‘my head-cook…appeared in an evening dress of black net and silver’: (re)viewing colonial western australians through travellers’ imaginings

...in the crowd
They could not deem me one of such; I stood
Among them, but not of them; in a shroud
Of thoughts which were not their thoughts, and still could,
Had I not fi led my mind, which thus itself subdued.¹

Did travelling writers who observed the white European population in Western Australia in the latter half of the nineteenth century feel that they ‘stood [a]mong them but not of them’, and to what extent were their ideas preconceived? This article examines how contemporary thought and ideology influenced travellers’ attitudes towards white Western Australian society between 1850 and 1914. In writing about the colonists, travellers’ observations shaped, and were shaped by, the assumptions, ambitions, and ideologies of the institutions they represented, and those already existing in Western Australian society.

A sample of forty-one travelling writers—eleven women and thirty men—were investigated, by reference to their diaries, journals, letters and published books. They were generally wealthy upper- and upper-middle-class persons of European heritage. Their wealth and connections greatly facilitated their ability to travel. Of these travellers, some were the affluent titled of independent means, and others, such as naturalists and botanists, bird collectors, commissioned illustrators, journalists and authors, doctors, religious ministers, diplomats and MPs, had an occupational motivation for their visit. Mining investors and miners began arriving after the goldrushes of the 1890s. Of the women, who mainly accompanied their husbands and wrote about their experiences, three were identified as having an independent purpose for their journeys; painting flow-

¹ Byron, Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage, Canto III (1816), 1053–57.
ers, and with intentions to publish a book. It is important to consider travellers’ backgrounds in order to examine their impressions of Western Australia, and how they understood their empire.

This study focuses on travellers and their assumptions, and how their ideas developed about the nature of settler colonial society in a predominantly rural and mining setting. Moreover, their writings illuminate the dynamics or interplay of social distinctions in colonial Western Australia. Therefore this article presents a dual focus, on both travellers and colonial society. While travellers’ observations help tell us about the imperial gaze and the visited society, and thus add to our knowledge of imperial and transnational history, any new insight we gain about class in Western Australia during this period is limited by a one-way gaze. Examination of the reception of the European visitors by the colony’s white society would further enlighten understandings of class in this region. However, such a study is not within the scope of this article.

Certainly British opinions and policies profoundly influenced Western Australia’s economic, political, and social development. Virtually all aspects of life in nineteenth-century Western Australia were adapted from British institutions and traditions. Governmental, administrative, judicial, financial, educational, cultural, architectural, religious, way of dressing, and the exclusive use of English were all derived from a British context. Even after Federation in January 1901, much of Western Australia’s cultural, political and social life still derived its essence from Britain. This helps to explain the travellers’ responses and their reception in Western Australia. As historian Lydia Wevers has pointed out, visiting European travellers could therefore ‘immediately engage with the local white population… using a vocabulary and set of relations that simultaneously establish[ed] social difference and a shared culture’, even while scoffing at their model of reproduction. For example, traveller and imperial enthusiast Charles Dilke wrote, ‘[u]nlke as are the Australians to the British, there is nevertheless a singular mimicry of British forms and ceremonies in the colonies, which is extended to the most trifling details of public life…in which home whimsicalities were


closely copied’. As evidenced by Dilke and other British traveller’s comments quoted later in this article, many visitors considered that Australians attempting to reproduce British public life were displaying, at best, quaint antics of parody. Consequently, from distant Europe, society in Western Australia was preconceived; it was, using Benedict Anderson’s term, an ‘imagined community’. Like a nation, it was imagined as a community because, ‘regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation’ that prevailed, it was conceived as a ‘deep, horizontal comradeship’. Western Australia was imagined by its visitors as a cohesive community, represented by a typical people, but perhaps a little foreign due to its isolation and remoteness. In the minds of both its members and visitors, Western Australia—in Anderson’s words—lived the ‘image of their communion’, distinguished and limited by the style in which they were imagined. When he first arrived in Perth in 1901, Charles Hawes represented both the expectations that British travellers had of a distant community colonised by their compatriots and their confusion on finding it similar but different.

As one sets foot in the city, gazes down the streets and at the faces with pent-up curiosity, what is it one feels? The foreignness of it all. Here in a land that is not England, and yet where the people are English and the tongue is English, things are so different, this it is that makes it more foreign than France, Germany or India. Hawes’ imagined community was narrowly envisioned because the inhabitants of Western Australia were not ‘mono-national’ but were made up of a diversity of nationalities and ethnicities, as well as multiple identities and classes. Despite this, the prescribed imagined community came to be mythologised over the next century as an enviable classless, egalitarian society. Most famously Russell Ward in The Australian Legend, written in 1958, delineated the values of the bush ethos as representative of the Australian character. In 1978, John Hirst in The Pioneer Legend wrote of how the same character had been sanitised in order to represent the respectable smallholder and tradesman as being the

backbone of Australia. Western Australian historian C.T. Stannage called the imagined community’s major characteristic the ‘Pioneer Myth’, for the pioneer became a central figure in historical discourse, which left out convicts, servants, city workers, labourers, Aborigines and people of non-Anglo-Saxon descent. The term ‘pioneers’ represented the elite and rural developers exclusively, and tells a story of individual entrepreneurship in an ideal community that was apparently classless and conflict free. These dominant colonial myths and narratives depicting Western Australian society as equal and liberated were a source of fascination that had tempted travellers to come to Australia. This is evident in Hume Nisbet’s passionate enthusiasm about a new way of life when he first sighted Western Australia in 1886.

