Reading Race, Repertoire and Transcontinental Reception through Madame Celeste's Colonial Encounter

In June 1866 newspaper reports announced that theatrical impresario George Coppin had engaged Madame Celeste for a tour of the Australian colonies for the sum of thirty thousand US dollars.[1] French-born Céline Céleste (1810/11-1882) was a celebrated star who had enjoyed a long career on the stages of the United States and Europe. Her Australian tour took place from January to December 1867, several decades before the advent of large-scale international touring of entertainment companies. It provides fertile ground for exploring the complexity of theatrical encounters with colonial subjectivities owing to a unique combination of factors. First, Celeste's Franco-Anglo identity positioned her as both a representative of, and an outsider to, the British empire. Her body was another site of contradiction, prompting a blurring of past and present for some migrant-settler audience members who retained memories of her younger self on the English stage. With an image largely founded on her physicality in performance, some spectators would need to reconcile their recollections with the appearance of the now mature actress in her mid-fifties (figure 1). Celeste's choice of repertoire, principally melodrama and often featuring exoticised 'others,' similarly invites examination, particularly given the genre's close association with empire, in both its subject matter and geographic reach. As Marty Gould argues:

> Melodrama's conventional framing translated an expansive and complicated political concept into the more familiar theatrical idioms that allowed audiences of all classes to understand their nation's imperial project and to make sense of themselves as citizens of an empire.[2]

Focusing on Celeste's reception and repertoire during her twelve-month Australian tour, I present an hitherto unexplored analysis of the complex interplay of racial identity, gender, and ageing in the context of mid-nineteenth-century colonial politics.

[Figure 1 here] Figure 1 caption: D. J. Pound's hand-coloured steel engraving of Madame Celeste was based on a photograph by J. Norris of Birmingham, probably taken on one of her annual engagements in the English city between 1860 and 1864. It provides a good indication of Celeste's mature appearance as she would have been during her 1867 Australian tour. Author's collection.

As newspaper reports reveal, Celeste's history and career were well known by the time she arrived in Australia. She trained and began her stage career in Paris. In 1827 she went to the US, appearing first in New York and then touring. An unhappy marriage to American Henry Elliott led her to pursue her profession in Britain in 1830 and engagements at various provincial theatres and in London followed. In 1834-37 during the second of six tours of the US, she achieved widespread fame and fortune. She specialised in dancing and pantomimic roles, forms which showcased her expressive use of body and face. Mime conveniently hid her heavily accented spoken English (a trait still commented on in Australian reviews in 1867).[3] Celeste was also adept at theatrical management, first at Liverpool's Theatre Royal and later at the Adelphi, Lyceum, and Olympic theatres in London. Initially she worked in partnership with Benjamin Webster with whom she had a long-lasting sexual relationship. Although remembered for originating roles in a number of popular plays, her significance to the creation or 'authorship' of productions during her managerial career was underestimated until brought to light in important scholarship by Jane Moody and Jacky Bratton.[4]

Celeste's Australian expedition followed a year acting in North America, commencing in September 1865.[5] Performances in cities across the US and Canada, starting in New York and ending in San Francisco, yielded mixed rewards. In May 1866, for example, a Philadelphian newspaper pronounced that although her engagement at the Arch Street Theatre was "a fine one artistically, [it] has not been a great success pecuniarily."[6] The subsequent Australian tour offered the prospect of refilling her coffers prior to retirement, but was not without financial risk.

The gamble paid off. Celeste's impromptu speech at the end of her first performance, at Melbourne's Haymarket Theatre on 12 January 1867, indicates her relief: "The cordiality of the reception with which I have been honored will dwell in my memory as one of the brightest moments of my existence."[7] Any apprehension she may have felt after her recent American experience proved unfounded, as confirmed by the large audiences during her first ten-week engagement.[8] At Coppin's benefit in April, the manager reflected on the six-month past season, regretting that he "had lost money by all my novelties, except one." He expounded "I am entirely indebted to the great attraction of Madame Celeste for the balance in my ledger being considerably upon the right side at the present moment."[9] The actress also reaped the financial benefits of the tour; a press report in 1871 asserted that "the bulk of the modest competency on which Madame Celeste is now retiring from the stage was realized in Australia."[10]

The risks of transcontinental touring were not limited to money. The recent drowning of tragedian Gustavus Vaughan Brook when the steamer the London was lost en route to Australia in January 1866 was a salutatory reminder of the dangers. Despite being an experienced long-distance traveller who had since the 1830s frequently sailed between Europe and the US, Celeste had cause for concern. For her 1866 voyage from California to Australia she took the newly established route via mail steamer from Panama. In a private letter reprinted in the *Era,* the actress expressed her astonishment at covering the 18,000 miles to Melbourne in just 59 days.[11] Calm conditions in the Pacific had enabled:

> an extraordinarily smooth passage from San Francisco to Panama. The weather only changed when we were eight thousand miles on the other side of the Equator, when we had it very rough; and it continued so until we reached New Zealand.[12]

The final ten-day leg of the journey from Wellington through Cook's Strait proved particularly challenging, causing her to fear her "fate was sealed, and that I was going on an excursion to the bottom of the ocean."[13] Unsurprisingly, Celeste reports that "the journey has fatigued me much, and I want rest before I begin."[14] After arriving in Melbourne on 6 December 1866, she had just over five weeks to recuperate before her first performance.

