TASMA — A WOMAN NOVELIST OF COLONIAL AUSTRALIA — AND 'CONTINENTAL' MEN

Whenever the subject of Australian women novelists of the late nineteenth century is raised, three names are invariably put forward: Ada Cambridge, Rosa Praed and Tasma (Jessie Couvreur). Tasma was in the unique position of being brought up in Australia, but by parents with very close family and cultural ties to Europe, especially to France. H. M. Green called her the first Australian novelist in whom appeared an element of cosmopolitan culture.[1] She not only knew, but became involved in many of the important social, cultural and literary questions that arose in late nineteenth-century England and Europe. In many ways she was an example of the 'New Woman' so frequently portrayed and discussed in English novels of the 1890s. Tasma has not been given as much prominence as Ada Cambridge or Rosa Praed, partly because she spent the second half of her relatively short life in Europe and died there without direct descendants. However, a reprint of her most famous novel, *Uncle Piper of Piper's Hill*[2], then a re-edition of a collection of short stories[3] and more recently Patricia Clarke's excellent biography have done much to rectify the situation.[4]

Tasma was born Jessie Catherine Huybers in London in 1848. Her Flemish father worked in London as a tutor, a clerk, then a wine agent, and her mother, Charlotte, seems to have been a governess, then teacher or proprietor of a small school. Charlotte was half-French, spoke several languages and was imbued with European culture. She was also strong-willed and very definite in her ideas. The couple already had three children by the time they emigrated to Van Diemen's Land in 1852, where Alfred Huybers set up as a wine merchant in Hobart. Other children were born there and had a carefree childhood in Tasmania. Jessie, the second child, was an extraordinarily bright, quick, physically active girl.

To the people of Hobart, Charlotte must have seemed more than slightly eccentric, and she disliked the town from the beginning. She insisted on teaching the children herself, with the cases of books that came over with them on the ship. Jessie was brought up freely discussing art, literature and philosophy, with

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1 *A History of Australian Literature*, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1961.

2 *Uncle Piper of Piper's Hill*, ed. C. Hadgraft and R. Beilby, Melbourne, Thomas Nelson, 1969.

3 *A Sydney Sovereign*, ed. M. Ackland, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1993.

4 Patricia Clarke, *Tasma: The Life of Jessie Couvreur*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1994.

an emphasis on Comte and the Positivists, similarly to Pauline educated by a French grandmother in the novel *In Her Earliest Youth* (1890).[5] A strong intellect notwithstanding, at nineteen she married handsome Charles Fraser in haste, knowing little of his character or interests, which were racing, horse-breeding and gambling. Like Eila Clare in *Not Counting the Cost* (1895), she repented at leisure having succumbed to the fascination of 'a reckless, chivalrous Jack Hamlyn type, with the athletic frame and the wonderful blue eyes trusting as a child's and brazen as a profligate's.'[6] She also realizes what a mistake it was for a girl to marry so young, a 'half child half woman', as she calls two of her protagonists. As a result, most of her novels are concerned with the institution of marriage: the expectations, the conventions, the relationships both social and personal, the for and against.

Fraser and his new wife went off to manage country properties on the mainland mostly owned by William Degraves. Jessie was miserable and missing the stimulating and close family life that was always so important to her. As Clarke points out: 'Her novels suggest that her early married life had affected her to such an extent that she recreated the incompatibility and unhappiness of those years over and over again. This was an experience etched into her being.'[7] It made her wary of marriage and emotional commitment. Unconventional even then, Jessie Fraser spurned the opinions of what she calls the Mrs Grundys of this world, left her husband in Kyneton and went to London, Paris and Brussels with her family in 1873, teaching the younger children on the way, as her mother had taught her.

