
‘What’s in a Name?’ The Mystery of Ellerton Gay

Belinda McKay

b.mckay@griffith.edu.au

Serendipity has always played a role in research, and today the availability of digitised newspapers through Trove offers new opportunities for chance discoveries. A couple of years ago, Glenn R. Cooke — then Research Curator of Queensland Heritage at the Queensland Art Gallery — referred me to a snippet from *The Queenslander* of 15 October 1892, where the Melbourne correspondent writes:

My attention was recently drawn to ‘Drifting’, a novel by a Queensland lady who uses the nom de plume of ‘Ellerton Gay.’ She lived, I believe, for eighteen years in Toowoomba, and is the wife of Mr. J. Watts-Grimes, who is well known in squatting circles. She has lived in England six years, and there she has embalmed her memories of the Queensland which is so dear to her. ‘Drifting’ is much admired here.¹

‘What’s in a name?’ asks the title of one of Ellerton Gay’s short stories.² The pseudonym, which was evidently an open secret in her lifetime, has subsequently obscured ‘Ellerton Gay’ and her creator, Emma Watts Grimes, from the view of literary historians: Patrick Buckridge and I, for example, overlooked her in our historical survey of literature in Queensland, *By the book* (2007). Until very recently, the AustLit Database listed her as male, with no further biographical details, and — despite its recent facsimile republication of her novel, *Drifting under the Southern Cross* (1890) — the British Library fails to make the link between Ellerton Gay and Emma Watts Grimes in its catalogue entry.³ The reissue of this novel, justifiably ‘much admired’ in its own time, suggests that its elusive author is worth a reappraisal.⁴ Since Ellerton Gay’s *oeuvre* draws extensively on the lived experience of Emma Watts Grimes and her extended family, this article provides a biographical sketch before discussing the fictional works.

From Emma Allen to Mrs James Watts Grimes

‘Ellerton Gay’ was born Emma Allen in Falmouth, Cornwall in 1846, the daughter of Robert Allen, a local brewer and wine merchant, and Mary Anne Cooper, a British subject born in Oporto, Portugal. Oporto had a long established English colony based on the fortified wine trade, and the couple had married in the British Factory Chaplaincy there in 1843. Emma, the second of their eight children, grew up in a strongly matriarchal household headed by her widowed grandmother, Ann Allen, a spirit dealer; she attended Falmouth School until at least the age of 15, and won a prize for freehand at the Truro School of Art in 1861.⁵ After the death of Robert Allen in 1857, his widow Mary Anne also became a spirit dealer, and the

family continued to live in Ann Allen's household until 1862, when Mary Anne migrated to Australia with seven of her eight children; the eldest child, Agnes, and her husband Rodolphus Edward Lanyon also migrated to Australia shortly afterwards.⁶

Aged sixteen when she arrived in Melbourne on the *Prince of Wales* in October 1862, Emma disappears from the historical record for just over four years. In January 1867, she married an ambitious commission agent, James Watts Grimes, in Toowoomba, Queensland. Born in Gloucestershire in 1833, James lowered his age by two years to 31, and elevated his father's occupation from linen draper to 'gentleman' on the marriage certificate.⁷ Two decades later, he returned to England effectively as a gentleman in his own right, able to declare on the 1891 census that he was 'living on own means'. The family surname, however, was a source of unease for a couple aspiring to move up the class ladder. Emma invariably styled herself 'Mrs Watts Grimes', while James oscillated between James W. Grimes and James Watts Grimes.

The couple lived on Ruthven Street, Toowoomba, where Emma gave birth to six children in seven years: Mabel (1868), Leonard Avery (1869), Martha Marian (1870), James Watts (1871, died 1872), Gertrude Mary (1872) and Henry Gordon (1874). As the household increased in size and prosperity, Emma advertised regularly for 'steady' and 'respectable' nursemaids, nursery governesses, cooks, housemaids and laundresses. Local newspapers occasionally record her involvement in charitable activities: in 1858, she donated a parcel of linen to the hospital; in 1867, she sold tickets to a Separation Day fundraiser. James was a successful auctioneer and commission agent, and played a role in public life as honorary secretary of organisations such as the Union Club and Royal Agricultural Society. In 1870, he was appointed as a magistrate. The eldest child, Mabel, was awarded a silver medal as a private student in the Senior Public Examination at the University of Sydney in 1883.⁸ Leonard attended Toowoomba Grammar from 1880 to 1885, where fellow pupils included (General Sir) Henry 'Harry' Chauvel and (Sir) Littleton Groom.⁹

Emma's older sister Agnes, by contrast, had a turbulent life, which probably sensitised the future author to the plight of women trapped in unhappy marriages. At the age of 16, Agnes married a 21-year-old landed proprietor from Cornwall, Rodolphus Edward Lanyon, with whom she had three children — one in England, and two in Queensland where the family settled for a time. Adolphus 'Dolly' Scott, who is described in *Across the gulf* as a 'ladylike little man whose whole soul seemed to be in the set of his clothes and the curl of his hair',¹⁰ is possibly a portrait of Rodolphus Lanyon, who died at Wonford House Lunatic Asylum near Exeter in 1905. The Lanyons returned to England together in 1871, but splintered soon afterwards. In a scenario echoed later in Ellerton Gay's novels, especially *Across the gulf*, Agnes had an adulterous union that produced a daughter, Agnes Violet Percy, born in Plymouth in 1875, but that apparently also resulted in the loss of custody of her children by Rodolphus.¹¹