Compared to other actresses who toured Australasia in the 1860s,[15] Celeste performed in relatively few locations, playing only at the Haymarket and Theatre Royal in Melbourne, the Theatre Royal in Ballarat, and the Prince of Wales Opera House and Royal Victoria Theatre in Sydney. A proposed tour through the principal towns of New Zealand did not materialise, most likely due to concern about her wellbeing.[16] In September ill health had forced her to withdraw from three performances at Ballarat and to cancel completely the advertised six-night engagement at the Lyceum, Bendigo. Announcing her indisposition, the manager of the Ballarat theatre claimed she "was attacked with a relapse of sciatica."[17] The condition was incompatible with the physical intensity of her performances, many requiring numerous costume changes (often in quick succession as she enacted multiple parts), and/or dancing.

Scheduling a limited number of engagements may have been a deliberate attempt to reduce the strain on Celeste's body, but might equally be an acknowledgement of her power to attract repeat audiences over extended periods. Large houses showed Australian spectators relished the last chance before her retirement to see a preeminent actress of the British theatre. As Tobias Becker contends in relation to theatrical touring companies in colonial India, the unifying appeal to diasporic British audience members was to keep them "in touch with the homeland," "to participate in the metropolitan culture," and "inadvertently hel[p] to unify the British empire."[18] These impulses are evident in a report of Celeste's reception in Melbourne, which accounts for her popularity in terms of nostalgia:

> The associations connected with this lady and thousands of our colonists—the recollections of times long since passed and gone away—the remembrances of happy nights spent in the society of smiling faces, perhaps never to be seen again, and the changes of fortune and vicissitudes of life passed through by all—were sufficient in themselves to ensure her an enthusiastic reception.[19]

In the *Australasian* 'Jacques' attributes the audience's warm greeting to 'a spice of patriotism arising from old-country memories.'[20] Other critics, including "Charles Surface," present nostalgic reverie that reinforces her pre-eminence on the English stage:

> The scythe-bearer, Time has dealt kindly with madame, and I could scarcely trace a shade of difference in her appearance since I last saw her some fifteen years ago. The same gracefulness of *pose*, the exquisite taste in costume, the fiery impulsiveness of character, and the musical and charming broken English in which she speaks, combined to recall my earliest

> recollections of the London stage when she was the presiding genius of the Adelphi in years gone by.[21]

In an address in Melbourne in May 1867 the actress commented “it is both a surprise and a pleasure to see before me so many old familiar faces I have recognised within the walls of the Adelphi.”[22] Nevertheless, ‘Jaques’ reported that Celeste was less successful in New South Wales and speculated “that there are in Sydney far fewer persons who go to see her for the sake of renewing old pleasures.”[23] Yet the fact that later in her engagement “crowded houses are now the order of the day,” and even extremely inclement weather did not put off audiences, indicates that she won over many of those for whom her performances were novel.[24]

In Australia Celeste’s repertoire was almost exclusively made up of standards that she had played many times before and that would have been familiar to much of her audience, regardless of whether they had ever seen her. One favourite was John Baldwin Buckstone’s domestic drama *The Green Bushes; or, A Hundred Years Ago*, which she had introduced at the Adelphi, London on 27 January 1845. She opened it in Melbourne on 4 March 1867, nearly 22 years after the play had first been performed in Australia.[25] (Since the 1849 Melbourne production it had been played many times, most recently in 1866 Miami was played by Kate Warde in Brisbane, Louisa Cleveland in Melbourne and Ballarat, and Mrs Heir—Fanny Cathcart—in Sydney.) Celeste’s situation was therefore like that of Charles Mathews the younger, who toured Australia in 1870-71 when, as Charles Dickens (son of the novelist) notes, he “was in the odd predicament of not presenting an original version of his own original parts.”[26]

The enthusiastic reception of Celeste’s old pieces accentuates her ability to make each production seem fresh. Such was the case with J. T. Haines’s “pantomimic drama” *The French Spy,* whose heroine she had already played 2,500 times since originating it in 1831.[27] The role involves adopting disguises including Arab Boy, who performs an important scene in dumb show. Celeste’s mimed portrayal in Australia in 1867 could still provoke effusive praise for her “superb acting”:

> Indeed, it is almost impossible to put on paper the ideas Madame Celeste so exquisitely, so elegantly, and with such exceeding grace, expresses by pantomime. Never before has it been given to a Victorian public to witness what pantomime really was capable of: what power of expression there is in dumb hands, in the human frame or the human eye. Look at the picture as Celeste presents it, and confess it is one at once ethereal, idealistic, and eminently artistic.[28]

Despite concentrating on her physicality on stage, none of the reviews reference any discomfort at the age disparity between actress and part. The mature actress’s efforts were more favourably greeted than those of Charles and Ellen Kean, whom Coppin had induced to visit Australia in 1863. The American actor Joseph Jefferson recalls "there was a feeling of disappointment in the audience that with all their kindness they could not shake off or conceal—the veterans had tarried too long."[29] A review in a Sydney newspaper confirms Celeste's superiority:

> We have had here a fair sprinkling of actors, who have acquired fame in the old country, including Mr and Mrs Charles Kean, Hudson, John Collins, C. Dillon, and others of lesser note, but none of these have combined great talent with the unimpaired possession of those dramatic faculties, by which they originally achieved eminence to such an extent as is the case with Madame Celeste, or else the particular line of business they excelled in, has not been so generally acceptable.[30]

Negative press commentary focused on deficiencies in the dramas, not the actress's histrionic capabilities. For example, in the *Leader* Autolycus's censure of *The French Spy* as "one of the worst ever produced in the colony," stems from a snobbery against melodrama. Discussing the proposed migration of Celeste and company to the Theatre Royal, he predicts failure since that venue is "looked on as the legitimate theatre of the colony," so there is an expectation that it will put on "legitimate entertainment there."[31] Such journalism is driven by an ideology advancing a cultural hierarchy with Shakespeare and "history" at the apex, as Kate Flaherty and Edel Lamb show in relation to the 1863 "Shakespeare War".[32] In this context, Celeste's success with a repertoire that consisted mainly of melodrama is noteworthy. She earned acclaim for her "singular talent for stage management,"[33] her artistic taste, for paying attention to the minor parts,[34] and for her insistence on overseeing every aspect of the productions, including the grouping of performers.[35] The *Sydney Morning Herald* hence concluded that despite "[c]oming here at a time when theatrical performances were in very low position," Celeste has "created a new era in the colonial drama."[36] The reviewer's comments refer to the elevation of style and professional production values, rather than to the introduction of a new dramatic repertoire.

Of the 17 dramas Celeste performed in 1867, the most frequent choices were *The Woman in Red* (32 performances), *The Green Bushes* (29), *The House on the Bridge of Notre Dame* (24), and *The French Spy* (23) – all of which were played at Melbourne, Ballarat, and Sydney. Joseph Stirling Coyne's melodrama *The Woman in Red*, with which she opened her Australian season, was a relatively new piece specially written for her and based on Victorien Sardou's French drama *La Tireuse de Cartes*. She had first played it at London's Victoria Theatre at Easter 1864 and reprised it on Broadway and in California immediately prior to her Australian sojourn. Celeste's character, Miriam, assumes the pseudonym Rudiga to practise as a fortune teller and money lender while searching for her child, who was stolen from her as a baby. Her agony does not end with the rediscovery of her daughter sixteen years later for the young woman shrinks from Miriam, her Jewish mother, in favour of the gentile woman whom she believed to be her parent. The part is rich in emotional moments that played to Celeste's strengths:

> The power of expression which she possesses in her countenance enables her to adapt herself, with singular felicity, to the varying scenes of the drama; every movement and every gesture breathes the spirit of the thought she is seeking to interpret; and, above all, the reality of her acting imparts to the character a passionate intensity, thoroughly Jewish in its nature, but, at the same time never offending by exaggeration. . . . She acted throughout with sustained fervour and power, and there were occasionally some of those electric touches—the mingled emanations of genius and art—which sent a thrill of emotion through the entire audience.[37]

The review, which is typical, praises Celeste's "natural" acting style and fits the pattern Flaherty and Lamb present of moments of affective intensity being expressed through the reviewer's switch to the present tense, the elision of performer and character, and detailed description of the action.[38] Not all critics were as enthusiastic about the play as they were of her acting,[39] but the evening, despite the intense heat, marked an auspicious start for the tour.

If *The Woman in Red* offered no obvious commentary on colonialism aside from raising the issue of antisemitism, the only drama Celeste originated during her Australian visit did. *Maximilian; or, the Empress and the Traitor* debuted on 28 October 1867 at the Haymarket and was performed five times. It was advertised as "a new drama written expressly for Madame Celeste, by R. P. Whitworth, Esq, on the late melancholy events in Mexico."[40] The reference was to the execution of Emperor Maximilian by Mexican republicans as part of their struggle against French dominion. A Melbourne newspaper reporter suggested that "colonial dramatist" Whitworth should be gratified at having his work chosen for performance, inferring that it was unusual for the motherland to recognise drama created in the colonies.[41] The fact that Celeste did not produce the play when she returned to the English stage may reinforce this perceived hierarchy of value. Predictably the drama is firmly on the side of the Emperor and his loyal and brave Empress Carlotta (Celeste's character), who is driven mad by grief when he is executed, and dies. In contrast, the republicans are shown to be treacherous and opportunistic. *Maximilian* clearly supports the imperial project, confirming the notion that Celeste's tour bolstered colonialism.

In contrast, analysis of one of her most famous roles—Miami, "The Huntress of the Mississippi" in *The Green Bushes*—suggests a more complex relationship to colonial development and First Nations peoples. To recap the plot, Act 1 of the play is set in 1745 in rural Ireland. Connor O'Kennedy is wanted for enlisting men for the Irish Brigade (i.e. Irish soldiers who fought in the French army). His treacherous brother George covets his property so intrigues with ne'er-do-well Wild Murtagh to frighten Connor into fleeing to America. When soldiers arrive to arrest him, Connor escapes by ship, leaving behind his wife, Geraldine, and their infant daughter.

