

State Library of NSW, Sydney Australia

Rachel Franks and Monica Galassi

A war of words: reading conflict in the writings of Miles Franklin

Abstract:

In *Bring the Monkey: a light novel* (1933), Miles Franklin, in her only work of crime fiction, queries the almost universal veneration of the war veteran. In addition to issuing challenges to readers, throughout this work, on matters of class constructed disadvantage and discrimination based on gender, Franklin calls into question the idea of the military hero; with a recipient of the Victoria Cross posited as the novel's villain. In this way the text serves to normalise the need to question all that is around us, even if those questions are controversial and are deliberately at odds with both political and popular efforts to construct a national narrative. In 1951 Franklin penned a more overtly anti-war work, *The Dead Must Not Return*, a play in two acts. Drawing on the social commentaries within these two texts, and the Miles Franklin Papers held at the State Library of NSW, this paper explores the ethics of writing about war. In particular this paper highlights the role non-combatants can play in producing commentaries on conflict, thus destabilising traditional accounts that often privilege white masculinity and subsequently marginalise civilian, female contributions to national war efforts. Moreover, this paper seeks to acknowledge the impact of war – as expressed through the creative writing practice of Miles Franklin – upon all members of society.

Biographical notes:

Dr Rachel Franks is the Coordinator, Education & Scholarship, State Library of NSW and a Conjoint Fellow, University of Newcastle. An award-winning writer she is an active researcher in the fields of crime fiction, food studies and information science. Her work can be found in books, journals and magazines as well as on social media.

Monica Galassi is the Project Officer, Indigenous Services at the State Library of NSW. Monica is passionate about finding international and transnational links and connections to assist Indigenous people to reconnect with their cultural heritage.

Keywords:

Class – creative practice – Miles Franklin – gender – war writing

Introduction

Whatever woman's place in literature, there is no doubt of one thing – she is climbing to an always increasing height on the platform.

H.J. *The Australian Women's Weekly* 7 October 1933: 10

‘There's wisdom in what the child says; there's none in war.’

M. Franklin *The Dead Must Not Return* 1951: 15

Miles Franklin (1879-1954) is a firm feature of the Australian literary heritage. Though her first novel, *My Brilliant Career* (1901), would be considered her greatest success, the entire corpus of her work – consisting of novels, play scripts, diaries and letters – continue to engage, and influence, readers and writers today. One of her more prominent legacies is the result of her generosity in the establishment of the Miles Franklin Award (now the nation's most prestigious literary prize). The Award, designed to foster Australian writers, as ‘without an indigenous literature, people can remain alien in their own soil’ (Franklin online), was first won by Patrick White in 1957.¹ Another of her significant gifts presents a different type of value: 41 volumes of manuscripts and 124 volumes of her private papers. These materials reside at the State Library of NSW.



M. Franklin's Waratah Cup and Saucer: Realia, c. 1923,

Call number: R 230 (a-b), digital id. 824191. Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW.

This paper explores some of the social views of Miles Franklin – particularly those that circulate around class, gender and war – as expressed in *Bring the Monkey: a light novel* (1933) and *The Dead Must Not Return* (1951), an unpublished play in two acts. The social commentaries within these texts are supplemented, here, by the Miles Franklin Papers which provide insights into her written works as well as into her life,

including her efforts in the trade union movement and her contributions to the First World War. Through these materials, this paper looks at the ethics² of writing about war. In particular this paper notes the important role non-combatants can play in producing commentaries on conflict, thus destabilising traditional accounts that often privilege white masculinity and subsequently marginalise civilian, female contributions to national war efforts. In this way this paper attempts to highlight the continuing need for writers to contribute to debates of national and international importance and encourage the questioning of dominant social views; even when such questions challenge a national narrative. We do this as we believe that such questions are of continuing significance.