Impeccable respectability, by contrast, characterised the reverse migration of the Grimes family. In about 1886, as Mabel approached marriageable age and Leonard neared the end of his schooling, James and Emma returned to England to launch their children into the upper echelons of English society. As Ellerton Gay puts it in 'A side wind', 'there was a manifest struggle in the family to get into "a good set"'. A connection with the Leith-Hay family of Queensland and Scotland may

initially have opened doors, but the Grimes children were soon socialising in upper-class circles.¹² Over the next two decades, the Grimes daughters consolidated and extended the social aspirations of their parents through their marriages. Mabel married twice into distinguished Scottish military families; Gertrude and Martha Marian also made seemly marriages.¹³ Leonard — who assumed the name Leonard Avery in 1899 — became a successful surgeon in the exclusive district of Kensington: an index of his social advancement is the publication in 1909 of a photogravure portrait of his wife, Helen Mary née Reeves, in a volume entitled *England's beautiful women*, which included portraits of Queen Alexandra and other members of the royal family and aristocracy.¹⁴ His younger brother, Henry Gordon Grimes, was the only disappointment: after being taken prisoner in the abortive Jameson Raid on the Transvaal in 1895–96, he lived in obscurity and died from the effects of alcoholism in South Africa in 1942.

James Watts Grimes retained colonial business interests, and visited Australia regularly until 1900. On his death at Steyning, Sussex in 1912, he left an estate worth £7,974 but no realty.¹⁵ ‘Emmy’ also returned to Queensland at least once, in 1896; she died at Bradbourne Dene, the home of her daughter Martha Marian and son-in-law Oliver Hering Campbell, at Sevenoaks, Kent in 1921.

‘Ellerton Gay’

‘Ellerton Gay’ made her debut in 1890, about four years after Emma Grimes’s return to England, as the author of the novel *Drifting under the Southern Cross: An Australian romance*, published in London by Gordon & Gotch in association with Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co. In 1893, Jarrold of London published her children’s story, *Under a spell*, in book form. Three other novels appeared only in serialised form: *Across the gulf* (*The Illustrated Sydney News*, 1893), *Gathered rue: An Australian novel* (*The Observer* and *The Leader*, 1894) and *Passing the love of woman: An Australian story* (*The Queenslander*, 1895–96).¹⁶ The success of *Drifting* appears to have been instrumental in establishing Ellerton Gay’s career: Graham Law has pointed out that in the Australian colonies ‘full length serial novels tended to be signed by authors with established metropolitan reputations’.¹⁷ Between 1891 and 1906, Ellerton Gay also syndicated eleven pieces of shorter fiction, at least one through Tillotson’s Fiction Bureau, though further works by her may have appeared in periodicals as yet not digitised or indexed.¹⁸

The shorter fiction of Ellerton Gay is self-consciously metropolitan, depicting the milieu in which the Grimes family moved, or aspired to move, after its return to England. Set either in London or the country homes of the English upper classes, the short stories and dialogues provide a humorous commentary on the potential pitfalls of courtship and marriage in the 1890s. In the dialogue, ‘What’s in a name?’, the ‘elegant’ Mrs Belterre rejects Peter Glubb as a suitor for her daughter Gwendolen because of his ‘odious’ name and limited income; when Peter’s Australian uncle leaves him several millions, Mrs Belterre enterprisingly enlists a hyphen to transform Peter into the more socially acceptable ‘Mr Merrion-Glubb’. In the short story, ‘A day behind the fair’, however, Gwendolen Cholmondeley Trelawney refuses an offer of marriage from Mr Fairfax Grub, who could give her an ‘excellent position’ as well as being ‘agreeable and accomplished, manly and straightforward’, because of his name: ‘How could a Trelawney become a Grub!’¹⁹ Gwendolen comes to

regret the lost opportunity. Ellerton Gay's preoccupation with the social drawbacks of an unprepossessing surname suggests the experiences that motivated Leonard Grimes to change his surname to Avery.

