on to the mellifluous Gaelic, from which race he had originated' (*Lady Bridget* 15). This is not to imply however, that Gaelic and Celtic dimensions were slight or unimportant in Praed's fiction. On the contrary, both identities were linked to high status qualities—hardiness and the exercise of control over the wilderness for instance. McKeith's manly condition and his 'flair of the Bush' are firmly framed by his possession of a 'hardy Scotch constitution' (*Lady Bridget* 29). The Irish similarly are solid—embodiments of resourcefulness and pioneers of the Bush. Thus Patsy, Susan Galbraith's part-Irish stepmother in *The Lost Earl of Ellan* 'for a Bush wife . . . can't be beaten . . . She's very downright' although 'she has a wheedling way with her . . . It belongs to the race' (*Lost Earl* 23, 219).

As the comparison of 'mellifluous Gaelic' to 'British drawl' implies, in tracing the Celtic or Gaelic contribution to the Australian 'formation of a distinct national type' (*Policy and Passion* iv), Praed drew on further romanticising traditions. These imaged a Celtic/Gaelic race quite distinct from the resourceful, durable breed indicated above and, as with the Anglo-Saxon identity, much connected with ideas of aristocracy. All but rejecting the crude English stereotyping of the 'poor, slovenly, half barbarous' Celt—the savage Irish brute that featured as standard in English cartoon and popular novel—she nevertheless responded deeply to the more developed and sophisticated stereotype.<sup>8</sup> This was illustrated in Matthew Arnold's influential account of a Celtic race defined as 'undisciplinable, anarchical, turbulent' and yet also 'expansive, adventurous and gay . . . sociable, hospitable, eloquent, admired, figuring away brilliantly' (Arnold 84, 81). More precisely, she responded to

the radicalisation of this English romance as it was effected so influentially by people like Standish O'Grady and, later, by W. B. Yeats and the fully-fledged Irish revival. The development of Arnold's Celtic 'turbulence' into aristocratic action, energy and heroism was central to Yeats's Literary Revival, much in vogue of course in the *fin de siècle* literary circles of London so well known to Praed. Her particular interest in Gaelicism, as witnessed by her collaborative relationship with Justin McCarthy, was hugely stimulated here not only by the ideas of cultural nationalism but also by the theosophical and eugenicist interests she shared with Yeats and revivalism. Thus her work is sometimes characterised by a conflation of aristocratic Irishness with romance, mysticism, adventure and political radicalism, a complex and even dangerous concoction that, in a literature so essentially conservative, sometimes needed containment.

As suggested above, the ending of *Outlaw and Lawmaker* where the dynamics of attraction to adventure cannot be resolved without death and debilitation images very clearly the difficulties Celticism presented for Praed. But the doubleness necessitated here was not reserved exclusively for the novel's ending, far from it. The tensions of a narrative pulled toward Blake's glamour, but unbalanced by his duplicity are fundamental, paralleled throughout *Outlaw and Lawmaker* in Elsie Valliant's ambivalent feelings towards him. She is both wildly attracted and yet obviously out of her depth and endangered. They are also, of course, reproduced in the figure of Morres Blake himself, a romanticised and thoroughly picturesque Irish aristocrat, next in succession to the Coola estate but travelling in Australia incognito. Ostensibly this 'Bohemian rebel' (*Outlaw* 105) is a well-bred gallant—a man of the moment whose powers of oratory and of leadership take him to high office as Colonial Secretary of Leichhardt's Land. In this capacity he is, ironically enough as it turns out, responsible for law and order. However, characterised as a 'wild' Irishman with more than 'a dash of Fenianism in the blood' (*Outlaw* 33), Blake is also the notorious bushranger, Captain Moonlight. Unable to control his lust for adventure, itself a 'taint' in his blood (*Outlaw* 278), Blake, functioning as a version of the Coming Man, is simultaneously the 'doomed of [his] generation' condemned to act against property on the highway, although it will eventually transpire that his motives for robbing are not solely biological and certainly have nothing to do with greed or material gain. On the contrary there is a compelling altruism to his highway exploits, a political motivation. As a public politician he favours 'the people' (*Outlaw* 49); as a highwayman his share of proceedings goes to the Irish nationalist cause at 'home'.

