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## **Ambitious Angel: Jean Batten and the performance of gender in a man's country**

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### AMBITIOUS ANGEL: JEAN BATTEN AND THE PERFORMANCE OF GENDER IN A MAN'S COUNTRY

*Anne Collett*

'Sydney has witnessed similar demonstrations of enthusiasm, but never one that was more spontaneous', wrote one Sydney reporter of Jean Batten's arrival in Mascot in October 1936 on completion of her record-breaking solo-flight from England to Australia.<sup>1</sup> Batten greeted the crowd that had waited long hours for her arrival, with an apology and the reminder that it was of course a woman's prerogative to be a little late.<sup>2</sup> The gathering responded with warmth and enthusiasm. Batten had played the woman's card with assurance, good timing and a lightness of touch. This was no easy achievement at the end of an exhausting flight of many days duration; but Jean prided herself on her professionalism – she was flying ace and queen of diamonds. The news media reversed this order, claiming her 'a woman first, adventurer second,' and praising her ability to 'always preserve the essentially feminine'.<sup>3</sup> The driven single-mindedness identified as 'masculine' that some labelled 'selfish' and others 'aggressive', was carefully hidden from view in order to please the crowd; but despite an understanding of the difficulties she faced as a young woman flyer, the degree of opposition to her proposed flight across the Tasman took her by surprise.

Recalling that surprise, she comments in her unpublished memoirs, 'I had no idea until I got to Sydney of the great controversy raging as to whether I should be allowed to fly the Tasman. I was even more staggered to find hundreds of letters and telegrams urging me not to attempt it.' To which she adds, 'I was a woman flying alone and in those days Australia, like New Zealand, was very much a man's country.'<sup>4</sup> Jean Batten's contemporary, Australian flyer Nancy Bird, corroborates this view, remarking that Australian Defence Minister H. V. C. Thorby 'believed flying was not biologically suitable for women, although he said there were some exceptions ... Generally, he felt flying was not consistent with a woman's role in life.'<sup>5</sup> But Batten refused to be

grounded. Frank Packer's bribe of a handsome sum to undertake a lecture tour throughout Australia was refused; and against all advice (including the threat of ban by the Australian Civil Aviation Board) Jean Batten took on the challenge of the notoriously dangerous atmospheric conditions over the Tasman Sea, thus making the first England to New Zealand flight in a solo-engined, solo-piloted plane. In the published account of her life (rather unimaginatively titled, *My Life*) she relives the moment of triumph:

The ground was black with people, and hundreds of cars were parked in long lines along the boundary.

I closed the throttle and glided down to a landing, and as the wheels of the Gull came to rest felt a great glow of pleasure and pride. This was really journey's end, and I had flown 14,000 miles to link England, the heart of Empire, with the city of Auckland, New Zealand, in 11 days 44 minutes, the fastest time in history. With this flight I realized the ultimate of my ambition ...<sup>6</sup>

Born in the small town of Rotorua, New Zealand in 1909, Jean Batten pursued her unconventional dream of becoming a solo flyer against the wishes of her father but with the fierce and often canny support of her mother. The tutu was discarded and the piano sold to finance the expense of a trip to England and flying lessons at the Stag Lane Aerodrome – home of the London Aeroplane Club and the de Havilland company that made the Gipsy Moth biplane she would pilot on her first record breaking flight from England to Australia in 1934 (a 10,500 mile solo flight of almost 15 days duration). Despite the doubts of club members like Bill Oliver who remarked in interview recently that 'None of us took her seriously and we teased her mercilessly. [Because] she was one of the very slow learners ...'<sup>7</sup> Batten was determined from the outset that not only would she succeed in learning to fly, she would fly better than anyone else – man or woman. Oliver recalls that 'we were all fascinated by her progress and the club was buzzing with rumours about how she was doing, because even then, she was talking preposterously about flying alone to New Zealand.'<sup>8</sup> She gained her A licence toward the end of 1930, her commercial pilot's licence in December 1932, and in April 1933 she made her first attempt at beating the England to Australia record set by British flyer Amy Johnson in 1930. Although Batten remarked that 'It is not so easy to stagger to

one's feet after two knock-out blows, so to speak, and put the chin out for a third,'<sup>9</sup> the 'try again girl' (as she was dubbed by the press) found success and the public recognition she craved on that third attempt. She would go on to achieve records for women's solo flight from England to Australia and back and England to Brazil in 1935; and the absolute world record for her solo flight from England to New Zealand in 1936. By all accounts, Jean Batten was not a natural flyer but she revealed herself to be a brilliant navigator and a woman of exceptional courage, stamina, determination and ambition.