A touch of irony characterises Ellerton Gay's reflections on the role of class politics, economics and English notions of propriety in the marriage market. In 'A side wind', Dora Nankivell — whose father is 'something in the city' — goes 'on appro' to the home of her suitor Maurice Dysart, who is 'of the best family, and wealthy, with a fine estate'. Maurice's mother, not wishing her son to marry a girl who is 'not of the best ton', asks her friend, Lord Felmingham, to lure Dora away from her son. The young woman falls into the trap: 'She had enough of the calculating spirit in her to reckon up the advantages of the bird in the hand, but it was very quickly done, and she decided for the lord in the bush.' The Lord predictably flies away (he marries Mrs Dysart), but in a plot resolution that appeals to the narrator's sense of social decorum, Dora marries a man who is also 'something in the city', although 'her visitors' list proudly bears the names of Lord and Lady Felmingham'. In 'The fate of an engagement ring', a detective story reminiscent of Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*, Margot Ainsley is conducting a secret affair with a social inferior, Thomas Marker. When a long-forgotten admirer, Paul Bevan, sends her a superb engagement ring out of the blue from South Africa — which suggests that he has amassed a fortune — she pays Marker's passage to the United States with the proceeds of the surreptitious sale of the stones from the 'lost' ring. Eldon Meredith in 'The M.P.'s wooing' decides that the 'very sedate, well-read, and intellectual' Miss Primrose is 'the very wife for a Member of Parliament', but is shown to be literally and figuratively short-sighted in jumping to false conclusions of 'unmaidenly conduct' that might have 'nipped in the bud' a happy and decorous marriage.²⁰

By contrast, Ellerton Gay's four novels for adults — all set principally in pastoral areas of Queensland — exemplify Anthony Trollope's precept that a good novel should be both 'realistic and sensational'.²¹ They draw on the colonial experiences of Emma Watts Grimes to flesh out the conventions of the romance genre with a distinctively Australian inflection. Here the course of true love is temporarily disrupted by the revelation of a scandalous social transgression, which usually has its origins in the home country but is played out in the colonies: a convict past in *Passing the love of woman*; divorce in *Across the gulf* and *Drifting*; an illegitimate child in *Gathered rue*; and the spectre of incest in *Across the gulf*. Although the London-published *Drifting* includes various passages explaining Australian conditions to English readers and 'new chums', both it and the serialised novels — which were published only in Australia — are addressed principally to a colonial readership that was reinterpreting its foundations as a penal colony and beginning to imagine itself as an independent nation. Ellerton Gay's work shows that domestic life plays a key role in this project.

Above all, the novels emphasise the transformative potential of colonial life, once old prejudices are abandoned and new possibilities embraced. As Mrs Wentworth puts it in *Passing the love of woman*, 'we require a little time to reconcile old ideas with new ones'. Firmly convinced of the 'heredity of vice', and regarding convicts as 'the devil's spawn', Mrs Wentworth jeopardises the happiness of her family by rejecting the unjustly convicted Philip David: 'innocent or guilty, he had suffered from the contamination of crime, and ... this was sufficient to cause

him to be shunned'. Only when David saves the life of her daughter, Gwen, does she overcome her fear of the 'contamination of this association' sufficiently to restore harmony within the family. 'Genuine humanity', the novel implies, allows a criminal past to be lived down by subsequent 'blameless existence' — at least in the colonies.²² *Across the gulf* explores how another kind of shameful past can be expiated in the colonies. Estelle — 'a disgraced wife, a divorced woman' who abandoned her son, Archie — redeems herself in Australia, first as 'a very angel of mercy to sufferers of all classes' in an Adelaide hospital, and then as the selfless wife of Queensland pastoralist Tom Verrinder. After the shock of meeting the adult Archie, Estelle attempts suicide as an 'act of expiation', but is saved in the nick of time. Ellerton Gay ends the novel with Estelle's expiation transmuted into atonement — in its original sense of *at onement* — through the marriage of Estelle's son, Archie Aytoun-Dallas, to her step-daughter, Nell Verrinder.²³ In *Gathered rue*, the noble Basil Tremayne protects his sister's good name by allowing both family and outsiders to believe that he is the father of a child abandoned on the family station. Many years later, however — through a combination of 'pride' in his own moral rectitude and outmoded expectations of wifely submission — he wrecks his marriage by refusing to confide the truth about Margaret's parentage to his young wife, Mora. Basil's transformation comes in the twinkling of an eye: when he sees the baby daughter born to his wife during their separation, his moral intransigence is swept away by the warmth of human feeling.²⁴

The expansive, inclusive, conciliatory plotting of Ellerton Gay's novels dramatically underscores the individual empowerment and social cohesion that can be achieved by abandoning old-world prejudices based on unforgiving moral codes or class barriers. The stark contrast between Ellerton Gay's contained and conventional treatment of love in her English short stories and the open-ended possibilities expressed in her Australian novels seems to be a case of form following function. Love in the English stories is largely determined by the economics of the marriage market and constrained by notions of respectability. The more fluid colonial context allows Ellerton Gay to explore the multifarious significances of love. Like Rosa Praed, she is interested not just in romantic passion, but also mateship and other bonds of affection. The title *Passing the love of woman* alludes to 'the old, old story sprung into life again in a new country' of David's love for Jonathan.²⁵ The bond of friendship between Philip David and the much younger 'Jack' (Jonathan) Ogilvy takes precedence over their heterosexual attractions, so that when Mrs Wentworth shuns Philip David, Jack breaks off his engagement to her daughter, Gwen. He assures David that

I want you always to feel . . . that although I do love Gwen very dearly, I should not be happy wanting you. To come back here, find you, and tell you all I have felt, thought, and done during the day adds a completeness to happiness which I should wholly miss without you. Even with Gwen I can't do without you, Davie. I want you and Gwen, too. If I have to choose, you know which I choose, don't you?