Australia the mighty, land of the free, where a man may lift up his head and date time from his own exertions; where the right hand of labour grants a nobler patent of nobility than ever did the bloody sword of usurpation and wrong in olden days. …Australia, the young giant who advances with such mighty strides before all the decaying nations of the time-worn world—I look toward you, and all the blood in me tingles.

And yet the travellers in this study journeyed under the aegis of imperialism, and bore considerable degrees of social and economic power and privilege, which would have determined their attitudes towards the people of Western Australia. As Peter Marshall has argued:

Empire reinforced a hierarchical view of the world, in which the British occupied a pre-eminent place among the colonial powers, while those subjected to colonial rule were ranged below them, in varying degrees of supposed inferiority.

Class and ethnicity were fundamental classifications in this hierarchical view of the world and underpinned nineteenth-century society. Owing to complex understandings and interpretations from the coloniser and the colonised points of view, historians continue to debate the nature of class and ethnicity in colonial Western Australia. Particular attention is paid to class in this article to help place the travellers’ observations in context, because it existed in both the culture of the society from which the travellers came, and the society in

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which they visited, despite the pervasive myth of a free and egalitarian society. Therefore travellers’ observations help significantly with understanding class in Western Australia.

Class Views

David Cannadine has pointed out that there are ‘many fluctuating and sometimes contradictory senses of identity that constantly cut across each other’ in European society.\(^{12}\) To a certain degree these inconsistencies also applied to Western Australian society. The gradual developments of various phases of economic change—capitalism, the industrial revolution, the rise of new technologies—were extremely complex and varied throughout Europe, and were never so momentous as to bring about homogenous, self-conscious classes of landowners, capitalists, and labourers.\(^{13}\) Hence Europeans did not think of themselves so much in conventional terms of a tripartite upper, middle, or working class, but more in terms of a much layered and disorderly class structure of smaller and interconnected social gradations. It was a complex, stratified hierarchy, entailing sensitivity to the smallest nuances of status. In Britain, and in other European countries, the organisation of the monarchy, parliament, the law, the armed services, and education was based on the social principles of

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\(^{12}\) Cannadine, *The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain*, 16, 23

\(^{13}\) Modern Britain’s social structure was integrated, quite elaborate, and complex. Erik Olin Wright, *Approaches to Class Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 182, argued that an analysis of class depends on the question. Different frameworks can be used for different questions. For example, there are a number of ways of looking at inequality; either materialistically, or by standards of living, or in life’s chances, or in social organisation, or in the distribution of location of material inequality. Linda Young, *Middle-Class Culture in the Nineteenth Century: America, Australia and Britain* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 45–48, also stated that ‘class’ does not always refer to the same phenomenon, but can indicate a ‘social description, a relation to production, a political self-definition or a cultural practice’. However, she still believed that class is like a sandwich with an upper, middle and lower layer. Cannadine, *The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain*, 9, 20–21, suggested that, although ‘ignorant oversimplifications of the complexity of society’, there are actually three enduring models which have survived within British society. They are the merging hierarchical view of society, the triadic version with upper, middle, and lower collective groups, and a basic division between the patricians and the plebeians: ‘us’ and ‘them’.
assumed inequality: order and station, deference and subordination.\textsuperscript{14} A ranking in this elaborate hierarchical system was determined by a number of factors: hereditary peerage, ancestry, education, accent, deportment, mode of dress, type of house, recreational pursuits, and lifestyle. These signs and signals helped determine how one regarded oneself and how others regarded one.

Many nineteenth-century individuals strove to become ‘a better class of person’. When investigating subsequent travellers’ comments, this article reveals that this was also the case in Western Australia: they adopted conservative values, shaped their lives to conform to new standards, and acted out rules of formal behaviour in public and in private. In Britain, the rising middle classes sought to emulate the nobility’s refined taste, thus creating a culture of Victorian gentility made possible by living in an urban environment where a network of social connections flourished. As social historian Linda Young has argued, ‘in doing, they came to be middle class, making their own definitions of what was correct’.\textsuperscript{15}

In the end, the only certain boundaries to middle-class status in Britain were the chance of birth that demarcated the aristocracy and the necessity of manual work that marked the working class. ...In between was a heterogeneous and endlessly subdivisible middle class not unified in any public sphere but sharing a body of ideas and behaviours communicated through education, reading, the practice of religion, the practice of servant management and kinship connections.\textsuperscript{16}

\section*{Displaying Gentility}

This complicated system of class and status was the foundation on which European society in Western Australia was based. In the early years of the Swan River Colony,\textsuperscript{17} settlement held particular appeal to those British members of

\textsuperscript{14} The concept of ‘deference’—a willing acknowledgment that people were justly entitled to be superior or inferior to one’s self. Deference was expressed in constant sensitivity to the status relationships of all social encounters. See also Richard D Altick, \textit{Victorian People and Ideas} (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1973), 18; Young, \textit{Middle-Class Culture}, 23–24.