Ambition was Batten's strength – it was the force that propelled her toward the achievement of her goal – but, more hampered by 'gender trouble'<sup>10</sup> than engine trouble, it was also her weakness. Ambition is generally considered to be an acceptable male trait, especially when coupled with the courage and risk-taking of dangerous and daring feats, but in a woman it is usually coupled with words like ruthless, conniving and bitch. Because Batten's solo flights required significant financial support, and having no means of providing that support herself, the construction and maintenance of public image was of paramount importance. Given the nature of Batten's character, this was not as easily achieved as might be imagined from the media photos that exude feminine elegance and charm. A perusal of the pages of the *Sydney Morning Herald* reveals a complexity of public attitude and response to the ambitions of a young female flyer, and a fascinating insight into Jean Batten's character and the attempt made to create a more acceptable Jean – acceptable primarily to the public 'down under'.

Jean Batten took off from Lympne, England on the morning of 5 October 1936, determined to break the England to Australia solo flight record, and equally determined to make the first England to New Zealand flight by man or woman in a single-engined, solo-piloted plane. She had made up her mind, as revealed in an interview reported in the *Herald* of Monday 19 October:

Miss Batten said: There seems to be a tendency to regard the Tasman flight as a stunt, but I never regarded it as that. To me, the crossing of the Tasman from Australia represented merely the last hop of my flight from England, and there does not seem to be any reason just now to fly across it again.

Actually, I was very surprised when I arrived in Australia to find the agitation existing against the crossing. There were newspaper headings, such as 'Will Jean Batten fly Tasman?' and 'Perils of the Tasman crossing'.

Months before I left England I had made up my mind to fly to my home in New Zealand ... <sup>11</sup>

Perhaps somewhat naively, Jean assumed, having made up her mind, that nothing would stop her, and indeed, nothing did. But image (rather than engine) repair would be necessary, given the ruthlessness such a mindset suggested, thus she attempts to place her feat in the grand scheme of things: she assures the public that this was no cheap stunt for publicity purposes but a serious-minded and carefully planned undertaking, not just to set a new record, but to fly home – thus aligning the feminine that might be seen to be dangerously misplaced in a boy's own adventure, once more within the safety of the domestic. Later she would also align her record-breaking challenges with a kind of 'hands across the ocean' agenda – peace and goodwill on earth would be achieved through the better and faster communication made available by new sky routes and cheaper, faster air travel. Carrying a New Zealand flag as a mascot, Jean Batten spoke of her record-breaking England-Australia flight as one that would 'strengthen the great bonds of friendship not only between England, our Motherland, Australia and New Zealand, but between all the dominions and colonies of the Empire,'<sup>12</sup> and as an addendum to the naked observation that the record-breaking flight from Australia to New Zealand was 'the ultimate of my ambition' she claims a fervent hope 'that my flight would prove the forerunner of a speedy air service from England.'<sup>13</sup> But this is to begin at the end – so I will take you back to the beginning of this particular record-breaking flight.

In the only biography of Jean Batten to date, Ian Mackersey claims that 'The media turnout for her at Lympne that morning [5 October 1936] was the biggest ever';<sup>14</sup> but *Sydney Morning Herald* coverage of Batten's challenge was fairly desultory. Her route and times are checked against those of Mr H. F. Broadbent's England to Australia record of 6 days 21 hours 19 minutes (beating Sir Charles Kingsford Smith's record set in 1933). Batten herself had broken the record for a woman solo pilot over this

route in May 1934 in a second-hand de Havilland Moth, but it was a time of 14 days 23 hours (no need to bother about the minutes) that left no reason to believe anything exciting would come of this new challenge, although, attempting to drum up some interest, the issue of Saturday 10 October claimed that 'If she has no mishaps she could break Mr. H. F. Broadbent's record for a solo flight ... by a substantial margin,' and notes, as though to ensure some Australian stake in a possible New Zealand triumph (no matter how unlikely), that the Percival Gull she now flew was the same make of plane flown by Broadbent when he broke the record, and was designed by an Australian.<sup>15</sup>

Of much greater interest however, is the 'Graphic Personal Account' of Kurt Bjoerkval, featured on the page following. Bjoerkval's plane was brought down off the south-west coast of Ireland on his attempted non-stop flight from New York to Stockholm. The wireless message from the French trawler Imbrin describes his 'terrible battle with snowstorms and the exciting circumstances of his ultimate rescue' – it is a description of daring-do – a battle against impossible odds:

I flew just above the sea. Then an impenetrable wall of snow forced me to climb. I reached 10,000 feet, but the snowstorms grew worse. Hail beat against the glass screen until I feared it would be smashed. I did not dare even to release the controls to get a food capsule. Once, when I attempted to do this, the Belanca reared like a fiery horse. It threw up its tail, flinging me to one side of the cabin, and so I had to abandon thoughts of eating and drinking.