Mrs Wentworth's change of heart allows the novel to effect a reconciliation of the claims of homoerotic mateship and heterosexual marriage: Gwen marries Jack, and Philip David — acknowledging 'that friendship is not love, but that it may

exist vigorously side by side with an absorbing love' — proposes to the widowed Wentworth daughter, Gay Stanhope, and '[seizes] her in his strong embrace'.²⁶

Non-sexual manifestations of love are also explored in Ellerton Gay's novels. *Drifting* begins with a moving depiction of Lindsay's tender solicitude for her young son, Hugh, who is stricken with a mysterious ailment; Gerard Grant, the Irish stranger who heals him, urges Lindsay to leave the brutish Darcy and make a new life for herself and her son with him — thereby distinguishing himself from unscrupulous adulterers like Egerton Saintsbury in *Across the gulf*, who trick women into abandoning their children. Love also reaches across the racial divide. In *Across the gulf*, Tom Verrinder's first wife is brutally slain by white bushrangers, but the Aboriginal nurse lays down her own life to save his little daughter, Nell.²⁷ The founding Margaret thrives 'exceedingly' under the care of black Mary in *Gathered rue*. Indeed, the portraits of Aboriginal people in Ellerton Gay's novels — although fleeting — are invariably sympathetic.

A deep and abiding love of nature is also voiced in the novels. *Drifting*, for instance, contains passages of almost mystical communion with nature, and feeling for the suffering of animals. Lindsay fulminates against the 'great evil' of the mistreatment of stock animals by squatters, and in *Gathered rue* cattle starved by drought are described as 'mere frameworks of misery'.²⁸ Gerard's attractiveness to Lindsay is enhanced by his repulsion for the 'horrid butchery' of a kangaroo drive in which 900 animals are slaughtered.²⁹ When Gerard asks how shepherds can 'support the monotony' of bush life 'without the resources of a cultivated mind', Lindsay replies that many of these men

are such close observers of nature that it is a pleasure to talk to them . . . These are the men for whom solitude has no terrors; not one of this sort ever goes out of his mind for want of the society of his fellows; he makes friends with every living thing around him; the birds come at his call, and the wild animals feed from his hand . . .³⁰

Desperately unhappy in her marriage, Lindsay too finds solace in nature, although in her case it is mediated through spiritualist ideas. In the hush of the night, she has the intuition that 'we are waiting for something':

A sort of sixth sense, through which nature could speak to us in words we could comprehend: by which the mystery and spontaneity of growth would be plain to us and we could read the poem that a great forest tree contains, or look into the cup of that big pink water-lily and hear the subtle music of its being. If we had this sixth sense perhaps we could look out over a wider world where all the petty hopes and fears of our little lives would recede into nothingness. What would an aching void in one's heart matter?³¹

Drifting under the Southern Cross

Drifting under the Southern Cross, the first of Ellerton Gay's novels to appear in print, is particularly accomplished and appealing, as its facsimile republication by the British Library suggests. Perhaps due to its publication in book form, it is the most self-consciously literary of the novels, with both chapter epigraphs and allusions within the text itself providing evidence of extensive reading of English poetry by its author. In addition to the Romantics (Shelley, Byron, De Quincey and Leigh Hunt) and Victorians (Tennyson and Browning, but especially Swinburne),

there are references to the Scottish writers Robert Burns, the Ettrick Shepherd James Hogg and Robert Pollok; to earlier English poets such as Wither and Herrick; and in particular to contemporary poets such as Lewis Morris, Wilfred Scawen Blunt and Edwin Arnold. The epigraphs and quotations imbue the novel with a heightened poetic sensibility that universalises its themes of love and suffering, and endows its colonial settings with an aura of sophistication.

The novel is set entirely in Queensland, on Darcy Morton's cattle property, Barionga Station on the Darling Downs, at Coomerang (Southport — a clever conflation of Coomera and Nerang) and at Milton in Brisbane.³² Vivid descriptions of the homestead and the natural environment of bush and coast, extended passages devoted to activities such as kangaroo and cattle drives, and detailed explanations of colonial idiosyncrasies, suggest that this novel — to a greater extent than the later serialised novels — was intended principally for an English readership. Nonetheless, the dilemmas and potentialities portrayed in the novel are inseparable from the setting 'under the Southern Cross'. In these respects, *Drifting* is reminiscent of Rosa Praed's Australian novels, although Ellerton Gay stakes a claim to superior realism: Gerard Grant informs Lindsay Morton that he 'gathered from the books of an Australian novelist that all the men were cabinet ministers at least, and all the women ardent politicians'.³³ Despite her fervent views on the progress of Queensland, Lindsay may not be a politician in Praed's terms, but she is nonetheless a sophisticated and cultivated modern woman whose colonial location enhances her sense of herself as cosmopolitan. As the novel's literary allusions suggest, she is equally at home in the world of high culture and in the bush — and, after all, the notion of the pastoral realm as the point of intersection between culture and nature has a long pedigree. Lindsay is also a storyteller to her son, Hugh, and to her friends, perhaps suggesting the way in which Ellerton Gay came into being; indeed, the ambiguous gender of the name also links the fictional character with the pseudonymous author.³⁴