Bring the Monkey: a light novel (1933)

Bring the Monkey: a light novel (1933) is Miles Franklin's only work of crime fiction. First published by Endeavour Press in 1933, the novel is a clever spoof of the detective story and, concurrently, a series of commentaries on class and gender relations. The crime story was a particularly popular form of fiction in the years between the First and Second World Wars, a period often referred to as the genre's Golden Age (Knight 2003: 77-94). Yet, despite women writers dominating the bestseller lists during this time – Agatha Christie (1890-1976); Dorothy L. Sayers (1893-1957); Ngaio Marsh (1895-1982); and Margery Allingham (1904-1966), often referred to collectively as the Queens of Crime – *Bring the Monkey* failed to capture the public imagination with only 584 copies sold by the middle of 1933, earning Franklin a 'modest £8 11s in royalties' (Roe 2008: 337). What was the underlying cause of this failure?

Contemporary opinion has noted the work 'revealed a writer who had learned to say serious things in an amusing way' (Barrymore 1933: 6) and that 'the detective story framework enclosed fragments of social satire and some illuminating social opinions' (Palmer in Roe 2008: 337). Franklin was unable to secure a serialisation of the work (Roe 2008: 326) but the novel would be republished by University of Queensland Press, with an introduction by Bronwen Levy, in 1984.

In a playful twist to the crime fiction formula of the day *Bring the Monkey* features a pet monkey (the not always well-behaved Percy³) in addition to the clue-puzzle's obligatory suite of murder suspects. The novel also deploys many of the devices that define sensation novels and their complicated plot lines of 'bigamy, adultery, seduction, fraud, forgery, blackmail, kidnapping and, sometimes, murder' (Pykett, 2006: 33) and Gothic novels. Taking advantage of established conventions ensured the novel conformed to crime fiction reader expectations of the day. Setting, too, conforms, with one of the Golden Age standards: the magnificent country estate, to provide the scene for both a jewel heist and a murder.

Revealed throughout this work are Franklin's views on class which mock the Americans, the British and a variety of professions, including her own: Cedd Spillbeans was creating a film 'without the interference of an author' (1933: 16). *Bring the Monkey* also gives some insight to the author's own downward mobility as a young woman (Roe, 1981: 574-6), portraying the lives of the middle and upper

classes as ‘an artistic struggle to escape from the drabness of carrying respectability too far’ (1933: 62). Some of Franklin’s observations are quite playful such as the following quote, which appears after it is realised a famous blue diamond has been stolen and must be looked for:

Protest against the suggestion of personal search arose. Such things couldn’t be at a private house-party among the best people; such things simply weren’t done—weren’t cricket. Tattingwood Hall was not a seaside hotel for American Tourists (1933: 78).

There are also more deliberate questions asked about the class system, including ones pertaining to Russian communism and the decline of the British Empire at a time of nationalist sentiment and overt patriotism in the years following on from the First World War in an Empire lying in wait for the Second World War.

The characters, assembled for a weekend film screening at Tattingwood Hall, are constructed to fulfil the needs of the novel and to communicate Franklin’s observations of serious social issues of the day. Male characters include the steadfast policeman, the overbearing husband, the enthusiastic entrepreneur and the foreign other. Women, in contrast, are exciting and new. These women, of the post-war era, are distinctly modern: they are fiercely independent; they ignore many of the social mores of their time; they are well travelled; and they even reject traditional feminine pets – birds, cats and dogs – preferring a monkey for additional companionship (Franks 2014: 60). Indeed, friendship is a strong theme of the novel with much of the text exploring the friendship between Ercildoun Carrington and Zarl Osterley, two women who, while not wealthy, have chosen to lead lives based on economic and emotional independence.



M. Franklin [and monkey]:
Photographs of M. Franklin, c. 1879-1954,
Call number: PX*D 250 (vol 1), digital id. a673013.
Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW.

When Ercildoun is the focus of the criminal investigations she depends on Zarl who ‘is not one to sell out on a friend’ (1933: 87) and is grateful to her ‘companion, a plucky one that would not leave me’ (1933: 159). Sally Munt questions the quality of this friendship arguing that Zarl, who had in fact been the one to steal the jewel, allowed suspicion to rest upon Ercildoun (1994: 11).