\textsuperscript{15} Young, \textit{Middle-Class Culture}, 10. See also 45, 70.

\textsuperscript{16} Young, \textit{Middle-Class Culture}, 61–62.

\textsuperscript{17} The original British settlement was named the Swan River Colony, but was renamed Western Australia once land was claimed further away from the Swan River, which eventually extended over the western third of the continent. However, ‘Swan River Colony’ was used for a number of years. See C. T. Stannage, \textit{The People of Perth: A Social History of Western Australia’s Capital City} (Perth: Perth City Council, 1979), 11–17 for specific details about the founders.
the gentry who had few noble connections and to middle class investors who were born and educated to wield power for the benefit, as they understood it, of all. Many were young men from a civil, defence, or professional background, attracted by generous land grants. These land grants were a powerful incentive, ensuring status, security, wealth, and political influence — privileges that came with land ownership which was usually denied to them in England under the laws of primogeniture. Though few had personal knowledge of aristocratic circles in Britain, in Western Australia these men ‘fulfilled an aristocracy-equivalent role as the powers of the land, the holders of patronage and the leaders of society’. This so-called ‘gentry’ aspired to recreate the British social system in which they would have wealth based on ownership of land, and they created in the colony a society—a system of government, law, religion, property, and family relations—in which they held power. The size of the land granted to the early colonists was directly related to the value of their assets and the number of servants they had, and this further reinforced hierarchy and the divisions of class. Thus, Stannage claimed, the ‘society based on rank and status’ that Governor James Stirling set out to achieve in the Swan River Colony at its inception was realised.

According to Geoffrey Bolton, in reality an established gentry tradition did not exist in Western Australian society. Bolton argued that Western Australia was ‘not nearly rich enough to nurture the kind of dynasties’ that existed in the eastern colonies of Australia. He stated that ‘Stirling’s original vision of a gentry colony stood no chance’. However, this view is contentious among historians. C.T. Stannage argued that the gentry tradition had become well established, and that the local colonial gentry performed their role remarkably well, even if they were not as rich as their eastern counterparts. John Hirst suggested that Bolton was relying on the traditional British system of associ-

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18 Young, *Middle-Class Culture*, 53.
19 Membership of the so-called ‘gentry’ was held to include the wealthy free settlers with successful pastoral enterprises, as well as professionals and merchants. See Pamela Statham, ‘Swan River Colony 1829–1850’, in *A New History of Western Australia*, ed. C.T. Stannage (Perth: University of Western Australia, 1981).
22 This debate comes to light in existing published and unpublished research in Western Australia’s social and political history. See works by Tom Stannage, Geoffrey Bolton, Brian deGaris, Mathew Trinca, Simon Stevens and David Black.
23 Stannage, *The People of Perth*. 
ating genteel status with the ownership of land, and argued that the means
by which status was recognised in Australia was different. In the Australian
colonies, gentlemanly status could be identified by anyone holding a position
in the occupational hierarchy, or possessing independent means; thus mer-
chants could belong to privileged society.\textsuperscript{24} G.E. Mingay has pointed out that
these same measures of gentlemanly status also came to operate in the later
nineteenth-century Britain, as land began to lose its old pre-eminence and the
business world greatly expanded. A new sense of elitism was exploited through
new sources of income, and status was found in occupations in the expanding
professions and civil services. Political reform, agricultural collapse, crippling
labour shortages, the secret ballot, and compulsory education steadily stripped
power and privilege from the landowning gentry in Britain, and as a meaningful
social class they disappeared.\textsuperscript{25}

This study proposes that the ruling elite in Western Australia were indeed well
established. Travellers’ writings reveal that the local colonial gentry were able to
manipulate and control procedures and events to suit themselves, even when
persistently being democratically challenged. This is evident in the authority they
used to organise special privileges for both themselves and visiting travellers.
For example, at the request of floral painter Marianne North, in 1883 Governor
William Robinson agreed to loan her a carriage at seven shillings a day and
to allow her free use of police-horses and a driver.\textsuperscript{26} In 1895, the Honourable
J.A. Wright, Managing Director of the Southern Railway offered Julius Price,
a travelling journalist, the use of his private saloon carriage and his company
for the journey from Albany to Perth via Beverley.\textsuperscript{27} In the same year traveller
Robert Tyler, the Director of an English mining syndicate, was not so fortunate.
He was seated in first class on the train journey to the goldfields until the train
was divided at Southern Cross. Much to Tyler’s annoyance he was then shifted
out of first class because landowner Mr Leake, Member of Parliament for Albany,

\textsuperscript{24} John Hirst, ‘Egalitarianism’, in \textit{Pastiche 1: Reflections on Nineteenth-Century
\textsuperscript{25} G.E. Mingay, \textit{The Gentry: The Rise and Fall of a Ruling Class} (London: Lonman
\textsuperscript{26} Marianne North, \textit{Recollections of a Happy Life: Being the Autobiography of
Marianne North}, ed. Mrs. John Addington Symonds (New York: Macmillan and
Co., 1894), 2:149.
\textsuperscript{27} Julius M. Price, \textit{The Land of Gold: The Narrative of a Journey through the West
Australian Goldfields in the Autumn of 1895}, third edition (London: Sampson Low,
had reserved three first class carriages.\textsuperscript{28}