The Charles Fraser type appears in one guise or another in several of her novels, physically attractive but often spendthrifts and drinkers, rarely philanderers as in The Penance of Portia James (1891).[8] They have no time for the life of the mind and little knowledge of cultural matters. These Australian men are often contrasted with others who appeal to the heroine's intellect and sensibility: a European, or someone with European background or who has at least travelled abroad like Sir Francis Segrave in her second novel *In Her Earliest Youth*. He can talk about art, poetry and the latest French novel. Nevertheless, in *A Knight of the White Feather* (1892), the novel Tasma found most difficult to write, she has to admit that the choice is not always clear-cut.[9] Something of a physical

5 *In Her Earliest Youth*, London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1890.

6 *Not Counting the Cost*, London, Richard Bentley & Son, 1895, p. 97.

7 Op. cit., p. 34.

8 *The Penance of Portia James*, E. A. Petherick & Co., 1891, p. 158. Hereafter abbreviated to Penance.

9 *A Knight of the White Feather*, London, William Heinemann, 1893. Hereafter abbreviated to Knight.

and mental Amazon, Linda Robley marries the cultured, but languid John, rather than the unintellectual outdoorsman Jack, but later thinks him a physical coward. Tasma more than hints that Linda's mental cruelty towards John after they are married is probably a reflection of her sexual frustration.

Jessie was overseas for three years and may well have wanted to stay there, but finally came back on her husband's insistence. In London she walked, saw art galleries and went to lectures such as 'The Female Education Question'. In Brussels Charlotte Huybers made sure the family were introduced to as much of the history and culture as possible. In Paris one sister took art classes while Jessie eagerly sought every opportunity to see and learn as much as she could about the city and country that had been at the centre of her education. Not that she slavishly accepted everything French: even then she was quite critical about the standard of contemporary French novels.

Her diaries tell us that she met and was attracted to a man called 'the Commandant' in Brussels, and something similar may well have happened in Paris, but she was a married woman and seems to have remained celibate during her stay in Europe. She was so wary and there was such a lot happening that perhaps it was not such a great problem.[10] Most important of all, it was during her stay in Paris that Jessie took an interest in social problems and gained the cultural and philosophical knowledge that would become an integral part of her life and work. She always kept up with the latest movements and theories, which enabled her to speak and write not only about literature, but also about trends in art and philosophy.

Jessie's marriage was worse if anything when she returned. Charles Fraser had had a child by a servant, so his wife finally took the unusual step of suing for divorce, which was granted in 1883. In the meantime, several important things had occurred. Firstly she went back to live with her family in South Yarra from 1876 to 1879, and during that time, her publishing career began. Inspired by what she had seen and learned in Europe, she became a regular contributor of articles to the Australasian, then also to the Australian Journal and the Melbourne Review. Several of these were short stories, so that by the end of 1877 the name 'Tasma', which she chose in honour of the colony where she grew up, was quite well-known in Victoria.

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10 See the comments made many years later in her Brussels diary 26 May 1890 and quoted by Patricia Clarke (p. 53), 'what [F]rench novelist, or indeed what person of any nationality would believe that the final step had never been taken?'

At the beginning of 1879 she sailed to Europe again to join her family, who seem to have been more important to her than anyone else. Like the Clare family in *Not Counting the Cost*, Charlotte Huybers and her family lived a poor but exciting existence on the Left Bank in Paris. Jessie's Paris was not one that most Australians knew. Like her character Linda Robley, she found life in the Latin Quarter wonderfully stimulating,

where friends' friends — rising artists, correspondents of English and foreign papers, young men medical students and women medical students, all given up to keenly interesting work, and brimming over with theories and ideas (wild, indeed, and far-fetched sometimes, but never trivial or venal) — had been wont to drop in of an evening and discourse on all the subjects of the day — and of those of a day that had not yet dawned as well! (Knight, pp. 81-82)

She also admired the freedom of their lives and loves, but like her heroines, would never take the 'final step' into free love.