Act 2 moves to the Mississippi Valley in 1747. Miami, a beautiful huntress, reveals to an admiring French captain that her mother was a native American princess and her father French. She is married to a settler, whom we soon discover is Connor. He vows love to Miami, but in private he is tormented by a letter from his wife Geraldine, who is searching for him. As he is rereading it, Geraldine suddenly appears. Unseen, Miami witnesses their encounter and, despairing at her husband's duplicity, ominously grasps her rifle. Later, discovering Connor and Geraldine kissing in the forest, Miami "in a paroxysm" fires her rifle and faints. Connor dies in the presence of both women after charging Miami to protect Geraldine. The huntress, however, plunges from a cliff into the river in a suicide attempt. The act ends as she is plucked from the water onto a raft carrying French soldiers.

The final act returns to Ireland a year later, opening at a forge where a young girl of unknown origin is being brought up. A French gentlewoman, Madame St Aubert (i.e. Miami), recognises Connor's daughter Eveleen from her likeness to a miniature, and arranges to take the girl to live with her. In Dublin Nelly O'Neil, who had been looking after Eveleen, bemoans that she was stolen from her care and is desperately searching for her. Nelly overhears Murtogh threaten to expose the fact that years before he had been responsible for disposing of the child to aid George O'Connor's plans. As the drama leads to the climax, Madame St Aubert has arranged to see George; Geraldine finally returns and learns about Eveleen's disappearance; witnesses who saw Connor's death plan to expose Miami in Dublin by presenting the murder weapon and claiming a reward; and Eveleen is discovered when she hears Nelly singing and joins in a song from her childhood. In the final scene, the truth is revealed. Madame St Aubert presents Geraldine and Eveleen with the right to all her estates and money as an act of atonement—then dies. As Disher remarks: "There was an understanding between authors and audiences that remorse usually proved fatal—Buckstone's philosophy depended on it (however good the health of Madame Celeste) and in this belief he wrote *The Green Bushes; or, A Hundred Years Ago.*"[42]

The Mississippi setting in the 1840s places it in a region that, from the late seventeenth century, was colonised by France as part of its Louisiana territory.[43] Despite trading between incomers and native peoples, relations were sometimes antagonistic. In the drama, Miami testifies to Captain Dartois of her sense of belonging to the indigenous community and acknowledges the disruption caused by British settlers (the anomaly of British colonists in French territory is not explained):

> There's not an Indian lodge in this great valley that would not shelter me, not a red son of the forest that would not die for me. I was well guarded, 'till there came one of the pale faces

> from other shores than that which gave you birth; they lived amongst us, hunted with us, taught us the use of the deadly rifle, and one became my husband.[44] (p.24)

It is this “deadly” weapon, introduced by the coloniser, that will bring about Miami’s ruin, for in learning to use it she gains the power to kill her lover when roused to jealousy. Read through a postcolonial lens, the imperial project thus disrupts the harmony of the region with catastrophic effects. I wish to argue such an interpretation is pertinent given the drama’s production in Australia where the displacement of Aboriginal people was recent and ongoing. In seeking to make connections between two disparate areas and native communities that suffered from colonial encroachment, I do not suggest that this association was made by audiences in Australia in 1867. Contemporary reviews do not acknowledge such a link with the continent’s Indigenous people, a revealing fact in itself.

Miami, whose name presumably references the Algonquian-speaking First Nations people, attracts audience sympathy for her genuine love for Connor and for being deceived by him. Nevertheless, she troubles Victorian gender conventions. Jane Moody describes the role, along with Cynthia in *The Flowers of the Forest*, as “submerg[ing] the stage memory of masculinity in the creation of women on the very edges of femininity.”[45] Appearance reinforces such unconventionality at a time when, as Barbara Dawson shows in the Australian context, women’s clothing functions as an outward signifier of class and respectability:

> The stark difference between white, ornately clothed, controlled, Christian, civilised women and their binary opposite—black, naked, ‘uncontrolled’, heathen natives—fed into British racial assumptions that encouraged the stereotypical depiction of aborigines as ‘savage’, ‘ugly’ and ‘depraved’.[46]
>
> Miami’s costume in Act 2, as detailed in the published text, is more picturesque than ugly:
>
> Moccasins on feet, black leggings, beaded, and tied down side of legs, short red petticoat, with Indian trimming, black hunting shirt, with beaded trimming, Indian pouch and band, hunting horn of fur skin, rifle and band, bracelets, armlets, bandeau round head, hunting cap made of panther's skin, flesh stockings (p.6).

A number of images of Celeste in this costume were widely circulated (see figure 2).

[Figure 2 here] Figure 2 caption: Celeste as the native American huntress in Act 2 of Buckstone’s *The Green Bushes*. This coloured plate from Thomas Hailes Lacy’s *Female Costumes, Historical, National, Dramatic, in 200 plates* (1865) closely follows the costume details given in printed texts of the play. Author’s collection.