Such observations, on class and gender, were certainly not unfamiliar to readers of the day and would not have been unexpected from the pen of Franklin (who, notably,

affixed her own name to the text rather than one of her pseudonyms). The clever adoption of ‘reflexive strategies in her “light novel” [allows Franklin] to take the didactic edge off what otherwise might be perceived as an unpalatable lecture on gender relations’ (Franks 2014: 66). This paper suggests the novel’s failure resides in Franklin’s efforts to question the almost universal veneration of the war veteran. The novel *Bring the Monkey* clearly interrogates the idea of the military hero; with a recipient of the Victoria Cross posited as the novel’s villain.

This approach questions a national narrative, born on the shores of Gallipoli, and is in sharp contrast to the Queens of Crime noted above who consistently presented war heroes to their readers who, universally, retained their status as hero. There was: Agatha Christie’s Captain Arthur Hastings, companion to Hercule Poirot, who had been wounded on the Western Front; Ngaio Marsh’s Roderick Alleyn who had served in the army during The Great War, prior to joining the Foreign Service and then the Metropolitan Police; Dorothy L. Sayers’s Lord Peter Wimsey who had also served on the Western Front before being appointed as an Intelligence Officer; while Margery Allingham’s Albert Campion, though too young to enlist for the First World War, was engaged in intelligence work in the Second World War. Thus, defending justice at home and the nation abroad went hand-in-hand for the successful woman crime writer of the Golden Age. In presenting Lord Tattingwood – a decorated war veteran – as corrupt and mercenary, as a bully and harasser of young women and, critically, the murderer of a police officer breaks the codes of reverence held for those who served on the front lines.

This is not to suggest that those who fought, and in many instances made the ultimate sacrifice, do not deserve a place of honour within our history books. It is acknowledged here that such an approach must have been confronting at a time when the Commonwealth was recovering from the aftermath of the First World War and the shadows of a new conflict loomed large across Europe. The novel does, however, remind readers of a responsibility to question all that is around us and that literature, across a myriad of form and style, can teach us to ask such questions of our political and social systems and can remind us to be vigilant.

In this way *Bring the Monkey* serves as one of Franklin’s great literary achievements as the text normalises the need to ask questions and to have a reasonable expectation to receive meaningful answers; even if those questions are controversial and are deliberately at odds with both political and popular efforts to construct a suite of national stories. These questions remain relevant today with award-winning author Tim O’Brien asking, in the context of the ethics of writing about war: ‘What do you die for? What do you kill for?’ (2011). And so, a crime novel – one described as a *light novel* – emphasises how the crime fiction genre can be appropriated as a vehicle for demanding that readers pause and consider issues in addition to the more immediate ‘whodunnit?’

Bring the Monkey was, by Franklin’s own admission, ‘an awkward kind of detective novel’ (Franklin in Ashworth 1948: 71) and the work received mixed reviews. The story of ‘two up-to-the-minute girls, and their awful little monkey, Percy’ was endorsed by *The Australian Worker* (Ellen 1933: 5). Yet *The Bulletin* – despite Archibald’s early support for Franklin (Franklin 1901) – frowned upon the effort, with

the critic alluding to Franklin's re-casting of the war hero: 'Lord Tattingwood, a secret lunatic who won a V.C.' (Page 1933: 2). More recently it has been written that: 'The artistic value of this work as a tale of mystery and detection is of the imitation glass beads variety – minimal' (Roderick 1982/2011: 156).

The Dead Must Not Return (1951)

Nearly two decades after *Bring the Monkey*, Franklin penned a more overtly anti-war narrative *The Dead Must Not Return* (1951), a play in two acts. Franklin 'invested a good deal of emotional energy' (Roe 2008: 509) into the script. This intensity structured Franklin's view of how the work should be presented with an instruction explaining: 'To be acted quietly without ranting. Action is inner, and not to be confused with mere motor activity or restlessness' (1951: cover sheet). The work was produced under one of Franklin's pen names "A Field Hospital Orderly" and, when submitted for consideration for the Commonwealth Jubilee Stage Play Competition, would be offered by "O. Niblat" (Roe 2008: 510).