Then, while my hands were numbed by the cold I found myself getting too warm for comfort. I found that the engine was getting hotter and hotter, and was beginning to miss.

... I looked desperately for a ship ... I grabbed a rope and was hauled aboard. Then I fainted for the first time in my life.<sup>16</sup>

The faint possibility of breaking the England to Australia record is no challenge to the thrills of this boy's own adventure. But on the following morning (Sunday, 11 October), Jean landed in Darwin 'after an amazing flight of five days 21 hours from England,' breaking the previous solo

record by 24 hours (no need for minutes here either). The headlines on page nine of the *Herald* on Monday, 12 October read:

MISS BATTEN BREAKS RECORD.

Thrilling Story of Flight

NEARLY HIT MOUNTAIN IN FIERCE STORM.

Perilous Night Flight Over Java.

TASMAN SPAN MAY BE BANNED.

(From Our Special Representative).

DARWIN, Sunday.

'For courage and determination, her flight, as disclosed by her exclusive interview at Darwin (published below), is one of the greatest yet made.' Here is a girl's own adventure story to match any boy's, with the added excitement of a battle of the sexes, and a battle of wills – Davina pitted against Goliath. The drama of a possible ban that would prevent the achievement of the first solo England to New Zealand flight was played to the hilt: 'The Acting Controller-General stated last night that the Civil Aviation Board would stop the flight [to New Zealand] if it could, and would make a recommendation to the Minister.' This claim is followed by Batten's statement of joy in reaching Australia in record time, and assured confidence in the achievement of her final goal:

'I am overjoyed at realizing I have broken the record,' Miss Batten said.

'It was only on my arrival at Darwin that I knew I had broken the record by so much. It meant a terrific strain, but I do not feel tired as I should feel. I am pleased to have broken the men's record solo to Australia by 24 hours. I am going to fly to my home in New Zealand.

I think the flight has been successful because I worked it out painstakingly, putting much organisation into it. It is nice knowing the route so well.'

This is a very curious statement – an odd mixture of the exultant and the flat – she is overjoyed and it was a terrific strain, but she is also merely 'pleased' and 'it was nice knowing the route so well'(!). What is particularly interesting is Batten's insistence that she was successful

because the flight had been planned and organised with painstaking care (it is this that sits so oddly with the usual and expected joy of achievement, as for example in Amy Johnson's famous response to the success of her flight and the overwhelming reception of the Australian crowd [in 1930] – 'I love you all and I love Australia!' – but I will return to this later).

Then follows the story of Jean's flight, '(Exclusive to the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Copyright. All Rights Reserved.)' Clearly the *Herald* is doing its best to create a drama and to ensure its rights to a story that promises a lot of news mileage and sales. However, 'the story' as told by Jean is a bit of a dampener. Told in undemonstrative manner, Jean's story of her challenge and success is one that emphasises the facts and is only interspersed with the occasional sense of personal gratification ('I was very pleased with my dead reckoning') or sense of physical or psychological strain ('It was a severe test after 1900 miles of flying that day'). This 'flatness' was read repeatedly by reporters and 'correspondents' as 'modesty', and such a response was useful to Batten, but not necessarily accurate. Here is her description of flying into (and out of) a severe sandstorm:

The weather was good over Persia until nearing Jask. I ran into sandstorms and climbed 6000 feet, and was still in a dust haze over Jask. Sandstorms raged beneath me. It was terrible ground. I could not have landed, and was glad I had the petrol tanks full. I flew on a compass course at 12,000 feet for 2 hours, when I decided to see my position and went to 8000 feet. I had to fly for another two hours before I could see the rocky shore of the Persian Gulf sticking out above the storm.