In spite of her loveless marriage to Darcy Morton — a coarse, alcoholic 'brute' — Lindsay makes Barionga Station homestead an oasis of taste and culture. The immediate mutual attraction between her and the charming and cultured Irishman Gerard Grant deepens into love when Gerard is forced by a sprained ankle to remain at the station. When Darcy further humiliates Lindsay by installing his mistress and illegitimate child on the station, Gerard argues that 'the treatment you receive entitles you to a divorce', and urges her to 'come with me, and bring your child'. However, as the child of a divorced mother, Lindsay has 'an indescribable horror' of divorce: 'my father's chivalrous love could not prevail against her remorse at the step she had taken, while his prospects were ruined'.³⁵ After the Barionga homestead is destroyed by fire while he spends the night with his mistress, a somewhat chastened Darcy sends Lindsay and Hugh to the seaside town of Coomerang. Gerard follows her, and when Darcy discovers some 'very fond and passionate' verses about Lindsay written by Gerard, he interprets his wife's reluctance to divorce him as proof of her own guilt. Brian Daly persuades his cousin Gerard to feign a change of heart towards Lindsay and depart on a long journey in order not to compromise her further. With Darcy's adultery now so 'notorious' and 'flagrant' that Lindsay's testimony against him would hardly be necessary to obtain a divorce, Lindsay nonetheless continues to refuse to sign the papers until Darcy writes to her that he will 'come down and make a scene, and fetch you back

like a refractory heifer to the herd'. Before he can act on the threat, however, Darcy is conveniently killed in a riding accident.

As in *Gathered rue*, here it is primarily the male protagonist, Gerard, who must decide whether or not to take up the transformative possibilities presented by his experience in the colonies. A drifter with a predilection for married women, his wealth and gender predispose him to idle his life away without concern for the women he woos and discards along the way.³⁶ To be worthy of Lindsay, he must prove that his love is unselfish and enduring. Two episodes where Gerard is being rowed in a boat function as liminal moments in his development. In both cases, he is rendered vulnerable but also receptive through injury — first with a broken ankle, and then with a broken arm.

On a lake on Barionga Station, where Gerard's 'erratic steering' leads Lindsay's sculls to become entangled in weeds, he fears that despite his attraction 'it is not in man's nature to be satisfied long' but then, 'in a flash', experiences a mystical feeling that 'we had been rowing like this in some former state of existence' so 'it must be that something links our fates together'.³⁷ Much later in the novel, Brian Daly rows his cousin Gerard Grant from Coomerang 'up with the tide along the island of Dartselle' (South Stradbroke). Gerard wants to 'wait until the tide turns and drift lazily back', but — in order to shock Gerard into realising that he is 'drifting into dangerous waters' with Lindsay — Brian has set the boat to drift into the breakers of what local readers readily recognise as the treacherous Southport Bar. Pointing out that remorse will inevitably follow if Lindsay sacrifices her 'good name, and what her son will think of her in after life', Brian announces that he is prepared to lose his own life rather than allow Gerard to 'land alive to carry out this injury to Lindsay Morton, the sweetest, purest woman that I have ever known'.³⁸ Gerard's broken arm leaves him at Brian's mercy:

You can't row, and I will not. We are going faster and faster with the current, in ten minutes we shall round the corner, and then only strong arms can save us. I will not touch an oar, and I will hold you under water if necessary until we are both drowned or the sharks take us.³⁹

Convinced that Lindsay will only initiate divorce proceedings if she feels that she has no 'ulterior motives', Brian forces Gerard to agree to convince Lindsay that his feelings have changed, and then absent himself until Lindsay is free to marry again. By this point, the skiff is about to be wrecked in the breakers of the bar, and only a daring and difficult rescue by the lighthouse boat saves the two men so that they can carry out the plan.

That this moment is a profound turning point for Gerard is underscored by a second brush with the uncanny. He reveals later that out in the boat the face of a drowned man he had seen some years before in the Paris Morgue had returned to him 'very vividly'. The man bore a 'singular likeness' to Gerard, who recalls that 'I stayed and took a long look through the glass and said to myself "If I were to die of drowning in a few years' time, that is how I should look."' In putting Lindsay's well-being before his own selfish, short-term desires, Gerard chooses a life-affirming transformation of the self. A year later, his reunion with Lindsay makes Gerard 'the happiest fellow under the Southern Cross'.⁴⁰

Conclusion

Emma Watts Grimes's remaking of herself from orphaned English migrant into the wife of successful Toowoomba businessman, and — after her return to England in middle age — into the modestly successful writer Ellerton Gay demonstrates the transformative possibilities for women of migration to the colonies. She wrote not from economic necessity, but — on the internal evidence of the novels — as a woman whose colonial experience contributed to, rather than detracted from, her sense of herself as cultured, modern and cosmopolitan. The intersection of the pseudonymous and biographical identities is of particular interest because Ellerton Gay draws on the life experiences of her creator to flesh out the conventions of the romance genre in two settings, turn-of-the-century England and nineteenth-century Australia. Ellerton Gay's shorter fiction, which offers a humorous commentary on the English marriage market of the 1890s, is rather slight and conventional. Her four novels, however, contribute to the reinterpretation of Australia's colonial past and the imagining of its future by showing that individual empowerment and social cohesion can only be achieved by embracing new moral and social codes. While Ellerton Gay will not displace Rosa Praed as the leading woman writer to emerge from colonial Queensland, the revelation of her identity solves a minor mystery, and thickens the texture of Queensland's cultural history.