The location of the action for the play is diametrically opposed to the grandeur of Tattingwood Hall. The setting is 'the shabby living room of the Fisher family's bungalow in "Ashville", an imaginary inner-Sydney working-class suburb, at the onset of the Korean War' (Roe 2008: 509). There are, however, some similarities between *Bring the Monkey* and *The Dead Must Not Return*. The most immediate of these is the motif of gallantry. Act I begins with Myrtle Fisher, and her daughter June Fisher, returning from the, posthumous, investiture of Ernie Fisher (Myrtle's husband and June's father), with a Victoria Cross for bravery during the Second World War (Franklin 1951: 2). The ceremony reminds another woman, Flora Fisher, of her brother Harry who was listed as having died at Gallipoli. The three women reflect on their loss but maintain that *The Dead Must not Return*: 'They could not stand it – neither could we' (1951: 6). Yet both dead men, Ernie and Harry, do return. The horrors of war clearly etched upon their bodies and their minds.

Franklin's strong views on gender are seen in this work – though the arguments such as the one of equal pay for work of equal value seen within *Bring the Monkey* are replaced with the stronger rhetoric of pacifism – most obviously, through Harry. It is Harry who claims: 'A man is war, but a real woman is peace. It's the women's (sic) job to stop war' (1951: 53, emphasis original). Yet there is confusion:

Harry: Women don't understand. . .

Flora: We understand very clearly what war – every and any war – leads to (1951: 61[bis]).

There is some agreement around conflict and gender roles but a notable dissent. The young June advocates that wars are won and lost on the front line:

If there has to be a war, like you always say, I think all soldiers should get into the Front line and really fight. That's what I'd make them do if I were administrating (1951: 14, emphasis original).

Critically, though, June goes on to speculate that: 'If administration is the biggest part

of war, and so clever, why don't you do it all by administration?' asserting that men would then be 'fat and rich' which is preferable to 'being dead' (1951: 14).

It is, however, claimed by Franklin, through her characters, that a peaceful destiny is unable to be fulfilled under a patriarchal system, as Flora claims women have been 'fooled and frustrated by men' and asks 'why can't Australia stay neutral for a change?' (1951: 52). The idea of neutrality, for Australia and, indeed, for Britain, had been advocated before. In the lead up to the First World War 'jingoistic fervour affected vast sections of the British population, many leading intellectuals, liberals and socialists were most unhappy about the turn of events and believed that Britain should stay out of the war' (Marwick 1977: 27). This particular brand of patriotism would influence fiction and non-fiction writers, many of whom did not want to be accused of 'ideological involvement – especially after the blatantly nationalistic productions by British and German historians before and during the Great War' (Southgate 2009: 99). Despite the debate on neutrality Britain, and by extension – due to the depth of Empire – Australia, pursued a militarised approach.

It is clear Franklin believed war was on the home front as well as on the battlefield: when Flora declares: 'The dead must not return!' (1951: 6) reflecting 'the essential gendered character of war violence in the experience of both men and women' (Declich 2001: 161). Amidst a range of arguments asserting that, out of war, everyone – men and women – loses something, Franklin distils her narrative around conflict and gender to: 'It's different for a man' (Franklin 1951: 44) while also noting it's different for a woman:

All the silly old women who think their brave boys are saving them from worse than death by shooting off a lot of other silly old women's boys, who are just as good as their own – or just as bad. It only depends on the side you're on. There's precious little difference in soldiers no matter what flag they shoot under (1951: 48).

The references from *The Dead Must Not Return* to real life cannot be escaped and there is a clear integration of what has been described as 'a personal and public narrative' (Southgate 2009: 101). John Franklin, Franklin's nephew, served in the Second World War and the trauma he suffered during his service would see him committed to Callan Park: a 'hospital full of broken men' (Roe 2008: 486). This is a reflection of the fact that the soldier's 'life is never the same again, and often he is not the same person who was seen off by family or friends' (Coker 2013: 245). The idea of being changed by war is taken up by Mrs King, within the play, 'Poor me!' she exclaims, 'I pity all women who have to put up with 'returned men' (1951: 4, emphasis original), 'they torture the living' (1951: 7).