Miami’s fetishised figure signals both her exotic otherness and her active engagement in hunting, a pursuit antithetical to genteel femininity as exemplified by the two outfits she dons as Madame St

Aubert.[47] The potency of Celeste's moving body in the hunting costume is shown in the reminiscences of "an Old Playgoer" printed in 1888, several years after her death:

> I have seen many charming Miamis, yet only one stands out in my recollection luminously distinct and clear—the lithe, graceful and winning huntress of the west, who used to bound over the bridge with a firm elastic foot, and bend her supple figure to the plaudits of the audience, while her eyes sparkled with pleasure at the warmth of the welcome she received.[48]

The figure of the native American appears in a number of nineteenth-century American plays, including several featuring Pocahontas. Examining James Nelson Barker's *The Indian Princess; or, La Belle Sauvage* (1808), Susan Scheckel argues that the plot enables the author

> to examine troubling aspects of the nation's history of conquest—violence, greed, dispossession—while appealing to the narrative logic of the romantic plot to resolve (or displace) the causes of anxiety and guilt arising from the play's examination of national origins.[49]

The Green Bushes operates similarly; moreover, for British audiences guilt is lessened since the drama is set in French, not British, colonial territory. Playing the piece in Australia puts it at a further remove, but adds complexity into the interpretation of Miami's mixed racial status.

In an 1888 article in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, W. J. Lawrence identifies race as the cause of Miami's internal conflict:

> Owing to a strange commingling of French and Indian blood, poor Miami's system becomes the battleground of the old antagonistic forces—civilisation and savageness, nature against art, brute strength against science.[50]

Her maternal lineage accounts for Miami's harmony with the North American landscape (see Figure 3). Asked why she does not go to France to claim her rank and inheritance, she contends that she would feel alienated and unhappy there: "No, I should be a restless prisoner, all would seem cold and strange to me, and I should weep for freedom, for the wild prairie and the great forest" (pp.24-25). The lack of constraint associated with the territory is reinforced in Miami's discussion with Connor. When he claims to have no plans to return to Europe, she responds: "Ah! that is brave—yes, we will remain here with liberty around us, even as the eagle flies above the clouds, that he may move his wings freely." (p.25) In contrast, Connor is out of place in her beloved landscape, privately disliking "the glaring sun of this place" and pining for the "cool and clouded sky of my own green land." (pp.26-27) His sentiments may have had particular resonance for settler audience members in the gold rush town of Ballarat.

[Insert Figure 3] Figure 3 caption: Engraving of 'Madame Celeste as Miami' from *Tallis's Drawing Book Table Book of Theatrical Portraits, Memoirs and Anecdotes* (1851). Sitting in the fertile

Mississippi landscape with the river in the background, Miami is depicted in contemplative mood, at ease with the natural world. Author’s collection.

Miami’s ties to the surrounding ecology are reflected in her language. When in turmoil upon the discovery of Connor’s falsehood, she finds a miniature of his daughter, musing:

> Yes, nature is a strong witness here of the father's falsehood—poor child! poor mother! [325] wretched, wretched Miami!—I will not look at it again, though it shall remain with me—and shall I live under this deep injury? No, with the great Spirit will I seek for peace, for I will never, NEVER, look upon his face again—should our eyes glance upon each other there would be death.
> *(siezing* [sic] *her rifle.)*
> I should but look upon his face, and the seeming truth that once beamed upon it, as the deadly hemlock hidden beneath the green moss—but I will not creep like a frightened fowl amongst the leaves—no—no—I will wander away—where—I care not, so that I do not meet with him again, for there is mischief in my blood, that I fear—an Indian never forgives an injury—and can I forgive mine? (p.32)

She repeatedly expresses herself in imagery derived from the natural world – here hemlock, moss and birds – and her reference to “the great Spirit” gestures to the beliefs and the customs of the native Americans as envisaged by European imagination.

The positive association of oneness with the natural world is familiar from Romantic notions of the state before modern human alienation from nature. Buckstone, writing in the 1840s, is clearly influenced by this tradition and constructs his native heroine as an idealised other. Hence Captain Dartois recognises Miami’s “wild and natural grace” (p.25). Her depiction might also be read as reinforcing the traditional association of women with Mother Nature, a conception challenged by ecofeminists such as Catriona Sandilands: “Nature was defined in terms of stereotypical femininity because contemporary culture was the manifestation of all that is quintessentially male.”[51] In the Australian context, in which men far outnumbered women, the dominance of the androcentric is particularly marked. Although Miami fits with essentialist gender definitions through her affinity to the natural world, she does not conform to the associated nurturing mother stereotype. Unlike Geraldine, she has no children. As Madame St Auban she may adopt parental responsibility for Eveleen, but only until her natural mother returns. Likewise, it is guilt, not maternal instinct that leads to her act of reparation.