The description bears little resemblance to Kurt Bjoerkval's 'graphic personal narrative.' It may be that Batten had little literary skill and no feel for a good story – or it may be that she just placed little value on story. It is on the whole quite a curiously unemotional account, enlivened somewhat by the paper's 'subheadings' – PETROL LEAKING, RAN INTO SANDSTORMS, TERRIBLE HEAT, HOLDING DOOR SHUT, NEARLY HIT MOUNTAIN, TERRIBLE NIGHT FLIGHT, BURST TUBE. Batten's account downplays emotion and drama, choosing rather to emphasise the technical details of the flight, attributing success (once again) to painstaking planning and

careful organisation. The account makes clear that breaking the record is everything. This is not the story of adventure, or mission, but one of achievement. This account is the story of a life governed by desire to be 'the best'; and it is the story of a woman who is not very nice, or at least, one who does not prioritise the feminine virtues of self-sacrifice in the cause of giving succour or gratification to others. These are virtues ably demonstrated by Australian flyer, Nancy Bird, as featured in the pages of the *Herald* four days previously (Thursday 8 October). The story of Nancy Bird's flying work in the service of sick children is the story of an Australian modern day Florence Nightingale:

Not yet 21 years old, and with a record of 500 hours in the 3 years she has had her licence, Miss Nancy Bird has returned to Sydney, after spending nine months at Bourke, where she was the flying unit of the Far West Children's Health Scheme. During that time Miss Bird flew approximately 20,000 miles.

Weighing only 7st 7lb, and 5ft 3in tall, Miss Bird is a determined little person, who says she does not think she will ever do anything else but fly, and her motto is 'Safety First'. She has no inclination to do any long distant flight in a single-engined machine, but her name was the second entry in the South Australian Centenary air race, in which she will fly the Leopard Moth which has given her such splendid service in the far west.

Every three weeks Miss Bird had a job to do with Sister Silver, of the Far West Children's Health Scheme ...

'Mine was a thrilling job,' said Miss Bird, 'not without its risks of forced landings or of being lost, but I don't think in all my flying experience I have ever had such a feeling of responsibility and eagerness to "get there" as when I had a sick passenger aboard. I always had the feeling that if I ever wanted my engine to do a real job it was then ...'

There was also the thrill when Miss Bird did three trips in one day from Cunnamulla to Thargomindah, taking food and mails to flood-bound people after heavy rains.

'The country is so flat,' said Miss Bird, 'that as soon as the river-banks overflow the place becomes like a huge lake and is quite impassable. The only way to serve the people was by

'plane, and I landed in the red claypan with their stores. But it was all in the day's work.'

Nancy Bird represents herself (a view endorsed by the press coverage) as a modern day angel of mercy, her plane an extension of her person, giving 'such splendid service'. The story emphasises service to the community and the importance of safety. She is determined (rather than ambitious) and responsible (rather than pleasure-seeking). Miss Bird loves flying, but the real thrill, according to this reporter, lies in the opportunity to serve those in desperate need.

In contrast, Jean Batten is revealed to be ambitious, competitive, single-minded, and self-centred ... hardly feminine attributes in her time or even in ours. Although like Bird, Batten would have agreed that 'safety first' was also her motto, as in everything Batten did, it was a motto that allowed no leniency or forgiveness if all was not as it should be. She was a perfectionist herself and expected everyone associated with her venture to match what she required of herself. This can be and sometimes was perceived as arrogance. Ian Mackersey relates an example of what he describes as Batten's 'imperious' manner and 'unforgivable rudeness' pre take off for the Tasman crossing. When the Group Captain revealed that fuelling and checking of the aircraft had been undertaken by a man she considered to be inexperienced, Batten refused to accept deputisation and asked that the Captain check the plane himself. This request was refused by the Captain, who felt such a demand was inappropriate, so Batten angrily proceeded to check the plane herself.<sup>17</sup> This request and action might be both imperious and rude, but a more generous reading might see it as indicative of the enormous stress associated with undertaking a mission everyone had declared too dangerous; and the desire to ensure as far as humanly possible, the safety of her machine. On Friday, 16 October the *Herald* reported,

At 4 p.m. Miss Batten flew her 'plane from Mascot to Richmond, where she supervised final touches. 'I leave nothing to chance,' she said. 'I like to be on the job myself and then I am satisfied. I have perfect confidence in my 'plane, and I am looking forward to a pleasant flight.'