Endnotes

- 1 'Our Melbourne letter', *The Queenslander*, 15 October 1892, 725.
- 2 Ellerton Gay, 'What's in a name? A dialogue for women', *Werner's Readings and Recitations* 26 (New York: Edgar S. Werner & Co., 1902), pp. 122–5. Accessed 20 November 2013, <http://archive.org/details/wernersreadings01unkngoog>.
- 3 AusLit database, accessed 23 June 2012, <http://www.austlit.edu.au> listed Ellerton Gay as male.
- 4 Ellerton Gay, *Drifting under the Southern Cross: An Australian romance* (London: Gotch & Gotch, 1890); reproduced by British Library Historical Print Editions. The book, while not strictly a facsimile, is an 'authentic reproduction of the text as printed by the original publisher' (n.p.). Neither this publication nor the British Library Catalogue indicates that Ellerton Gay is a pseudonym. The novel is also now available for free viewing or download as a PDF file through a link in the British Library's catalogue entry for *Drifting under the Southern Cross*.
- 5 The prize is reported in *The Royal Cornwall Gazette, Falmouth Packet, and General Advertiser*, 12 July 1861. Emma's sister, Marian, married Stephen John Burke in Queensland in 1864, but at least some of the family remained in Victoria, where Emma's brother William Allen died in 1887.
- 6 Since probate of Robert Allen's will was not granted until 1865, eight years after his death and three years after Mary Anne's move to Australia, it may be that financial difficulties and family conflict over business matters contributed to the decision to migrate.
- 7 James Watts Grimes was baptised on 25 December 1833 in Gloucester. His father, James Grimes, identified himself on the 1851 census as a 'linen draper, employing three hands'. The reasons behind a subsequent distortion of the public record by James are less transparent than the lowering of his age. In March 1872, local newspapers announced the death of five-month-old James Watts Grimes, and a death certificate confirms these facts. However, two years later when James Watts Grimes Senior certified in writing the birth of another son, Henry Gordon, he declared that his living issue included James Watts, now aged

- 2 years and 5 months, and ‘one dead male’ — by implication, Leonard Avery. Since even a very distracted father could hardly have mistaken five-year-old Leonard Avery for the toddler James Watts, the deception was presumably deliberate, although his motives are obscure. Leonard’s later decision to drop the surname Grimes by deed poll, although driven primarily by a desire to enhance his social standing, may have been made easier by his father’s mysterious erasure of him in favour of a dead brother.
- 8 ‘Personals’, *Queensland Figaro*, 29 December 1883, 6, accessed 20 December 2013, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article83678711>. Mabel appears to have entered the examination as a private student, so was presumably educated at home, perhaps at least in part by her mother.
 - 9 ‘Personal’, *Brisbane Courier*, 7 January 1932, 10, accessed 20 December 2013, <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article21769914>>. Leonard says here that his brother Henry also attended Toowoomba Grammar, but the school has no record of Henry (email from Denise Miller, Curator, Museum and Archives, Toowoomba Grammar School, 2 November 2013.) As Medical Officer of the Westminster Dragoons, Leonard served under Chauvel throughout the Palestine campaign in World War I: see John Keeble Winn, *Still playing the game: A history of Toowoomba Grammar School 1875–2000* (Caringbah, NSW: Playright Publishing, 2000), p. 132 for Chauvel’s reminiscences.
 - 10 Ellerton Gay, *Across the gulf*, serialised in *The Illustrated Sydney News*, 7 October 1893, 13. *Across the gulf* was published in eighteen instalments between 12 August and 25 November 1893.
 - 11 Agnes Lanyon née Allen used the surname Percy on the 1881 and 1891 censuses. Her daughter, Agnes Violet Pennell, born in Plymouth in 1875, is probably the same person who in 1899 married John Renton in Cranley-Gardens, Kensington (where Leonard Avery was married a few months later) under the name of Agnes Violet Pennell-Percy, giving her father’s name as R. P. Percy. The two Lanyon sons, Rodolphus Richard (1862–1884) and Edward (1868–1910) were brought up in the household of an uncle in Chichester. I have found no record of the fate of Agnes’s legitimate Australian-born daughter Meta Kathleen (1870–1894) until her early death in Hampshire; however, she did not live with her mother on any of the census dates. Agnes Lanyon died in Eastbourne in 1924.
 - 12 Charles Edward Norman Leith-Hay (b. Queensland 1858, d. Scotland 1939), son of prominent early Queensland settler James Leith-Hay, returned to Scotland to manage the properties of his uncle, whom he succeeded as Laird of Leith Hall in 1900. Emma, James, Mabel and Leonard Grimes attended the marriage of Charles’s sister, Louisa Jane Leith-Hay (b. Queensland 1868, d. Hove, Sussex 1923), to Captain (later Admiral) Robert Kyle McAlpine in 1889. On the 1891 census, Leonard Grimes and his sister, Martha Marian, were listed as house guests of Lord Wodehouse, later 2nd Earl of Kimberley.
 - 13 In 1894, in India, Mabel married Aylmer MacIver Campbell of Asknish (b. Northants. 1867, d. India 1900), a Captain in the Indian Staff Corps. Her second marriage was to Alexander Campbell Stewart (b. Bangalore 1937, d. Knocke, Belgium 1936), also of the Indian Staff Corps. A Lieutenant-Colonel in the Indian Army Corps of Guides, A. C. Stewart — like his brother-in-law, Leonard Avery — was awarded the Distinguished Service Order for his gallantry during World War I. The couple later divorced, but the social activities of their only daughter, Margaret Leila Campbell Stewart, were often reported in the Queensland press. In 1895, Gertrude became engaged to a planter from Ceylon, but the marriage did not proceed; she married Edwin Stanley Sturdee, an architect and surveyor, in 1901. The marriage in 1905 of 35-year-old (Martha) Marian Watts Grimes to Jamaican-born Oliver Hering Campbell (b. 1868 Jamaica, d. Sevenoaks, Kent 1936), formerly a lieutenant in the Bedfordshire Regiment, further consolidated the Grimes family’s imperial and military connections.