Once again Jessie immersed herself in the intellectual and cultural life of Paris, but had to earn a living, sending articles back to Australia on a variety of topics. An article she wrote in French encouraging immigration to Australia for the Nouvelle Revue aroused considerable interest and led to a series of lectures on Australia in different cities in France. Her well-informed illustrated talks, lively style and charming accent made Jessie Tasma, as she called herself, a much-appreciated *conférencière*. The French government showed its appreciation by making her an *Officier d'Académie*, a precursor of the *Palmes Académiques*, in those days rarely awarded to a foreigner and even more rarely to a woman.

In 1881, before her divorce, she met Auguste Couvreur, a well-known Belgian politician, social reformer, journalist and a correspondent for the London Times in Brussels. He was a widower with no children, the type of distinguished older man whom she had always admired. They became friends, but in 1883 she had to go back to Melbourne for the divorce. The eight months she spent there were not wasted, however, as she deepened her knowledge of colonial life, which she had experienced first-hand from Tasmania to Queensland. Jessie hesitated for some time before finally marrying Couvreur in 1885. Although they were not well-off, Jessie was now part of a society in Brussels more suited to her talents and interests, and their home became a meeting-place for intellectuals, politicians and social reformers. She involved herself in many of the important issues of the day, including the status of women, while continuing to lecture and travel with Auguste from 1885 to 1890.

The diary she kept in 1889 and 1890 reveals a certain disappointment with her marriage, but this was probably inevitable, as she once wrote, 'I am not born with a wife's instincts I fancy.'[11] On the other hand, she did not have to earn a living and now found the time to write the novels that must have been forming in her mind. Her first, and her best, *Uncle Piper of Piper's Hill*, an Australian Novel, was published in London in 1889. It explores the clash of cultures when the impoverished upper class branch of a family comes to Australia to live with relatives dominated by an extremely rich but somewhat boorish self-made man in middle-class Melbourne. The book, which was very different from most Australian fiction to date, was so successful that it went into several editions. Rolf Boldrewood hailed Tasma as 'the Australian George Eliot',[12] and an English reviewer compared her to Jane Austen.[13] It was the first of six novels and one set of short stories published between 1889 and 1897. The later works never received the almost universal acclaim of *Uncle Piper*, but they are nearly all set largely in Australia and written from memory as Jessie Couvreur never returned here. By the end of the century Tasma was quite a famous name.

When Auguste Couvreur fell ill in 1893 and died in the following year, he left his wife once again faced with the problem of limited finances, in spite of his prominence in Belgian politics and international relations. His salary from the *Times* had been their regular source of income, but she knew his work, believed in the same political and social principles, and was determined to take his place as Brussels correspondent. In the end she got her way, although, as Clarke points out, 'This was an almost unheard-of role for a woman in the 1890s'. Her mother lived with her — always a mixed blessing — and Jessie continued writing, but the stress of her life since Auguste's death took its toll. It seems she had had coronary heart disease for some time and fell ill late in 1896, finally succumbing to a heart attack on 23 October 1897.

Given her background and experience, Tasma was ideally placed to compare colonial Australian and European men, especially French and Belgians. As she began writing fiction after returning from her first trip to England and the Continent, it is not surprising that 'Continental' men should appear in half of the short stories she published before leaving Charles Fraser and setting out for Europe once again. All her novels but one begin and end in Australia, but the

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11 Diary, 20 March 1889. See Patricia Clarke, *Tasma's Diaries: The Diaries of Jessie Couvreur*, Canberra, Mulini Press, 1995.

12 'Heralds of Australian Literature', *Australian Association for the Advancement of Science Report of the 4th Meeting*, Hobart, January 1892.

13 *Queen. The Lady's Newspaper*, 13 January 1894.

characters, especially the female protagonists, often travel abroad and have similar experiences to her own.

Although Tasma's fiction is often set a decade or two before the time of writing, she gives an idea of certain common ideas and prejudices about Europeans that were no doubt still prevalent. They are often comments or asides made by minor characters. One sister in the short story 'Mr Schenck's Pupil' (1885) remarks, 'Foreigners are all so alike, somehow', while the other asks if he is a German Jew.[14] Even the heroine wonders if he is 'a prince in disguise or a *chevalier d'industrie*?'[15] Not an unusual reaction perhaps for a colonial Australian girl attracted to a handsome, well-dressed foreigner. Ernest Schenck, a German tutor, may be described as a swarthy young man who holds his head well as a first impression, but he turns out to be intelligent, sensitive, romantic and a wise financial investor to boot. An altogether admirable character.