Franklin also, importantly, acknowledges contributions, to conflict, of non-combatants through Myrtle who remembers how she:

[D]ragged all through the last war in that windy Red Cross hole – organizing card parties with those yapping old women; making jam or scones, or raffling a chook to make a good show for our branch. Hundreds of pounds scraped together in three-pences and pennies to send chocolates and writing paper to the boys, while millions and billions were squandered

in ammunition to blow them to pieces (1951: 45).

The work remains unpublished, like many of Franklin's plays, and has not been performed. There has been, a one-off presentation, of this script with the work read⁴ in the Metcalfe Auditorium at the State Library of NSW on Tuesday, 8 September 2009.

Anti-war narratives

Anti-war narratives are not a modern invention. *Lysistrata* (411BC), was one in a series of plays preaching peace, by the Greek author Aristophanes. The work was produced during the Peloponnesian War, a period of great conflict and loss. Of particular interest to this paper – which highlights Franklin's anti-war arguments in the context of discussions around class and gender – the heroine, and the namesake of this text, brings about peace without capitulation. *Lysistrata* (literally, the Liquidator of Armies [Sommerstein 2002: 136]) industrially sets about arranging a sex strike; recognising that 'Athens cannot end the war on her own: in the play, the women of *all* the warring states have to co-operate in forcing peace upon the men' (Sommerstein 2002:135, emphasis original). With determination, and some divine intervention, peace is achieved:

Let us make peace, that's what we ought to do;

If you don't hurt us, we will never flout you.

Let our division now be dead and done:

Let us unite and sing our songs as one (Aristophanes 411BC/2002: 183).

Many anti-war works, inspired by The Great War, are well known, such as the poetry produced by Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon and classic novels including Henri Barbusse's *Under Fire* (1916) and Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929). It is important to note that women, too, contributed, through literature, to the anti-war movement including Rebecca West with *The Return of the Soldier* (1918) and Virginia Woolf with *Mrs Dalloway* (1925). So, though Franklin's contribution to this genre is not a unique offering from a woman writer, her work, it is suggested here, is an under-recognised feminist interjection into a predominantly male sphere.

As social commentaries within *Bring the Monkey* and *The Dead Must Not Return* clearly indicate, Franklin had strong views around class, gender and war. These examples of her work – despite the first not being very successful and the second not being staged – demonstrate Franklin's capacity, and her willingness to unpack these, often complex issues, and challenge assumptions as well as the status quo. The texts are not isolated examples of the expression of Franklin's views, with such views permeating all of her work,⁵ oral and written.

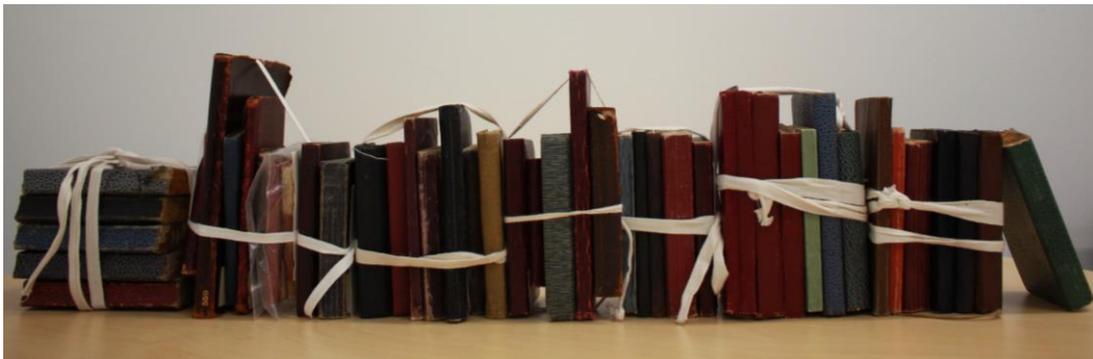
It has been observed that contemporary work in ethics is 'overridingly ecumenical, involving significant contributions from many scholars outside philosophy and theology' (Proctor 1998: 10). It is argued here creative practice can be a central consideration to the ethics of writing about war: through producing works that deliberately attempt an ethical approach to what is an incredibly complex arena; and

through an ethical imperative to communicate the horrors of war, to directly contribute to debates around conflict and peace.