Although this article supports Bolton’s assertion that the elite class in Western Australia consisted of ‘self-made men and their families who imitated English gentility as an index of their achievement’,\textsuperscript{29} it is asserted here that travellers believed there to be, regardless of their perceived lack of qualifications for English nobility, a tolerable ruling class worthy of visiting. Bearing formal letters of introduction, these travellers sought out exclusive clubs and accepted invitations to dine and stay. Class-conscious travellers tended to easily find the dominant family in many country towns, accepted their display of refinement and wealth and approved of the power they held in the legislative council. These people satisfied the travellers’ sense of social privilege and gentility, even though they considered the local elite to be somewhat outmoded compared to their counterparts in Europe. This study therefore highlights the fictive nature of ideas, common at the time, that Western Australians were a new and distinctive people who had developed different cultural habits from their British and Irish forebears, without the problems of the class-ridden old world.\textsuperscript{30} However, these preconceptions were held by travellers at the time, and continued to influence their writings. For example, Italian diplomat Leopold Zunini’s exclamation that a ‘lack of social division is…firmly rooted in the soul and spirit of this people … there is no abject class here…they belong to an admirable race which will have a glorious future’,\textsuperscript{31} reveals that he was shielded from ordinary society by only mixing with its elite, who were eager and genial when welcoming an aristocrat.

The re-creation and retention of a governing genteel society in Western Australia also caused many challenges for the founders. However, as the travellers demonstrated, the system essentially survived until the end of the century, accommodating the introduction of convicts and the first wave of gold prospectors. Travelling journalist Raymond Radclyffe recognised the colonial elite’s desire to maintain their power in 1896.

\begin{quote}
The old colonists ignore the mining man…Like the Boers, they think the mine
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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{28} Robert Emeric IV Tyler, \textit{My Dear Emma} (Perth: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2003), 144, 146.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Bolton, \textit{The Land of Vision and Mirage}, 53.
\end{itemize}
will only last a few years. They will not have Coolgardie men in the club, if they can help it. They talk of their vineyards, their cattle, their sheep, their timber, but they don’t like mining talk.\textsuperscript{32}

Louis Hartz’ \textit{The Founding of New Societies} elucidates the tenacious quality of Western Australia’s elite society. Hartz argued that the settler societies of the New World were ‘fragments’ of the source nation, which had become frozen in time.\textsuperscript{33} As a result, remnants of the social system and underlying ideology prevalent in Britain at the time of Western Australia’s foundation left residual conservatism in its societal structure. For example, traveller Gilbert Parker, who visited Western Australia in 1889, was reminded of ‘gentlemen of the very old school…because some of them are a type of what has become very much modernised in the other colonies, and even in England’\textsuperscript{34} The idea was that once the colonists departed the shores of their homeland, the political catalysts that drove libertarian ideologies were removed. In this respect, the radicalism apparent in European social reform was not adopted in the colonies since the antagonist was abandoned with the creation of their New World.\textsuperscript{35} This helps explain why Western Australia’s elite seemed to be clinging to the vestiges of the ‘old school’, and the reason for their unwillingness to accept the growth of mining influence.

Meanwhile, in Europe a bohemian culture was emerging within bourgeois society that rejected the stuffiness, obscurantism, and taboos of Victorian moralism, and instead promoted self-discipline and freedom from social control. However, even though the liberating nature of bohemian non-conformism had a romantic appeal, middle-class values and behaviours pervaded European society, and the sense of belonging to, or achievement of, middle-class status remained all important.\textsuperscript{36} This same middle-class conservatism was evident in Western Australia with the establishment of traditional institutions, as noted by


\textsuperscript{34} Gilbert Parker, \textit{Round the Compass in Australia} (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1892), 387.


\textsuperscript{36} Young, \textit{Middle-Class Culture}, 189, 192; Altick, \textit{Victorian People and Ideas}, 300.
Radclyffe, who was invited to join a selection of men’s clubs, to have ‘tea at the Polo, dance in the Town Hall, join the Minuet Club, or even go to a Ministerial Dinner Party’. As Hirst pointed out:

[W]hat made Australia’s hankering after old-world titles and distinctions even more pathetic was that the old world itself had seen through them. The social revolution would sweep them away. Australians, to universal laughter, would be running after the ‘gewgaws of titles’ while the rest of the world was discarding them.

Moreover, Hirst argued that the prestige of new-made colonial gentlemen was doubtful by traditional English standards of land ownership and heritage, and, even though they mimicked British high society as best they could, they were never accepted in England as such. Indeed, in 1896 Radclyffe noticed an attempt to maintain an elite social class. He wrote, in a somewhat derisive manner, of the ‘Seven Great Families’ who ruled Perth society, controlling the Weld Club and deciding who should and should not be accepted into polite society:

Once they have decided that you know someone in England who is respectable, you are free to go anywhere and move in the highest circles… [A]nd if you have ever been to a public school, let everybody know it…There is not a man or a woman either in the Colonies that does not nurse in his or her secret soul a passionate desire to shake hands with a ‘somebody’. Why, they even give dinners to MPs in the Colonies.