In 'Monsieur Caloche' (1878), one of Tasma's earliest and best short stories, the slightly-built, pockmarked young Frenchman applying for the job of a boundary rider, 'was a wondrous study of "Frenchiness" to the clerks.'[16]. They had heard of absinthe drinking, which gave an aura of mystery to the stranger whom they scrutinized for 'signs of dissipation'. The owner of the firm, the narrow-minded, irascible Sir Matthew Bogg — another self-made man based on Degraves — is highly suspicious of what he calls 'foreign adventurers' who speak in their 'foreign jargon'. He even wonders whether this one will turn out to be a 'ruffianly Communist' (a participant in the Paris Commune, some of whom were exiled to New Caledonia and made their way to Australia).[17] Tasma has several characters who were involved with the Commune in their past. Bogg is also an extreme case of the anti-intellectualism that has been noted in Australia since early colonial days: the idea that the youth would include the fact that he had shown some promise as an *homme de lettres* raises his ire and predisposes him even more against the tremulous French youth.

Jessie Huybers Fraser was predisposed by her upbringing to admire all things French, and she is not above making some generalizations: she notes for example in the short story 'A Philanthropist's Experiment', 'There is nothing the

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14 'Mr Schenck's Pupil', *Australasian*, 4 April 1885, p. 666. The story was serialized under the heading of 'The Storyteller'.

15 Ibid., 11 April 1885, p. 714.

16 In *A Sydney Sovereign*, p. 95. The story first appeared serialized in the *Australasian*, 27 April, 4 May 1878 and was then included in the first edition of A Sydney Sovereign, 1890.

17 *See A Knight of the White Feather, Not Counting the Cost* and *A Fiery Ordeal.*

shrug proper does not convey from a pair of French shoulders.'[18] Nevertheless, when she got to Europe she was faced with certain less admirable aspects of the country and the people she had never seen before. One of her sisters married a French sculptor and woodcarver whom the family considered rather vulgar and much beneath them intellectually. Several of her heroines make observations that she no doubt shared, like Portia James who disliked Frenchmen 'trying to dévisager her (the fact that we have no equivalent for the word in English is a proof that the habit is more of a Continental than an insular one.)'(Penance, 158) A more openly hostile Anglo-Saxon view of foreign men and their tendency to ogle women can be found in the early short story 'Malus Oculus' (1877).[19] The newly married couple are described happily climbing over a wall in the Ardennes, 'Here on this tranquil height, where there were no black-eyed, fat-faced foreigners to glare at the ancles [sic] encased in their high-heeled boots.' (*Malus*, 2) These are no doubt the thoughts running through the head of the rather strait-laced husband.

As Jessie was a good-looking woman like Portia James, she may very well have been followed by men who asked to accompany her, albeit very politely, and felt afraid. Anna Ross, Portia's more liberated friend, tells her 'That's only their way of showing their appreciation.'(Penance, 158) The reassurance must have worked as Portia is amused when approached in the Luxembourg Gardens, at 'the solemn absurdity of his denunciation: "O la cruelle!"'(Penance, 224) No doubt Jessie had got used to it, and either ignored the pursuer or could see the funny side to the situation.

Tasma seems to take it for granted that French men are generally more hedonistic and sensual beings than their Anglo-Saxon counterparts. The dichotomy is personified in the person of Jack's best friend Captain Greville in *A Knight of the White Feather*. Linda finds that he had been reading with her old Positivist professor in Paris and they have much in common. There are, however, two sides to his nature: he is a chivalrous half-Englishman, but also 'a descendant of a long line of pleasure-loving French whose motto had always been throughout their pleasure-loving lives: Fais ce que veulx, advienne que pourra.' (Knight, 196) In the end, in spite of all her philosophy Linda escapes her tragedy and emotional dilemma, not by breaking free and being like the young French people she admires in Paris, but by punishing herself into temporary

18 'A Philanthropist's Experiment', first published in Australasian, 3 August 1878 and later in *A Sydney Sovereign*, 1890. This passage is from p. 88 of the 1993 edition.