*Outlaw and Lawmaker*, then, twists and turns through the ambivalences of attraction and repulsion, excitement and fear until the final pages and Blake's death, the signification of which is political, as well as racial: the new Australia, however much it might have been drawn to Celtic glamour, could ill-afford the social disorder which came with it. Or, at least, that was Praed's version of things in the late 1880s. But *Outlaw and Lawmaker* did not exhaust Praed's interest in Celticism. She returned to it in later novels, distanced further from the Famine and Fenianism and positioned closer both to the relative stabilities of Federation and a political solution to the Irish Question that looked half-imminent in 1915.<sup>9</sup> Here Celticism remained potent and challenging but less of a threat to the social order newly emerging in Australia, which is essentially the condition of *Lady Bridget in The Never-Never Land*. The heroine of this novel, a fiery adventurer, is 'a hybrid Celt' whose romanticism is a product of her 'Celtic blood' (10, 144). 'Lady B' is also a 'little Englander, a pro-Boer, a champion of the poor native'. She identifies strongly with both the imperialism of Cecil Rhodes, for whom she has an 'adoration' (44), and, shocks a colonial gathering at Government House by apparently identifying with Irish nationalism. 'I don't admire your glorious British record', she proclaims, 'I think it's nothing but a record of robbery, murder and cruelty beginning with Ireland and ending with South Africa' (47). If such outbursts are part of a youthful idealism that, this novel demonstrates, Lady Bridget must learn to moderate, they are also part of the great attraction of this character—an adventurous, passionate, unconventional Irish aristocrat who declares she would 'rather follow the fortunes of a Nihilist and be sent to Siberia, or drive wild cattle and fight wild blacks with one of your Bush cowboys, than I'd marry the perfect type of an English country gentleman' (11). Lady Bridget's status as organic Woman, who wants to 'learn from a country that has no traditions, but is making itself', and who suspects the Bush to be a place where 'one might touch a more vital set of heart-beats than the heart-beats of civilisation' is thus positioned clearly, less in terms of *fin de siècle* feminism than alongside Lady Bridget's status as a half-Celtic aristocratic mystic (57). Her dreams thus become 'prophetic' warnings: 'we're like that, you know, the Irish Celts' (292). Lady Bridget's romantic excesses, then, may need taming to some degree; they certainly are tempered by experience. But by the end of this novel the stage is set for an entirely positive resolution. Separated by culture and almost divorced by their experiences of the Bush, Lady Bridget and Colin McKeith, both aristocrats in their way, nevertheless look set for success. The full biological and cultural potential of this splicing of Australian manhood to Anglo-Irish woman looks set to be realised, a final confirmation, if any were needed, that for Rosa Praed and her many readers 'race tells after all' (*Outlaw* 286).

Such ideas about race shaped Praed's views of Aboriginal life. They also determined the complete removal of the Aborigine from any formulation of national identity visited in Praed's novels. In this respect 'black gins . . . don't count' and nor do 'half-castes' who are 'all the worse for that' (*Lady Bridget* 46, 156). Praed's recalling of a friendship with an Aboriginal, Ringo, 'the first object of my youthful affections', only served to emphasise just how innocent, ill-formed and absurd any notion of a meaningful Australian identity that included black 'blood' must be. 'There was serious thought', she wrote, 'of elopement to the scrub with Ringo, but upon going into the question of the marriage laws of the race, we discovered that he, being a Cuppi was bound to wed a Dongai, or undergo the penalty of excommunication or perhaps death' (*My Australian Girlhood* 65-66). Once taken as illustration of Praed's radical liberalism (Spender 202), the basic positioning of this passage is actually knowingly mocking rather than seriously romantic. It shows Praed's engagement with Aboriginal life, but also all the ambiguities and contradictions of a mature gaze that was thoroughly anthropologised, Europeanised and outsiderly.