- 14 After receiving private tuition on his arrival in England, Leonard Grimes spent a few months at Wadham College, Oxford in 1899 (enabling him to claim for the rest of his life to be an Oxford man) before training as a physician and surgeon at St George's Hospital in London. His change of name to Leonard Avery came into effect in October 1899, a few days before his marriage to Helen Mary Reeves (1877–1944), and two months before he set up a private medical practice in Kensington. For the photogravure portrait of Mrs Avery, see *England's beautiful women* (Bassano, 1909). It can also be viewed on the National Portrait Gallery website: <http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw213419/Helen-Mary-Avery-ne-Reeves>. Just after the South African War, he invented the horse-drawn Rapid Transit Galloping Ambulance. In World War I, Major Leonard Avery served at Gallipoli and in Palestine, was mentioned in dispatches and was awarded the DSO in 1918. Later he travelled as a doctor with various British scientific and cinematic expeditions to Africa and managed a British polo team which toured America. In 1930, Leonard Avery's speculation that some people are 'natural wireless receivers' was reported worldwide. With his second wife, silent film actress Alma Taylor, he returned to Australia in 1937 to oversee the medical organisation of the new Horlick's factory. He died in Surrey, England in 1953.
- 15 In 1889, James and Emma were living at The Gardens, Great Marlow (Buckinghamshire); in the early 1890s at Knapton Hall, Norfolk; and in 1901 at The Chantry, Fladbury, Worcestershire, but with a postal address of Hove, Sussex.
- 16 I have found no evidence that these serialised novels were also published in Britain. *The Illustrated Sydney News* ceased publication in 1894, and *Across the gulf* was the last novel to be serialised in the famous weekly. Ellerton Gay's novels were not distributed by Tillotson's, according to Toni Johnson-Woods, *Index to serials in Australian periodicals and newspapers* (Canberra: Mulini Press, 2001).
- 17 Graham Law, 'Savouring of the Australian soil? On the sources and affiliations of colonial newspaper fiction', *Victorian Periodicals Review* 37(4) (2004), 80. For a broader discussion of the role of serialisation and syndication in developing the market for fiction in the late nineteenth century, see Graham Law, *Serializing fiction in the Victorian Press* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000).
- 18 Ellerton Gay's short story, 'A day behind the fair', was published at least six newspapers in England, the United States and Australia. *The Milwaukee Journal*, 20 December 1892, 10 notes that, 'A day behind the fair' is 'Copyright, 1892, by Tillotson & Son'. W. F. Tillotson, the owner of the *Bolton Evening News*, created Tillotson's Fiction Bureau in the 1870s: Tillotson paid authors for fiction, which he syndicated to other newspapers in the United Kingdom and abroad.
- 19 Ellerton Gay, 'A day behind the fair', *Camperdown Chronicle*, 14 March 1893, Supplement, 5. First published in *The Bradford Observer*.
- 20 Ellerton Gay, 'The M.P.'s wooing: An episode of the session', *New Zealand Herald*, 20 April 1899, 3. This story was later published as 'Nipped in the bud', *Evening Telegraph* (Angus, Scotland), 8 December 1905, 6.
- 21 Anthony Trollope, *Autobiography of Anthony Trollope* (Rockville, MD: Serenity, 2009 [1883]), p. 133.
- 22 Gay, *Passing the love of woman*, serialised in *The Queenslander*, 7 March 1896, 449; 1 February 1896, 210; 14 November 1895, 1221; 4 April 1896, 642; 18 January 1896, 114. Gwen Wentworth echoes her mother's prejudice, but suffers retribution in the form of the life-threatening bite of a brown snake while she is trying to catch a forbidden glimpse of Jack (21 Mar. 1896, 545). *Passing the love of woman* was published in eighteen instalments between 7 December 1895 and 4 April 1896.