Radclyffe’s observation certainly gives weight to Hartz’ argument, revealing that Western Australian society resolutely established a prescribed ‘old-school’ social order. Travellers’ discourse often revealed class ridicule from the point of view of imperial gatekeepers. As Linda Young has argued, by dismissing the aspirations of the colonial elite they rejected any possible competition to their own status. As illustrated by Marianne North’s claim in 1880 that the landlady of ‘the little inn of Pinjarrah…was most anxious that I should admire some worsted-work pictures of the last generation, and other curiosities’, Western Australian society’s desire for class exclusivity was widespread, and they were eager to impress travellers with their alleged gentility. That no further comment was made by Marianne, and that the landlady remained unnamed, is an indication of Marianne’s lack of interest.

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41 Young, *Middle-Class Culture*, 37.
42 North, *Recollections of a Happy Life*, 159.
Marianne’s indifference also demonstrates that despite seeking out the colonial elite and making use of their connections, travellers did not expect to find members of distinguished pedigree. This could be because travellers supported the idea that there was a more fluid social order in Western Australia than at ‘home’. Such social fluidity was reinforced when they met those who had risen from humble origins, and thus they perpetuated the ‘rags to riches’ myth—a myth that did not acknowledge destitution and impoverishment. In 1860, traveller Henry Richardson wrote that Mr Mungor [sic] came out as a servant, made his fortune selling brandy on his travels around the unpopulated country, and now ‘[h]e is considered one of the wealthiest men in Western Australia’. As Hirst argued, such examples suggest that ‘opportunity was open to all regardless of old-world tests of rank and birth’. Therefore, travellers from the higher echelons of society often showed disdain for those who had improved their standing in society, for they still considered them their social inferiors. On this matter, in 1906, Zunini commented,

There is also a problem in that the division between the classes, which are only two in number, is not rigorously maintained. As a result, the company one finds is not always the most select; but here in Australia one must accustom oneself from the outset to the ultra democratic ways of the country which, while they may offend the more sensitive, also have their good side.

Lady Broome was one of the ‘more sensitive’ who was not impressed when coming across her servants in public, ridiculing their dress sense:

I used to be so amazed at their love of finery. To see one’s housemaid at church absolutely covered with sham diamonds, large rings outside her gloves, huge solitaire earrings, and at least a dozen brooches stuck about her, was, to say the least of it, startling; so was the apparition of my head-cook, whom I sent for hurriedly once, after dinner, and who appeared in an evening dress of black net and silver. I also recognised the kitchen-maid at a concert in a magnificent pale green satin evening dress, which, taken in conjunction with her scarlet hair, was rather conspicuous.

Finding it vulgar that the lower classes could become indecently well-to-do, displaying ostentatious bad taste in their clothes, and obtrusive familiarity in their manners, reflected visitors’ own social prejudices. It also further demon-

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45 Zunini, *Western Australia as It Is Today*, 54.

strates Western Australian society’s desire to display middle-class refinement. Young stated that these features of a wealthier working class and middle class aspirations should be viewed as ‘diasporic rather than unique’. Class historiography has revealed that there were similarities in the social structure of Britain, America, and other western societies. In reality, there were still many members of the lower classes who remained in poverty, for success in Western Australia was various and indiscriminate, which is revealed later in his article.

Historian F.G. Clarke suggested that unlike the lower classes, and some from the middle classes, who came eventually to see Australia as a promised land, the upper classes believed that Europeans from the higher levels of society would want to leave once they had increased their wealth. They felt that the social status and cultural life befitting a gentleman was unobtainable in the colonies, where a demeaning contact with convict servants or the newly-rich—who had come out as labourers or tradesmen—could not be avoided. This attitude can be detected in the above travellers’ extracts. Zunini also recognised this as he travelled around Western Australia in 1906. He believed there was a ‘deep dislike of Australians which exists among the English upper classes. … The English nobility rarely choose Australia as a destination’. Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson explained that while the Australian male colonist was part of the ‘imperial enterprise’, the colonial power’s agent and beneficiary, he was also excluded from the ‘Empire club’: ‘[f]rom his half-empowered limbo he fetishizes yet disparages a Europe which in turn depreciates him while envying his energy, innocence, and enterprise’. There was also an underlying insinuation, according to historian Beverly Kingston, that the ‘woman settler’ was not quite as refined in her views and outlook as a ‘real lady’ of Europe. Young pointed out that,

\[\text{the self-made, self-improving culture of the United States and the British colonies constituted sufficient evidence for English genteel society to abhor such peripheral places, but it was an empty snobbery. American and colonial standards were not just derivative; they were transplanted. Their behaviours}\]

47 Young, *Middle-Class Culture*, 45.
48 Clarke, *Victorian People and Ideas*, 162–164.
49 Zunini, *Western Australia as It Is Today*, 54.
were not merely imitative, they were the same, granted that local fashions generated occasional idiosyncrasies in practice, just as happened ‘at home’.52

Most travellers, however, were surprised by the degree of sophistication they found. Residents filled Western Australian space with objects and cultural behaviours that symbolised their positions in society. When visiting mining investor Albert Calvert dined with the Albany Government Resident and his daughter in 1895, he thought that there was an ‘old world’ atmosphere in their home, gardens, and house, and even the pictures on the walls were all of home.53 Lady Broome also revealed similar thoughts when she wrote about her husband’s impressions as he journeyed around the southwest in 1883.