For Franklin this is complicated through the merging of fact and fiction. The works discussed here serve as entertainment, they serve other purposes as well, including capturing how conflict – on an unprecedented scale – impacts upon combatants and non-combatants. So, while not historical writing, there is history within both texts and they both indicate ‘the possibility, and even inevitability, of intruding an ethical dimension into historical writing’ (Southgate 2009: 103). As ethical frameworks of equity informed Franklin’s commentaries on class and gender, ethics, too, informed her commentaries on war.

The Miles Franklin papers

Such debates, and the personal value systems that support the taking up of a strong position within a difficult arena, are revealed within Franklin’s personal papers. The Miles Franklin Papers explore many issues of social importance and the broader literary landscape, including issues that circulate around the ethics of writing about war. A cornerstone of this extraordinary collection is a set of pocket diaries that: [S]he bequeathed to the Mitchell Library on her death in 1954 (Brunton 2004: vii).



Photograph: Clement Girault. M. Franklin’s Pocket Diaries: 1909-1954,
Call number: MLMSS 364 / Box 2 / Items 1-46. Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW.

War, and the fear of war, comes through these diaries quite strongly:

Mother and I went to the Sydney Show – lunch in Wilkes’ tent. Cold, winter & clear. Home about 5.30. Governor-General had a military escort of band & walkers & mounted lancers – sign of the sinister speeding up of Europe’s far-flung war mania (Franklin 1936: 8 April).

Franklin’s ability for such economical prose reflects a sense of urgency. There is also, amidst the ‘war mania’, normalcy: a day out; lunch; a weather report; details of daily life. It is this integration of ideas of ‘the civilian’ and ‘the chaos’ that, it is argued here, inform some of Franklin’s creative outputs.

Within *Bring the Monkey* glittering parties provide cover for classism and sexual

harassment (1933). In *The Dead Must Not Return*, the opening scene combines chatter about new dresses and the price of being awarded a Victoria Cross (1951: 3).

Non-combatants and creative practice

This paper highlights the role non-combatants can play in producing commentaries on conflict, thus destabilising traditional accounts that often privilege white masculinity and subsequently marginalise civilian, female contributions to national war efforts.

According to Wilfred Stone, first-person narration provides a ‘special authenticity and a special vibrancy’ (1983: 14). This narrative form is clear within Franklin’s diaries, discussed briefly above, and clear too, within the fiction works *Bring the Monkey* and *The Dead Must Not Return*. The first line of the former – ‘I have always loathed murder’ (Franklin 1933: 7) – setting the scene.

Key statements within the latter, through the dialogue demanded of a play script, also utilise first-person narration. Indeed, many of the more powerful lines within a text that has, as a core message of ‘women coping with the aftermath of male blood gains in war’ (North 2009) – such as ‘I still can’t understand why man,’ complains Flora, ‘the only beast endowed with reason, should be the only one to degrade his mate’ (1951: 59) – begin with ‘I’. Women are classified as non-combatants, their role in national defence determined by traditional gender roles (as clerk, as cook, as nurse) but women too, bear the scars of conflict. This writing is particularly personal.

The sense of loss, within published and private works, is tangible. Franklin’s questioning of the glory of war is articulated in prose intended for an audience; while the waste of war is recorded in her diaries:

God! how I craved this morning to sit in peace and write my thoughts on Anzac, evoked by the competition stories - as the stupidest blunder in history [...].

They pity, the damnable madness of so much gallantry wasted! [...].

After 9 years absence from my native land I went to see my countrymen, the remnants of Anzac in the first anniversary celebrations in Caxton Hall, London. [...].

I saw, long after, the gates at Woolloomooloo being dedicated. Met the ageing Anzacs at the Town Hall celebration. They have to be cared for, many many of them simple men who gave all in that one supreme effort, however false & foolish, who are now really derelicts. Oh, what misdirection of human potentialities! But Anzac cannot be glorified nor excused; that is to betray those who were sacrificed (Franklin 1936: 9 January).



Photograph: Clement Girault. M. Franklin's Pocket Diaries: 1909-1954,
Call number: MLMSS 364 / Box 2 / Items 1-46. Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW.