19 'Malus Oculus', in *The 'Vagabond' Annual*. Christmas 1877, Melbourne, George Robertson, 1877. Hereafter abbreviated to Malus.

madness. Ruth Fenton, the main character of Tasma's last novel *A Fiery Ordeal* (1897), reacts in a similar way.[20]

If Linda's old Positivist professor in Paris is to be taken as an example, older Frenchmen are more worthy of respect than the young. He is like a wise father figure whom she calls Papa Professor, educated, fond and protective of his young Australian pupil. He too advises her against marriage, saying that 'The femme artiste must renounce once and for ever the sanctuary of wifehood.'(*Knight*, 28) Linda, like Jessie, had loved her time in 'a Paris of work and self-reliance, inhabited by beings who responded to every impression of beauty and grandeur, like the strings of an Aeolian harp to the wind.'(*Knight*, 83). For all that, philosophy does not seem a great help in the emotional choices made by Tasma's leading characters. While they embody many of her own beliefs and experiences, she can still distance herself from them and is not above taking a sly dig at ideas she generally admires. She shows Linda 'sipping her coffee with a half sensuous childish enjoyment of it, very amusing in a priestess of Positivism.'(*Knight*, 111)

Finally, there are two important French-speaking male characters unlike any others in Tasma's fiction: the evil, hypnotic man with the blue glasses in the short story 'Malus Oculus' and the hunchback Hubert de Merle in *Not Counting the Cost*. The fascination of blue eyes features prominently in Tasma's fiction, but in 'Malus Oculus' they are like the evil eye used to mesmerise and almost seduce Grace, the beautiful young wife of a young English couple not long married on holiday in Belgium. Mesmerism was a topical subject at that time, but the fact that the story is set in Brussels would seem to support Clarke's suggestion that the tale has 'faint echoes of the elusive almost magical spell of her romance' with the Commandant.[21] Grace and her husband are at a masked ball where the man is dressed as Mephistopheles. Like the Devil, he possesses 'the power exercised over the baser part of the human mind' and uses it to cast a spell over Grace, who follows him in a trance. (*Malus*, 12) They have glimpsed this 'black ugly man' in other places, and now have to find the evil 'half monk half fiend' with the claw-like fingers, to break the spell.

Grace has little memory of what happened, and in the final scene some years later, the now demure housewife puts the whole thing down to her having chosen to wear a clinging ball-gown and wanting to be admired, with which her rather preachy husband all too readily agrees. When the stranger had taken off his mask and hood at the ball and shown himself as Mephistopheles, Grace had felt at the

20 *A Fiery Ordeal*, London, R. Bentley & Son, 1897.

21 *Tasma*, p. 49.

time that he was 'the Mephistopheles she had courted from the days when she had first chosen the public places that men's eyes might pay tribute to her beauty.'(*Malus*, 19) Although the protagonists do not realize it, the reader is aware that the hypnotic stranger had drawn on her not entirely fulfilled sensuality and her desire for excitement with a frisson of danger. The last line of the story shows that she still has spirit when she replies as she looks at her 'little one at play with the seaweed in her hair, "but for all that, I don't think I'll make our little Grace a Quakeress."'(*Malus*, 27)

Although not overtly evil, Hubert de Merle in the novel *Not Counting the Cost*, is a similar malign influence, drawing Eila Clare to him with offers of help for her family which are too good to refuse, especially as he is a distant relation. Although he does not wear a Mephistopheles costume, his misshapen body is in a way the outward manifestation of the baser side of his character, which is much more multi-dimensional than the mesmerist in the short story. Tasma mentions that he is familiar with the French Decadents and Symbolists — a touch of evil? All the same, you can feel pity for him as he is an educated man with a fine mind and a love of beauty denied expression. He had always felt the irony of it too keenly, making him a social and political rebel in his youth, but for the wrong reasons — 'he hated the entire existing social edifice, wherein there seemed no place or scope for one cursed like himself.' (*NCC*, 224) After the Commune and deportation to New Caledonia, he had decided 'to go into the desert and hide there', buying land on the New South Wales-Queensland border and ending up making a fortune in silver.