He was rather surprised to find what nice comfortable homes these back-settlers had built for themselves; and, when once you reached one of the stations, you would never dream that it and its inmates were buried in the heart of a forest. They seemed all pleasant and nice and well-informed people, besides being the very soul of hospitality. There were books and music, and evidences of refinement and taste; and the ladies looked as pretty and merry and nicely dressed as if they lived only a little way from an English country town.54

And yet, the expressions used indicate that the Broome’s socially distanced themselves from those so-called ‘back-settlers’ and ‘inmates’, as they would with those that they considered were provincial back ‘home’. This is evident when Lady Broome compares them to families who lived outside an ‘English country town’.

Nevertheless, in spite of all these perceptions of newly-gained wealth and comforts expressed by the authors above, there were still those travellers who presented as the colonial narrative of the ‘Pioneer Legend’, land-owners toiling in the harsh environment. Marianne North saw the discomfort borne by some when she visited ‘The Warren’ located in the tall timbered karri forest of the far southwest, commiserating with Mr Brockman and his sons who had to work long hours without servants. She stated that the farm was in a state of disrepair, the men ‘dressed in rags and his pretty ladylike wife’ did the housework: ‘What a situation hers was, with miles of forest all around…!’55 In 1906, Zunini was also wondering at the hardships of life in the bush when speaking of ‘an old

52 Young, *Middle-Class Culture*, 152.
gentleman’ in the Kojonup area, who was a former Sydney banker:

[I]t was sad to see a person of refinement, used to an easy and comfortable life, now forced to do the rough and heavy work of the pioneer in the virgin bush. How much pain, bitterness and disappointment lie hidden in the endless forests of this continent which, if it offers wealth and success to the young and strong, is often a premature tomb for those who have lost the strength to face the struggle for life[^56]

But according to travellers, these Western Australians were not failures. They were admired, for in the true ‘pioneer’ spirit they worked hard and maintained respectability in the bush. However, it is important to point out that the above travellers, Calvert, Broome, North and Zunini, only visited well-respected landowners belonging to an elite society, and their observations are not representative of the the lives of the less fortunate and poorer Western Australian community—convicts, servants, labourers, Aborigines and other non-Anglo-Saxons—who did not have the opportunity to be ‘pioneers’ and make their mark in the New World.

### Dignifying Physical Labour

The ‘pioneer myth’ that most colonists engaged in hard physical labour from dawn to dusk in an endeavour to make their properties successful, was a narrative represented and promoted in travellers’ texts. In the colonies, physical outdoor work was invested with a prestige attached to independence of spirit and manliness, so that people who performed it were held in high regard. Henry Richardson was certainly impressed by Mr Chidlow of Northam when he visited in 1860, again keeping alive the rags to riches myth.

[Mr Chidlow] raised himself from the position of a servant to a state of affluence: his flocks and herds roam over an immense acre of country and he has accumulated I believe a large fortune. His indefatigable industry is celebrated throughout the colony. It seems that not content with working hard all day he was often to be seen ploughing by the light of the moon and even now when he might enjoy his ease and leave manual labour to his servants he does not hesitate to perform himself the most menial offices.[^57]

Many colonists, who, out of necessity, had substituted their leisurely life in

[^56]: Zunini, *Western Australia as It Is Today*, 179.
[^57]: Richardson, *Papers*, 58. The Chidlow family was well known in Northam and later in Mundaring.
England for hard work in Australia shared this respect for the dignified worker.\textsuperscript{58}

However, the changing attitude towards work was not unique to Australia. ‘Industry’ and ‘work’ became revered words in industrial Europe, elevated to a moral nobility by the likes of Thomas Carlyle. Work as the prime means of fulfilling happiness became a common theme, and sayings such as ‘heaven helps those who help themselves’ satisfied Utilitarians and Evangelical ethics. Poverty was considered to be the consequence of laziness and spendthrift habits.\textsuperscript{59} This was partly the rationale for why convicts were used as a source of free labour. Hard work was recommended as a means of reforming idleness and instilling the habits of work, and self discipline.\textsuperscript{60}

The cult of manliness was nurtured as a middle class construct ‘through school textbooks, children’s literature, philanthropic organisations and the churches’, and enveloped Britain, its colonies, and America.\textsuperscript{61} As Young explained, the genius of the new middle class was to adapt its requirements to suit new conditions during industrialisation, whilst still aspiring towards refined culture. It managed to ‘invert the view of work and leisure, so that not to work became a standard of poor behaviour…it condemned the idle rich as much as the feckless poor and so cast the middle class as distinctly separate from both’.\textsuperscript{62} These views obviously carried through to Australia. In a book written in 1885 entitled \textit{Australian Etiquette}, idleness was considered the ‘greatest cause of misery and wretchedness. The want of something to do is what makes people wicked and miserable. It breeds selfishness, mischief-making, envy, jealously and vice, in all its most dreadful forms’\textsuperscript{63}