War: immediate impacts and the aftermath

This paper also acknowledges the impact of war – as expressed through the creative writing practice of Miles Franklin – upon all members of society. Armed conflict, regardless of scale, can have devastating effects upon those at the frontline and those on the home front. As an example of total war, the First World War was unprecedented in terms of military losses (Davies 1997: 1328).

War changed not only the immediate profiles of societies; it fundamentally changed the way nation states interacted with each other. As John Keegan explains:

The First World War was a tragic and unnecessary conflict. Unnecessary because the train of events that led to its outbreak might have been broken at any point during the five weeks of crisis that preceded the first clash of arms, had prudence or common goodwill found a voice; tragic because the consequences of the first clash ended the lives of ten million human beings, tortured the emotional lives of millions more, destroyed the benevolent and optimistic culture of the European continent and left, when the guns at last fell silent four years later, a legacy of political rancour and the racial hatred so intense that no explanation of the causes of the Second World War can stand without reference to those roots (1999: 3).

‘Historians investigating the impact of war in society can be divided into those who see wars as a catalyst for change, and those who minimise their effects and stress the continuities in social history (Pope 2013: 9). For Franklin war was waste. As Jill Roe records, in her epic biography of Franklin, the writer was ‘horrified by this vile war’

Miles was horrified by ‘this vile war’. Until then the forces of evolution had seemed unstoppable, and the women’s trade union movement had been riding the wave of the future. [...] ‘No-one thought of anything but the war,’ and Miles became depressed by ‘the staggering calamity’; ‘life seemed hardly worth living’ (Roe 2008: 179).

Ethics, amidst aggressive propaganda campaigns asserting the rights and wrongs of war, must have been prominent in Franklin's politically-conscious mind. Her connections to belligerent sympathisers contributing, perhaps, to her feelings about the impending conflict:

Political trends in Europe were perturbing. Her German cousin was a Junker and a Nazi. Mussolini-admiring Italians were emigrating to Australia, and Tories everywhere were in the ascendancy. As for Australia's own rising conservative, Robert Gordon Menzies, it sounded as if he was getting too big for his boots, letting it be known in London that he could run the British Commonwealth with one hand (Roe 2008: 377).

Franklin's personal contributions to a total war were many and varied. Her most obvious service was seen when she sought overseas work that, though behind the frontlines, was clearly far removed from the comforts of home. On 27 June 1917 she signed a contract with the Scottish Women's Hospitals for Foreign Service 'to serve as an unsalaried cook for not less than six months' (Roe 2008: 211). And so Franklin went to a hospital at Ostrovo, attached to the Royal Serbian Army (Roe 2008: 214, 216) where she would become an orderly but would remain unsalaried. Franklin enjoyed her experiences and briefly considered joining the Women's Royal Air Force (Roe 2008: 222).

Franklin, too, would have been subjected to rationing and 'increased government controls' (Reid 1988: 16). These deprivations are reflected in *The Dead Must Not Return* when Myrtle complains: 'I'm sick of pinching and doing without' (1951: 11). There was also the psychological impact of indirectly 'experiencing death and perversions during war [that] exposes the depths of "evil" to which humans are capable' (Creed 2013: 10). The scars across society, wrought by the millions of the missing and the dead, would have also been impossible to avoid. Men transformed, by war, into ghosts and shadows.

Anti-war must not be confused with anti-Australian. She was proud of the Australian soldiers and their unabashed ways; and until it was lost in the Balkans, she always wore an Australian flag brooch. But more than that, it was the same deep-seated humanism that characterised so many responses to the wanton waste of the Great War: 'It is impossible to live in any of the belligerent countries without feeling a deep affection for the soldiers . . . just gentle, ordinary people [...] being assembled for the slaughter (Roe 2008: 201).

It is worth noting, too, that these serious issues were overlaid upon a personal life that was also fraught with many difficulties including poor health. On the final Anzac Day of the First World War, Franklin wrote: 'Worked a lot in garden + had an attack of malaria. Went to bed in discomfort + with a temp. of 103°' (Franklin 1918: 25 April).