However the incident reported by Mackersey is interpreted as clear evidence of Batten's drive toward perfection (and the importance that insistence on perfection had to the success of her venture and ultimately,

survival). Certainly in her day perfectionism and the demands associated with it were perceived as unfeminine, as evidenced in the reflections of 'sister' flyer, Esther (l'Estrange) Mather, who remarked of Batten:

Her flying was perfectionist. It was far more brilliant than Amy's or Amelia Earhart's but her whole approach to it was uncharacteristic of a woman. I know it sounds a funny thing to say but, from watching her flying and observing her whole approach to it, it struck me very forcibly that she actually flew like man.<sup>18</sup>

When asked by the interviewer to explain further, Esther Mather expands on the nature of that perceived masculinity:

Well, she just kept on going. She never ever gave up in her determination to achieve her ambition. Although those early women pilots certainly didn't lack for bravery or determination, I don't think any of them approached their flying quite so aggressively bent on winning through at all costs as Jean did. When she set herself a target nothing would deflect her from it.<sup>19</sup>

If Batten's determination to achieve her ambition and an 'aggressive' desire to succeed were perceived as masculine and therefore troubling – inappropriate or even threatening – then something more would be needed beyond sheer hard work and the meticulous planning and organisation upon which the success of each new challenge was dependent. The drive toward perfection in performance, to which the masculine might be attached, would need to be balanced or even hidden behind the performance of the feminine. If Jean Batten did not demonstrate the desirable feminine virtues in her character, at least she could demonstrate them in her dress; and to this end her mother was an invaluable aid.

Mother and daughter worked hard at constructing and shoring up a softer, feminine image for the press. The negative impact of traits perceived to be 'masculine' might be mitigated by the careful marketing and sale of 'feminine' charm. Thus one newspaper described 'Miss Batten' as '26 years of age, small and graceful, and a fine pianist and dancer,'<sup>20</sup> and her mother assured the press that whenever Jean felt 'put out or one of her plans were delayed, she would go and play Chopin.' It was not technical flying skill or a capacity for enormous physical and

mental endurance, or careful planning and organisation, or sheer tenacity that 'pulled her through', but, according to her mother, the credit lay with Chopin.<sup>21</sup> Skill in the areas of music and dance had long been the necessary and popularly recognised attributes of 'a lady' – and Batten was, at least in dress and demeanour, every inch a lady. 'There wasn't room for much luggage,' declared Batten to one female reporter, 'but I felt I owed it to myself to bring with me a Paris model hat, from Liliani Callett. Every woman knows what a new hat does for her outlook on life, and I felt that that little black hat would do me a lot of good.'<sup>22</sup> The report by the *Herald's* 'woman representative' goes on to applaud Miss Batten's maintenance of all things feminine, despite the masculine maintenance demanded of the machine and her chosen profession:

Miss Batten stepped from the 'plane a slim figure in white drill flying suit, zippered up the front, and worn with a frilled green and white checked blouse, a navy white and scarlet scarf, and a white leather helmet. She wore soft tan leather low-heeled shoes with crepe soles, and no stockings. On her slender suntanned wrist she wore a tiny gold watch on a black band ...

Her trim appearance demonstrated that a woman can enter a sphere which used to be one popularly regarded as exclusive to men, and not divorce herself from a single feminine quality. Despite her record-breaking achievement, Miss Batten [w]as sufficiently interested in her appearance to greet Sydney with her face powdered lightly, her lips showing a dash of rose, and her eyebrows a trace of the pencil.

There were no signs of grease or oil on her white flying suit, which was worn throughout the journey, and had been washed for her in Darwin.

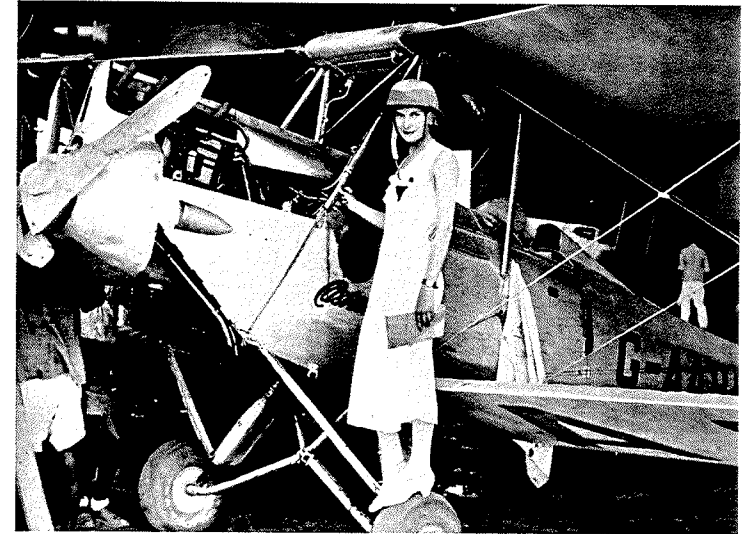
'I had hoped to arrive in Sydney looking like a new pin,' said Miss Batten, 'but the bumpy weather on the trip from Bourke across the mountains made me spill some coffee on the collar. It's too bad.'<sup>23</sup>