Australia was often viewed as a fit receptacle for Britain’s failures: the ‘feckless

\textsuperscript{58} Charles Fox and Marilyn Lake, eds., \textit{Australians at Work: Commentaries and Sources} (Ringwood: McPhee Gribble, 1990), 46.
\textsuperscript{59} Fox and Lake, \textit{Australians at Work}, 33.
\textsuperscript{61} J. A. Mangan and James Walvin, eds., \textit{Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America 1800–1940} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 2.
\textsuperscript{62} Young, \textit{Middle-Class Culture}, 17.
poor’, and sometimes the ‘idle rich’ from the upper ranks of English society. Therefore idleness and poverty in a land of promise could only be explained by personal failings, as Stannage and White pointed out. Convicts, and later the poorer class of migrants, were made scapegoats for crime, domestic violence and drunkenness, which was believed to be caused by their idleness and improvidence. The travellers’ gaze sometimes alighted on aspects of behaviour that they associated with an inferior colonial character. For example, Zunini was not impressed with the quantity of alcohol consumed in Western Australia:

The bar is a den of iniquity where countless numbers leave their wages down to the last penny only to emerge totally brutalized and unable to face up to life’s struggles. Unfortunately this vice is not limited to men; even women drink, and how! They do not frequent the public bars but either get drunk at home or in one of the private rooms provided in the hotels where they cannot be observed. It is a disgusting sight, particularly in small country hotels, to see workers completely drunk for weeks on end.

Earlier in 1863, Mrs Millett blamed the immigration schemes and penal system for the vices that she believed poorer women held, the consumption of alcohol being her main complaint: ‘[w]e had lived but one fortnight in our Australian parsonage before learning how rare it was to find a woman, amongst our poorer neighbours, of whom it could be said that she was habitually sober’. However, the large consumption of alcohol was commonplace rather than unique to Western Australia. It can also be identified in European, and many other societies, and was often the side-effect of poverty caused by a number of disadvantages such as oppression, inadequate earnings, sickness and old age. Although attitudes towards emigrating to Australia underwent considerable change over time, from the stigma of felonious exile to a place where there was money to be made, the upper and middle classes continued to believe emigration was a social corrective for the unemployed labouring classes, supposing the bulk of emigrants were from ‘the humblest ranks of life

65 Zunini, *Western Australia as It Is Today*, 77.
66 Edward Millett Mrs, *An Australian Parsonage or the Settler and the Savage in Western Australia* (London: Edward Stanford, 1872; reprint, facsimile, Perth, University of Western Australia Press, 1980), 338.
in the mother country.’⁶⁸

**Appreciating Womanly Labour**

Where did the ‘cult of manliness’ fit into the lives of nineteenth-century European women and children? Within the middle-class construct, and furthermore within the tiered class structure, women’s place was often neglected. Feminist historians, such as Catherine Hall, have argued that the middle class construction of the ideal family obscured class relations.⁶⁹ The divide between men and women came to be seen as naturally ordained, and that first and foremost all women were wives and mothers. The separation between the sexes was marked out at every level within society—in manufacturing, the retail trades and the professions, in public life of all kinds, in the churches, in the press and in the home.⁷⁰

The ideal family in Western Australia in the nineteenth and early twentieth century consisted of the husband as the breadwinner, with his wife and children dependent on him for their welfare. The husband’s domain was the public sphere of work and politics. The private sphere of the home was the domain of the wife and mother. As carer, nurturer, and civiliser, the wife was responsible for domestic contentment and security in the home, extending to an expected civilising influence on society.⁷¹ As prescribed in *Australian Etiquette*, convention dictated a rigorously stereotyped personality:

> Home is the woman’s kingdom, and there she reigns supreme. To embellish that home, to make happy the lives of her husband and the dear ones committed to her trust, is the honoured task which it is the wife’s province to perform. …The wife should remember that upon her, to the greatest extent, devolves the duty of making home happy.⁷²

Although she may ‘reign supreme’, it was only in her function as the provider of happiness. As John Tosh has pointed out, the man’s role in the home was father, husband, and head of the household. Home was a man’s retreat for

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⁶⁹ Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 92, 106.

⁷⁰ Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class*, 106.


⁷² *Australian Etiquette*, 126.
both comfort and privacy. Women never held equal status to men, even within the family, and were also seen as passive, emotional and physically unstable. However, Penny Russell has argued that within the gentry women wore a public face of gentility, notwithstanding their relegation to the private sphere away from the ‘real world of power and competition’. They thus defied complete control by men, for in cultural terms they ‘held together the whole elaborate edifice of society’.