Conclusion

The complexities of conflict can be read in the writings – both public and private – of Miles Franklin. In *Bring the Monkey* (1933) the women are presented as playful. The central protagonist, Ercildoun Carrington, is a young woman who disguises herself as

a maid and the carer of Percy, her best friend's pet monkey, in order to attend the film-screening weekend at Tattingwood Hall. A disguise described as 'a gilt-edged scheme to be in all the fun without the burden of being entertaining' (1933: 29). Challenging class lines Miss Carrington also challenges gender: 'Why do you men love to suspect brave decent women when you'll mostly find it is the sexy so-called feminine types that let you down?' (1933: 113). Such debates are engaging and, at times, entertaining, but the crafting of a war hero as a callous murderer challenges more than class and gender; it challenges a national narrative of honouring combatants. In *The Dead Must Not Return* (1951) the messaging, around the cost of conflict, is explicit. War damages men that fight and the women that are left behind. In this two-act play Australia has survived two world wars but some of her citizens, including Franklin's nephew, are shadows: desperate, dark and damaged – their final days lived out alongside headlines of yet another conflict.



M. Franklin
[and nephew Norman John Franklin]:
Photographs of M. Franklin, c. 1879-1954,
Call number: PX*D 250 (vol 1),
digital id. a673016.
Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW.

Franklin's diaries provide insight into the anti-war sentiments within these works while revealing some of the impact, of war, upon her own life and her view of the world. The works of Miles Franklin convey much of what she believed in and reveal – through a war of words – her personal ethical frameworks, to which she held fast in a changing and complex world. Franklin too, worked towards a native literature, which: '[Has] remained chronically incipient' (Franklin 1956: 217). Yet there was hope. She wrote: 'nonconforming minds in various fields still remain untamed, just as lightning, not yet domesticated by science, retains its power to strike unpredictably' (Franklin 1956: 222). Franklin, too, retains her power as a woman writer who, though not consistently successful (Davies 2015: 13), was political, feminist and 'unapologetically Australian' (Spender 1988: 239).

Simultaneously one of our nation's most well-known authors worked towards the creation of the indigenous literature she believed was so important, influenced – as were so many who shared her times – by war. As Kay Schaffer has written:

In fact, there are many discourses (of history, literature, politics, economics, and the like) and the discursive practices (found in the operations of institutions, cultural productions, political events, and the like) which inter-penetrate and fuse to form a conceptual schema which make possible the discussion and articulation of an Australian tradition (1988: 16).

This paper has sought to acknowledge the effects of war – as expressed through the creative writing practices of Miles Franklin – upon all members of society. Moreover, this paper has explored, briefly, the need to question our national narratives, to understand these in new ways. For, as Bert States has written: ‘[T]he business of literature is increased mental organisation: better personal survival equipment for a world that is constantly mutating, even as it remains much the same’ (2003). In our attempts to survive across the battlefields of class, gender and the anti-war movement, literature might be the most powerful weapon we have.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank all those scholars who have gone before them, particularly Jill Roe and her extraordinary efforts to document the life and work of Miles Franklin. The authors also thank Richard Neville, Mitchell Librarian at the State Library of NSW.

Endnotes

¹ Patrick White received £500 for Voss; today recipients are awarded \$60,000.

² The ethics of acts of war have been debated at great length (see, for example: Christopher [1994]; Coates [1997]; and Creed [2013]) and a full coverage of these debates is beyond the scope of this work.

³ The fictitious Percy was modelled on a real monkey: the real monkey’s name was Peter and he belonged to Jean Hamilton. Hamilton would occasionally allow Franklin the ‘sole care of the volatile creature’ (Roe 2008: 321).

⁴ The work was read by Annie Bilton, Lynden Jones, David Kerslake, Amanda Stephens Lee, Mikaela Martin, Brendan Miles and Caitlin Shaw.

⁵ It is worth noting, as highlighted by Jill Roe, that *All That Swagger* (1936) has, as an obvious omission, ‘the impact of World War I on Australia and the consequent creation of the Anzac tradition’ (2008: 364).

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