Lady Jane Franklin’s Diary of a Visit to South Australia in December, 1840

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Abstract

While there are many critiques of women’s travel writing focusing on 19th century women travellers in Africa, the Middle East and various parts of Asia much less has been written about women who travelled in Australia during the same period. And while it is fair to assume that many of the discursive strategies and imperial tropes used by colonial women elsewhere would be drawn upon by these Australian travellers, there are distinct differences between the ‘settler’ colonies of Australia and the various types of colonies in other parts of the world which were extant at this time. In choosing to write about Lady Jane Franklin’s travels in South Australia in 1840-41, I am well aware of the specificity of the Australian context and want to explore the ways in which this specificity is reflected in Franklin’s diaries, while also acknowledging the aspects of her journey which demonstrate her complicity with the broader colonial project.

Although she recorded her journey in an unpublished diary, it is a fascinating record of her impressions of South Australia. I will consider a number of different ways of seeing women’s writing, including the ways in which Franklin’s diary reflects Mills’s ‘sublime moment’ and what this reveals about gendered and classed writing. I am also particularly interested in the peculiarly colonial experience of the familiarity of the exotic, especially as the phenomenon relates to colonial Australia. Accordingly, I want to explore the intersection of the ‘sublime moment’ with the juxtaposition of exotic/familiar and how this intersection is inflected in the various theories of gendered writing already discussed.