- 23 Gay, *Across the gulf*, *Illustrated Sydney News*, 11 November 1893, 12; 18 November, 13; 25 November 1893, 12. When Estelle goes to the creek to drown herself, the bank gives way and she becomes trapped by mud and vegetation: 'God's hand had interposed in a singular manner to prevent her carrying her resolve of self-destruction into execution.' Although she is 'perfectly calm and wholly resigned' to a 'living death' as a result of this 'accident' which saves her from committing a 'crime against God's laws', she is rescued at the last minute by Tom (25 November 1893, 12, 13).
- 24 Gay, *Gathered rue: An Australian novel*, serialised in *The Leader*, 29 September 1894, 33. *Gathered rue* was published in seventeen instalments between 18 August and 15 December 1894.
- 25 Gay, *Passing*, 7 December 1895, 1073. The title alludes to 2 Samuel 1:26.
- 26 Gay, *Passing*, 7 March 1896, 449; 4 April 1896, 643. Jack's assertion to Philip, in a moonlit bedroom, that 'friendship outlasts love' definitively switches the tone from homosocial to homoerotic: *Passing*, 14 March 1896, 498.
- 27 Gay, *Across the gulf*, 18 Nov. 1893, 12. *Passing the love of woman* contains a remarkably similar encounter between desperate outlaws and a lone woman with two daughters on an isolated station. One is the escaped convict, Comte Philippe de la Jonquieres, who later assumes the name Philip David. Mrs Wentworth might have suffered a fate similar to that of the first Mrs Verrinder, but for the restraint of Philip David and the other convict: 'Once I feared the very worst that could befall me. When they had satisfied their hunger one of them came and seized me, with something too horrible for words in his bleared, red eyes. I screamed with all my might, and you two babes did the same, and then the others pulled him off . . .' (Gay, *Passing*, 14 December 1895, 1221)
- 28 Gay, *Drifting*, pp. 61, 89; Gay, *Gathered rue*, 18 August 1894, 33. Both *Drifting* and *Gathered rue* vent criticism against squatters tying up large tracts of land that would be better used for 'close settlement', one result of which would be more humane treatment of stock.
- 29 Despite sharing Gerard's sentiments about how 'horrible' it is to slaughter animals that 'seem so utterly innocent and harmless', Lindsay is pragmatic about how the drive will make 'an appreciate difference in the grass in the country they have infested'. This sanguine attitude is shared by the narrator, who recounts with relish the hunting of a dingo: it is a 'supreme delight' to be able to kill 'this greatest plague of the sheep farmer' (Gay, *Drifting*, p. 133).
- 30 Gay, *Drifting*, pp. 36–7.
- 31 Gay, *Drifting*, p. 119. Tardy de Montravel originated the concept of the 'sixth sense': T. D. M., *Essai sur la theorie du somnambulisme magnetique* (London: n.p., 1785). However, the passage in *Drifting* is more reminiscent of late nineteenth-century uses of the term in theosophical and other esoteric writings. *Gathered rue* makes a number of references to 'fate' and the 'uncanny' without shedding further light on any specific spiritualist influences on Ellerton Gay.
- 32 That Southport is also fictionalised as 'Narong' in *Gathered rue* suggests that the Grimes family had a strong connection with the seaside town. The settlement, named Southport in 1875, began as a port for shipping timber to Brisbane but developed as a tourist resort in the 1880s and 1890s. A railway line connecting Beenleigh to Southport was completed in 1889.
- 33 Gay, *Drifting*, p. 55. In *Gathered rue*, both Basil Tremayne and his wife Mora's father Daniel Kirby are politicians; Mora herself is a keen political observer. Since Basil is a Conservative and Daniel a Liberal, Ellerton Gay is able to outline in broad terms the two political positions. As in *Drifting*, she appears to be more sympathetic to the Liberals than the

Conservatives, who support the squattocracy; indeed, she implies that Basil's Conservative politics align with his moral intransigence.

- 34 Lindsay was named for a dear friend of her parents, Colonel Archibald Lindsay: Gay, *Drifting*, p. 120.
- 35 Gay, *Drifting*, pp. 261, 167.
- 36 Gay, *Drifting*, pp. 99–101.
- 37 Gay, *Drifting*, pp. 96, 97.
- 38 Gay, *Drifting*, pp. 212, 213.
- 39 Gay, *Drifting*, p. 213.
- 40 Gay, *Drifting*, pp. 224, 308. In this novel, Gerard's receptiveness to the uncanny and spiritual ideas is linked to his Irishness.