It is partly generosity, however, that brings him to Paris, showing Europe to his young manager, Jack, for the first time. They happen to be there at the same time as Eila Clare, her mother and siblings, much as Jessie was on her first trip. Eila had a similar disastrous first marriage, but in the novel her husband goes mad a year after they were married. The family are living in quite straitened circumstances in Paris, hoping to trace Hubert and a ruby heirloom, when Eila, a handsome young woman of independent mind, agrees to go into a beauty contest for the money, not knowing what it entails. Hubert and Jack in the audiences rescue her when she faints. Then a young brother is accused of theft and Hubert, who has fallen in love with Eila, makes a bargain that he will make everything right and support them all generously, which he begins to do, if she will agree to eventually be his mistress. He does not ask her to love him but to let him worship her beauty in his own way. She reproaches him as he knows that 'Whether now or later, our union must be a violence done to your instincts', but decides to sacrifice herself. (*NCC*, 361) Eila is saved from the final step, as she writes to her faithful friend Reginald in Australia before making any momentous decision. Hubert, still a gentleman, although terrified of losing her,

has left her for three months to think it over. Luckily her husband dies and Reginald sets out for France.

The final page highlights the slightly eerie feeling that Hubert de Merle has projected throughout the novel, and which links him to the evil hypnotist in 'Malus Oculus'.

> There was only one terror that haunted Reginald, and he confided it to his betrothed. What if the hunchback cousin should reappear upon the scene?
>
> 'What — Hubert! Oh, he will never come back!' said Eila confidently. 'I have a feeling sometimes that he wasn't a real person at all, only a shade we evoked from the nether world by our determination to discover the owner of the ruby. If he should come our way again, I will run away to you directly.'
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> But Eila was right, for Hubert was not heard of again. (*NCC*, 326)

What is one to make of these French characters? It must be admitted that Tasma's stories and novels, like most similar nineteenth-century fiction in Australia, are not without the occasional romantic cliché and melodramatic turn to the narrative. The idea of the culture and sophistication of France and the French is very attractive, especially to Tasma's heroines, who often have a French background like her own. They, and their English counterparts, stand in marked contrast to the active athletic young Australians, who are physically attractive but basically conservative, under-educated and dismissive of intellectual pursuits. Some are not insensitive, proclaiming themselves to be malleable and willing to be taken in hand by the more cultured and free-thinking women they love. But their background and the pattern of their lives is too ingrained for them to change in any lasting way.

Once on European soil, there is everything the young Australian women have anticipated and much more. Life in Paris and Brussels is immensely stimulating, but also a little frightening at times. Tasma/Jessie repeats the words 'dark', 'dark-eyed', 'swarthy', 'Meridional types' for the intruding presence of this type of Frenchman not to be seen as unwelcome and some sort of threat. Perhaps they give a hint of blatant sexuality that is unsettling to a young colonial woman of English background and upbringing, for all her admiration of freedom and individuality in France.

The two sinister Frenchmen are definitely to be feared, as they can exercise power 'over the baser part of the human mind'. What Grace does not quite

recognize is that the power reaches to the body as well as the mind, releasing the disruptive force of suppressed sexuality. In Eila's case there is obviously no physical attraction to the hunchback Hubert de Merle, but by taking advantage of her devotion to her family and her feeling of responsibility for them, he nonetheless almost succeeds in making a New Woman his slave: 'she would do and be whatever he chose to make her — his thing, like Beatrice in Shakespeare's comedy.'(*NCC*, 343) Some reviewers of the novel found her decision highly immoral.[22] In short, one could say that Tasma's important French male characters are either evil ('Malus Oculus') or disfigured ('Monsieur Caloche'[23] and Hubert de Merle). Willingly or unwillingly, they belong to the dark side — a strange perception for such a francophile writer.