The nature versus civilisation binary manifested in nineteenth-century bias against indigenous peoples’ “savagery” is evident in this review of Celeste’s first Australian production:

> Here it was that Celeste showed how much of study she must have bestowed on the character; the changeful fitfulness of a fond and deceived woman was strangely blended with the half savage dignity of the last of a great aboriginal race. The struggle to maintain her composure, the wild wail of her soul as she learnt the full extent of her misery, and her sudden determination for revenge; these were the emotions so faithfully depicted by the actress.[52]

The "half savage" is associated with a lack of control, her uncivilised instinct kindled by her passionate jealousy, causing her to act irrationally. The commentary continues:

> Hitherto we have had Miami presented to us as a deliberate murderess. Madame Celeste makes the act of revenge purely a mechanical one. The brain has no will; it is but the body which performs functionally its work.[53]

Instinct, not thought direct the woman's actions. Hence having caused Connor's death, Miami seeks release by drowning herself after invoking the elements of earth, air and water:

> But blood is upon me, the blood of one I loved, and I must die. The spirit of death is near and calls me—hark! I hear his solemn voice—earth—sky—I have looked on you for the last time—river of my race receive me. (p.37)

Civilisation, however, triumphs as her immolation is thwarted when the French raft takes her to a ship sailing for Europe. Subsequently she appears as a French aristocrat, in which persona she will be called upon to carry out her duty. Thus she murders as the "savage," but acts nobly as a European. This leads Robin O. Warren to characterise the play as a conversion narrative in which Celeste progresses from "wild transgressive native woman to an upper-class contrite white woman," thereby "affirm[ing] whiteness."[54] I suggest this reading is undercut by the character's death at the end, which may be read as her ultimate failure to assimilate into white European society. It should also be considered in the context of attitudes towards miscegenation and indigenous people within Australia.

Many white Australians believed "the biological incorporation of 'half-castes' into the wider population to be an ineluctable process of nature," and in the early twentieth century they would go on to support direct measures to "breed out the colour" by regulating reproduction and forcibly taking light-skinned, mixed-blood children from their birth families.[55] In this environment, the fact that Miami, as played by Celeste, was light-skinned and could be identified as native American only through her costume and speech patterns meant she could be read as illustrating the potential of this approach. Act 3 demonstrates that, shorn of her ethnic identifiers (costume and rife), all trace of her aboriginal inheritance has gone and she poses no further threat to white society.

Another perspective on colonisation and exploitation is provided by the play's comic subplot. Grinnage, the English owner of a travelling caravan is in the Mississippi to acquire "real live Indians" for his show. His associate, sailor Jack Gong, has fallen in love with Tigertail, a native. They elope and are pursued by her tribe, led by jilted lover Rattlesnake. In a fight, Grinnage is about to be scalped but his peruke comes off in Rattlesnake's hands, causing the terrified natives to run away. Both the bloodthirsty savages and their bumbling English foes are ridiculed in this encounter. Cultured behaviour receives further sardonic treatment as Grinnage educates Tigertail about what "To civilize" entails:

> To
> *(crosses to C.)*
> learn you to turn up your nose at a wigwam, and want a house genteely furnished. To teach you never to be able to do anything yourself, but have a servant to do it for you. To force your own particular opinions on any [25] matter, on every body, whether they like it or not; to lead you to want every thing you see—and to want a great deal more than nature ever intended you to have—in short, I should say, that to be civilized, is never to be satisfied. (p.33)

In Europe, Tigertail, now Mrs Gong, performs as a money-making exhibit, dancing "the real and original native Kickaraboo, or Indian war dance" (p.33). Although a willing participant in this commercial appropriation of her native culture, she is demeaned as an object of curiosity. Grinnage justifies this:

> let 'em say what they like of us poor showmen, we are but pictures of all the world—don't every body, the grave and the gay, all classes [50] have it's monster, something to be frightened at, or stared and wondered at—and of course most liberally maintained for the purpose. No, Jack, the world can't go along without a monster. (p.49)

Identifying Tigertail as a monster dehumanises her and shows that although she may wear European dress and speak English, she will remain an outsider in British society. Thus, in the course of *The Green Bushes* native American figures are variously figures of sympathy, nobility, fun and contempt. According to Kate Flint in *The Transatlantic Indian,* multi-focal shifting is typical, "symptomatic of the fact that different narratives concerning Native Americans ran in tandem with one another in Victorian Britain, pulling in various and coexistent directions."[56] *The Green Bushes* exemplifies these ambiguities. Even if, as Gould argues, the imperial project ultimately wins out in melodrama, Celeste's charismatic performance as Miami was sufficient to raise a counter discourse.[57]

Celeste's tie to the colonial establishment was reinforced at the end of her tour. The actress was scheduled to leave Australia on 26 November 1867, following her final farewell performance at Melbourne on Saturday 16th. However, her departure was delayed after she received a letter from HRH Duke of Edinburgh (Prince Alfred) desiring to see her perform and asserting he "should consider whatever theatre she played at as under his special patronage."[58] Flattered by this request, she completed her farewell on 16th at which she made an address and was presented with a testimonial, but remained in the colony to perform two command nights for the royal patron on Thursday 28 November and Tuesday 24 December. At the Prince's special request, the featured drama on the first occasion was *The Green Bushes.* Celeste is reported to have entertained the prince backstage.[59]

The arrival of Queen Victoria's son, the first visit by a member of the British royal family to Australia, provoked an upswelling of loyal flag-waving for the imperial project. Cindy McCreery argues the visit "demanded that the prince and the locals display their loyalty to the British throne, affection for the Royal Navy and their adherence to British protocol."[60] Even though she was French by birth and still spoke English with a French accent, Celeste can be viewed as included in this homage because of her lengthy history on the British stage and her importance to its theatrical culture. Just as advertisements made much of the patronage of Lord and/or Lady Young (the Governor General and wife) at seven of Celeste's appearances in Sydney, so such royal occasions enhanced her personal prestige and coterminously demonstrated the legitimacy of Australian theatre.