It might be argued that such attitudes as are implied here were simply the signs of the times, the inescapable product of Praed living in what historians have described as an age of empire. This was a period, after all, when the sheer materiality of empire was crucially supported by science, history and commonsense—the vast cultural paraphernalia that we now speak of in terms of 'race discourse'. So much is substantially the case and one reason why our sense of Praed's political imagination must be historically contextualised rather than understood in terms of contemporary versions of the liberal. It is also worth pointing out in this connection that for all the *fin de siècle* currency of scientific racism, the whole system was already unravelling by the 1890s, both as a result of better science and also under the weight of its own internal contradictions. On the margins of the intellectual world, a new centre was emerging that within a few decades would combine with the brutality of the Holocaust to do more than just remove some of the excesses of scientific racism. Soon, scientific racism would be in retreat virtually everywhere, including, of course, in the intellectual world.<sup>10</sup> Historical linguistics, once so central to race discourse, would become completely displaced by Saussurian structuralism. Similarly in sociology and anthropology, structuralism would shift the ground on which both progressivist and degeneration models of society and culture had been based. In the end it is these further contexts that best position Rosa Praed's cultural intervention, placing it in terms of intellectual cultures that were not static and monolithic, but changing and diverse. From that position it is clear that however much Praed might articulate

some of the central obsessions of the age, she could not speak for what were to become most prestigious versions of the modern.

#### NOTES

- 1 Theosophy in particular, and of great interest to Praed, constituted 'a body of thought that placed race (and the Indo-European Aryans) absolutely at the centre of the universe. It revealed how fundamental the category of race could appear at the *fin de siècle*—to the extent that it enabled what was quite literally race religion' (Platt, *Joyce* 105).
- 2 There is, of course, a huge literature on this subject. Highlights include Poliakov, Banton, Goldberg, and Malik.
- 3 Lamarck and Darwin were, in fact, critically at odds. The former argued that acquired characteristics could be inherited, a notion rejected by neo-Darwinists, especially after the appearance of Weismann's 'germ plasm' theories and the development of Mendelian biology. Despite such distinctions, race theorists used both Lamarck, who crucially underpinned eugenics, and Darwin. For a recent account of the contentious issue of Darwin and race theory see Weikart.
- 4 For an account of the return to aristocracy in *fin de siècle* literature see Platt, *Aristocracies*.
- 5 For an engaging account of the Coming Man in Australian cultural history see White. Writing about the influence of Social Darwinism on late nineteenth-century Australia, White reconstructs a standard view as follows: 'As long as racial purity was maintained, as long as only the noblest racial strain was permitted to flourish in the Australian soil, then the future of the Australian branch of the British race was secure' (71).
- 6 See *Lady Bridget* where Colin McKeith is like 'a Viking worshipping his conquered bride' (144).
- 7 See, for example, Rolf Boldrewood's *A Sydney-Side Saxon* or his *The Miner's Right* where Cyrus Yorke is 'a grand specimen of Anglo-Saxon manhood . . . as developed by the kindly conditions of Australian life' (109).
- 8 Anti-Semitism is likewise comparatively understated in Praed. But see *The Bond of Wedlock* where Sir Leopold D'Acosta first appears as a genuine aristocrat of the old school, but turns out to be no more than a modern decadent. His degeneration is linked to 'his Jewish ancestry' (60).
- 9 Anti-Irish feelings in Australia ran quite high through the 1860s to the 1880s, largely a response to the perceived threat of Irish disloyalty to Britain. These concerns seem to have died down by the 1900s, in part because the post-Famine 'flood' of emigration that had peaked in the 1870s declined. By 1900 only 4% of immigration to Australia was Irish. These contexts may help explain the

shifts in Praed's attachments from a 'dangerous' to a 'safe' form of romanticised Celtic identity (Kingston 82, 124-26).

<sup>10</sup> For a fascinating account of this development see Barkan.

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