After experiences that seem to have scarred them, Jessie Couvreur herself and two of her female protagonists shy away from romantic involvement altogether in favour of an ideal relationship that is French in name and concept. What they want is neither a husband (often referred to by Tasma as a 'lord and master') nor a lover, but a *preux chevalier*: in other words, a man who allows them to be themselves; a noble, devoted, generous man who makes no demands, but worships at a distance and is always there for support when needed. (This is the very opposite of the chevalier d'industrie, which a charming foreigner is often suspected of being, as in 'Mr Schenk's Pupil'.) Although the term is not used, the idea is there in Tasma's first short story 'Barren Love'.[24] Tasma sees this need as something instinctive in women.

> Women's rights' champions are without doubt altogether right. They have no end of solid grievances to redress. Let them bring about — if they can — social, intellectual, and muscular equality between the sexes. There is a certain sentimental instinct they can never do away with — the blind, unreasoning sense of comfort a trembling, frightened woman feels when a strong, earnest man takes her under his protection in a moment of danger.[25]

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22 *Scotsman*, August 1895; *Academy*, 19 October 1895.

23 There are two aspects to this disfigurement in the case of 'Monsieur Caloche'. In Australia, he is seen as a shy, pockmarked young Frenchman who can ride, but Monsieur Caloche is really a young woman. For an interesting analysis of this story as an example of women portrayed as defective men, see Susan Martin, 'Why Do All These Women Have Moustaches? Gender, Boundary and Frontier in Such is Life and "Monsieur Caloche"', *Southern Review*, vol. 25, no. 1, 1992, pp. 68-77.

24 First appeared in 'Hash': A Mixed Dish for Christmas with Ingredients by various Australian Authors, Melbourne, P. E. Reynolds, 1877, also in *A Sydney Sovereign*, 1890.

25 'Barren Love' in *A Sydney Sovereign*, pp. 73-4.

Pauline Vyner, the main character of a later novel, *In Her Earliest Youth*, thinks she has found one in the older, sophisticated Sir Francis Segrave, whom she finds 'refined and heroic'. He says she can trust him, but unfortunately he falls in love with the charms of this 'intelligent ingénue' and wants her to leave her husband or at the very least be a free spirit and sleep with him. This is dangerous territory, and Pauline wonders whether she is depraved by even considering the temptation. She finally retreats to the safety of marriage and motherhood.

Linda Robley in *A Knight of the White Feather* has to choose between two men of very different character, when the ideal would have been a composite of the two. After she chooses John for his gentleness and sensibility, the more masculine Jack goes off to war and is killed. Linda realises her mistake and after his death sees Jack as having been her *preux chevalier*. She blames his best friend, Greville, for having held her back from jumping into a raging river after her son before John drowns saving the child. But it is Greville who some time later comes back to find her recovering from a breakdown in Paris. His English half obviously dominates his 'pleasure-loving' French ancestry, and because of his unfailing kindness and patience, Linda finally agrees to let him be her friend, her *preux chevalier*. There is a hint in the last lines that perhaps some time in the future she may relent and let him come closer.

The necessarily sketchy backgrounds to this examination of Tasma's Frenchmen cannot do justice to her work as a whole. Some of it has obviously dated, but the two books that have been reprinted, *Uncle Piper of Piper's Hill* and the short-story collection, *A Sydney Sovereign*, deserve to be reread and remembered. And on the relationship between Tasma and the French: her writing on French art, literature and social problems; her fictional style and language, which are full of French expressions; opinions of her work published by reviewers in France and Belgium, there is still more to be written.

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