Overall, Celeste's tour was financially rewarding although the exertion was not without adverse consequences, with one columnist reporting "her arduous career in this colony has in some measure impaired her health."[61] She benefited from appearing at a time when Australians tended to take a deferential attitude towards the culture of the colonial homeland, as is implicit in the wording of the testimonial presented to her at her farewell performance:

> When actors and actresses who have achieved the highest distinction in Europe and America favour British colonists at the antipodes with their presence, they pay a high compliment to the Australian public and the Australian stage.[62]

In the following decades such a submissive cultural relationship would be rejected as the theatre responded to a more overtly national agenda,[63] but even in the 1860s Celeste's identity was more complex than simply a representative of Britain. Like her character in *The Green Bushes,* she embodied contradictory aspects of race and gender that posed more of a challenge to the establishment than was recognised at the time.

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[1] "Dramatic," *New York Clipper,* June 2, 1866, 62.

[2] Marty Gould, "Melodrama and Empire," in *The Cambridge Companion to English Melodrama*, ed. Carolyn Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 178.

[3] 'Jaques' [J. E. Neild], "Entertainments. The Theatres, &c.," *Australasian,* February 9, 1867, 177.

[4] See Jacky Bratton, *The Making of the West End Stage: Marriage, Management and the Mapping of Gender in London, 1830-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Jane Moody, "Illusions of Authorship," in *Women and Playwriting in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, eds Tracy C. Davis and Ellen Donkin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 112-21; and Jane Moody, "Céleste [*married name* Céleste-Elliott], Céline [*known as* Madame Céleste', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2019) https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/4987 .

[5] Moody follows Charles Eyre Pascoe's *The Dramatic List: A Record of the Principal Performances of Living Actors and Actresses of the British Stage* (London: Hardwicke and Bogue, 1879) 81, in asserting that Celeste's foreign tour began in 1863. In fact she was performing in the UK until mid-June 1865.

[6] "Amusements," *Daily Evening Bulletin* (Philadelphia), May 4, 1866, 8.

[7] "Madame Celeste at the Haymarket," *Age* (Melbourne), January 14, 1867, 5.

[8] "The Haymarket Theatre," *Argus* (Melbourne), March 30, 1867, 5.

[9] "The Theatres. The Haymarket," *Argus*, April 15, 1867, 5.

[10] "Anglo-Australian News," *Geelong Advertiser,* February 20, 1871, 3.

[11] "Madame Celeste in Australia," *Era*, February 17, 1867, 11.

[12] "Madame Celeste in Australia," 11.

[13] "Madame Celeste in Australia," 11.

[14] "Madame Celeste in Australia," 11.

[15] For discussion of such tours, see Janice Norwood, *Victorian Touring Actresses: Crossing Boundaries and Negotiating the Cultural Landscape* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).

[16] "Town and Country," *Lyttelton Times,* July 11, 1867, 2 and *Oamaru Times, and Waitaki Reporter,* November 12, 1867, 2.

[17] "News and Notes," *Ballarat Star,* October 5, 1867, 2.

[18] Tobias Becker, "Entertaining the Empire: Theatrical Touring Companies and Amateur Dramatics in Colonial India," *The Historical Journal* 57, no.3 (2014): 701, 702.

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[19] "Theatricals in Australia," *Era,* March 24, 1867, 10.

[20] 'Jaques,' "Entertainments," *Australasian,* June 19, 1867, 81.

[21] 'Charles Surface', "Theatrical. The Metropolitan Stage," *Bell's Life in Victoria and Sporting Chronicle* (Melbourne), January 19, 1867, 2.

[22] "The Haymarket Theatre," *Argus,* March 30, 1867, 5.

[23] 'Jaques', "Entertainments," *Australasian,* June 15, 1867, 754.

[24] Report from Melbourne dated July 27, 1867, "Theatricals in Australia," *Era,* September 15, 1867, 10 and "Prince of Wales Theatre. —Benefit of Madame Celeste," *Empire,* June 24, 1867, 4.

[25] "The Green Bushes," *Lorgnette* (Melbourne), April 20, 1888, 4.

[26] Ed. Charles Dickens, the Younger, *The Life of Charles James Mathews* (London: Macmillan, 1879) Vol. 2: 211, quoted in Jim Davis, "Colonial Experience: English Comedians in Australia in the Nineteenth Century," *Nineteenth Century Theatre* 16, no.1 (Summer 1988): 18.

[27] "Madame Celeste as 'The French Spy'," *Argus,* February 9, 1867, 5.

[28] "Madame Celeste at the Haymarket Theatre," *Age,* February 11, 1867, 5.