The powerful European concept of refinement prescribed that all upper- and middle-class women abstain from gainful employment. Despite this, wives in rural Western Australia often found their unpaid labour was depended on, as farmers had difficulty finding necessary labour. Therefore, like their ‘pioneering’ husbands, they redefined acceptable female behaviour, and respect was paid to working women in rural backblocks. As exemplified in European travellers’ writings, this was indicative of most settler societies in the New World. Contrary to the general belief that manual work was unwomanly and undignified, many travellers expressed an appreciation of the effort middle-class wives displayed in working on their farms, often in their husband’s absence. In 1876, traveller Alfred Wood noted that women were accustomed ‘to harness and drive horses that, at home, would be in the hands of a competent horse breaker: and, in fact, we were struck throughout our visit to Western Australia, with the energy and managing capacity displayed by Colonial ladies’. He was very impressed by Mrs Wilson who worked in the absence of her husband, competently carrying the mail from Guildford to York. Women therefore contributed to the material livelihood of the family group. Home garden plots and orchards throughout the colony allowed many housewives to make pickles, chutney and jams, as well as having a few fowls, ducks and geese producing eggs and poultry, all available for sale, and which often sustained delighted travellers on their weary

76 Ibid., 7.
journeys throughout the colony.\textsuperscript{77}

The empathy travellers felt towards these bush settlers further indicates that they usually regarded those they visited or associated with as members of their own class. Their admiration for working ‘gentlewomen’ is also explained by the new value placed on hard work, particularly in the colonies. However the moral superiority expected of wife and mother, and the ability to maintain refinement while working, was often incompatible with the daily experience of women of the ‘lower orders’, and was not appreciated by the travellers. For example, in 1899 Gilbert Parker showed little respect for working-class wives when he recounted a conversation with a ‘self-made man’ who collected him from the train in Beverley:

‘Many a mother of us chaps went out to work like a nigger; for there ain’t none can work like a good mother with a family of children, is there sir?’ I assented to that proposition. …I thought of those I had noticed along the line that day with staring and meaningless eyes, and children—the offspring of such—with inane and effortless faces, doomed to be hewers of wood and drawers of water throughout their lives.\textsuperscript{78}

Parker’s class prejudice is evident. In contrast to the respect shown for women of higher status, he held little admiration for lower class women, despite his acknowledgment of the deprivations and isolation they suffered in the bush, or the evident success of a ‘self-made’ son. Consequently travellers appreciated the necessary efforts ‘gentlewomen’ made working on their properties, but their class prejudices rendered them incapable of accepting the plight of working women from the lower orders.

In rural areas many children also laboured alongside adults with responsibilities that included domestic and minding duties, and farm work.\textsuperscript{79} Mrs Millett wrote about the duties carried out by the daughters of a neighbour in 1863:

There was no sort of labour suited to female hands which these young ladies had not attempted in the effort to lighten their father’s first struggle with the


\textsuperscript{78} Parker, \textit{Round the Compass}, 379.

\textsuperscript{79} Phyllis Garrick, ‘Children of the Poor and Industrious Classes in Western Australia, 1829-1880’, in \textit{Childhood and Society in Western Australia}, ed. Penelope Hetherington (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 1988), 15–16.
wilderness, and the elder of the two told me that at sixteen years of age she and younger sister had been his shepherdesses.\textsuperscript{80}

However, this study finds that the travellers seldom mentioned meeting children on their journeys, let alone in their capacity as domestic helpers and rural workers.\textsuperscript{81}

**Conclusion**

Travellers articulated and reinforced a set of shared assumptions and attitudes in their writings about the people of Western Australia in the nineteenth century. These observations were based on a melange of contemporary European ideas strongly influenced by existing class views. Travellers were empowered by their high place in a class-based society and as representatives of the imperial authority. This article has revealed how travellers’ views can contribute to our understanding about imperial attitudes and how they comprehended the British Empire. It has also illuminated the nature of social distinctions and how they worked in colonial Western Australia.

European travellers generally imagined Western Australia as a community, regardless of the actual inequalities and exploitations that may have prevailed. Their view on class limited their field of vision with regards to the members of that community, given that they largely associated with the colony’s ruling elite. Social standards and behaviours in Western Australia were transplanted from Britain. Despite the waning of gentry as a meaningful class in the ‘mother country’, Western Australia’s elite society was fashioned on ideals of British gentry and displayed substantial power and authority. A desire by the Western Australians for middle-class status and recognition was revealed through travellers’ writings. Alongside stories about self-made men, this contributed to the promotion by travellers of an imagined egalitarian society and their perpetuation of the ‘pioneer myth’ of a more fluid social order.

A contributing factor to this idea was acceptance of the fact that gentlemen and their wives needed to work in rural areas. They were held in high regard because of middle-class views about the cult of manliness and the importance of healthy physical labour. Idleness was seen to represent the behaviour of the

\textsuperscript{80} Millett, *An Australian Parsonage*, 123.

\textsuperscript{81} Since children were rarely mentioned in travellers’ observations, any discussion concerning the historiography of writing about children cannot be elaborated on in this study.
poor. This idea influenced opinions about immigrants perceived to be members of Britain's lowly unemployed classes, which additionally contested the notion of an egalitarian society in the colonies. Even though preconceptions held by travellers prior to arrival in Australia continued to be expressed in their writings, this article reveals that Western Australian colonial society was not a homogeneous community made up of a new and distinctive people. Rather, Western Australian colonial society retained the problems of the class-ridden old world in its efforts to achieve and portray status.