[29] *The Autobiography of Joseph Jefferson* (1889), quoted in ed. J. M. Hardwick, *Emigrant in Motley: The Journey of Charles and Ellen Kean in Quest of a Theatrical Fortune in Australia and America, as Told in Their Hitherto Unpublished Letters* (London: Rockliff, 1954), 87.

[30] "Theatricals. Prince of Wales Theatre," *Bell's Life in Sydney and Sporting Chronicle,* June 8, 1867, 3.

[31] Autolycus, "The Drama," *Leader,* February 16, 1867, 17.

[32] Kate Flaherty and Edel Lamb, "The 1863 Melbourne Shakespeare War: Barry Sullivan, Charles and Ellen Kean, and the Play of Cultural Usurpation on the Australian Stage," *Australian Studies* 4 (2012): 3.

[33] 'Jaques', "Entertainments. The Theatres, &c.," *Australasian,* Febuary 2, 1867, 145.

[34] Charles Surface, "Theatrical. The Metropolitan Stage," *Bell's Life in Victoria and Sporting Chronicle,* February 9, 1867, 2.

[35] When she returned to the Melbourne Haymarket in October, her stage management is contrasted with the "reprehensible laxity" of the previous incumbent, American actress Kate Denin; Autolycus, "The Drama," *Leader* October 26, 1867, 18.

[36] "The Prince of Wales Opera House," *Sydney Morning Herald,* June 22, 1867, 4.

[37] "Madame Celeste at the Haymarket Theatre," *Argus,* January 14, 1867, 5.

[38] Flaherty and Lamb, "The 1863 Melbourne Shakespeare War," 4.

[39] 'Jaques' presents various objections to the drama in "Entertainments. The Theatres, &c.," *Australasian,* January 19, 1867, 81.

[40] Advert for Royal Haymarket Theatre, *Age,* October 24, 1867, 8.

[41] "The Fate of Maximilian," *Argus,* October 28, 1867, 6.

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[42] Maurice Wilson Disher, *Blood and Thunder: Mid-Victorian Melodrama and Its Origins* (London: Frederick Muller, 1949), 221.

[43] J. Michael Bunn and Clay Williams, "A Failed Enterprise: The French Colonial Period in Mississippi," *Mississippi History Now* (September 2007), accessed February 29, 2020, http://www.mshistorynow.mdah.ms.gov/articles/35/french-colonial-period-in-mississippi.

[44] John Baldwin Buckstone, *The Green Bushes* (London: Webster and Co., 1845). All further references in the text are to this edition.

[45] Moody, "Illusions of Authorship," 113.

[46] Barbara Dawson, *In the Eye of the Beholder: What Six Nineteenth-century Women Tell Us About Indigenous Authority and Identify* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2014), 8.

[47] It was not the only native American role Celeste played. She enacted Narramattah in William Bayle Bernard's *The Wept of the Wish-Ton-Wish*, adapted from Fennimore Cooper's novel, at the Adelphi in 1831 and subsequently in the US, but only played it once in Australia (at the Haymarket on 9 November 1867). For more on the costumes, see Robin O. Warren, *Women on Southern Stages, 1800-1865: Performance, Gender and Identity in a Golden Age of American Theater* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2016), 144-45.

[48] "Bygone Days. Reminiscences of the Melbourne Stage. By an Old Playgoer. No. X," *Australasian,* 9 October 1886, 715.

[49] Susan Scheckel, *The Insistence of the Indian: Race and Nationalism in Nineteenth Century American Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 46-47.

[50] W. J. Lawrence, "Madame Céleste," *Gentleman's Magazine* (October 1888), 399.

[51] Cited in Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 117.

[52] "Madame Celeste at the Haymarket Theatre," *Age,* March 5, 1867, 5.

[53] "Madame Celeste at the Haymarket Theatre," 5.

[54] Warren, *Women on Southern Stages*, 143, 151.

[55] Russell McGregor, "'Breed out the colour' or the importance of being white," *Australian Historical Studies*, 33 no.120, 287.

[56] Kate Flint, *The Transatlantic Indian*, 1776-1930 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020) first published 2009, 154.

[57] Gould, "Melodrama and Empire," 186, 188.

[58] *Argus*, November 14, 1867, 5.

[59] Cindy McCreery, 'Two Victorias? Prince Alfred, Queen Victoria and Melbourne, 1867-68," in *Crowns and Colonies: European Monarchies and Overseas Empires*, eds Robert Aldrich and Cindy McCreery, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 65-66.

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[60] Cindy McCreery, “A British prince and a transnational life: Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh’s visit to Australia, 1867-68,” in *Transnational Ties: Australian Lives in the World*, eds Desley Deacon, Penny Russell, and Angela Woollacott (Canberra: ANU Press, 2008), 71.

[61] Autolycus, “The Drama,” *Leader,* February 16, 1867, 17.

[62] “Haymarket Theatre. Farewell Performance of Madame Celeste,” *Argus,* November 18, 1867, 5.

[63] See Katherine Newey, “Popular or Populist: The Great Australian Theatre Debate,” in *Defining New Idioms and Alternative Forms of Expression*, ed. Eckhard Breitinger (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), 191-99.