Clearly Batten did not have control over what the media selected as newsworthy, but she certainly colluded in the feminisation of her image to the extent that she chose to disclose certain pieces of information whilst suppressing others. Thus, the news media reported the important

preparation for the long-haul flight, not in terms of route maps, engine repair or even fitness training, but in terms of the 'full wardrobe of frocks and a number of sets of dainty underwear', carefully stowed away from contact with grease or oil.<sup>24</sup> While her mother worked hard at assuring the media that, although Jean did not wish to comment on 'rumours that she was affianced', she was indeed 'a real woman' as indicated by her abilities to 'make a frock, trim a hat and play the piano beautifully'.<sup>25</sup> Batten herself cultivated an image of uncontaminated, virginal purity. She performed an ideal or touch-me-not femininity. The word 'perfection' might again be recalled, but equally, the word professionalism.

Because planes demanded a degree of athleticism, comfort and often warmth for which women's fashion of the 1930s was generally unsuitable, the majority of women flyers wore bulky waterproofed overalls, a (brown or black) leather coat, with brown leather helmet and goggles. Some however continued to wear woollen skirt and woollen jumper, with long-legged bloomers and woollen stockings. This was not the most practical apparel for hoisting a leg high over the cockpit side and swinging the other up after, but the wearing of trousers by women was not generally approved, being worn only by loose or flash women.<sup>26</sup> Jean's flying costume was thus designed to accentuate her femininity, whilst serving practical considerations. In newsreel footage of the period, Jean alights from her cockpit not only immaculate in dress but perfectly poised and coolly pleased. The intensity of desire and drive possessed by every champion, but designated as 'masculine', is carefully masked by the pacific nature of her dress and demeanor. The readily recognised photo, originally published in the first edition of her autobiography, *My Life*, is that in which Jean is 'Supervising the Engine Work at Calcutta' in white silk dress, white hat, and white pumps.<sup>27</sup> She is posed 'looking' not 'doing' – she conforms to traits identified as feminine, that is, she is receptive and responsive rather than active and generative. Additionally, and of particular interest, is the transference of perfectionism (as identified by Esther Mather) from the active sphere to the passive – from the masculine performance of perfection in action to the feminine performance of perfection in appearance. This appearance took on an ethereal quality that conjured up the magical flight of angels rather than the dirty work of men and machines. Photos in which Jean appears in less than spotless white overalls are exceedingly rare. Her

image, carefully cultivated and guarded, is virginal if not angelic. She steps out of her plane to accept the adoration of her public in pristine white silk flying suit – immaculate in figure and speech – an object of youth, beauty, and feminine perfection – uncontaminated by her machine.



**FIGURE 8.1.** Jean Batten 'Supervising the Engine Work at Calcutta'.

In her unpublished memoirs, Batten recalls the two pieces of advice given her by Australian pioneer flyer, Charles Kingsford Smith: 'Don't attempt to break men's records – and don't fly at night.' 'I made a point,' says Batten, 'of ignoring both of them.'<sup>28</sup> But she could not and did not ignore the politics of gender and the power of the modern media to shape and influence the successful achievement of her ambition. Significantly, it was not only association with a masculine physicality that Batten took care to avoid, but also association with feminism. Unlike the androgynous 'tousled boygirl' look of US flyer, Amelia Earhart – a woman whose flying went hand in hand with a feminist agenda, Jean Batten projected an image of elegant femininity – one centred upon the specialness and singularity of the (Hollywood) star. Although *Herald*

news writer, 'Slipstream', gives Jean's story a feminist angle, declaring that Jean Batten 'realises ... she is denied, because of prejudice, most of the humble occupations of the male record breakers' and that 'A woman joy-flier has never made a satisfactory living because there appears to be a public preference for male pilots, even though they may be less skilled,'<sup>29</sup> the words are not reported in direct speech, and the sentiment is not recognisable as Batten's.

Jean Batten rarely spoke or wrote of women's issues; nor did she draw relationship between her record-breaking flights and the possibilities of life beyond the domestic sphere that could or should be opened up to women. Rather, Batten concentrated on the cultivation of special status – a status that served her well during the period of achieved flight records in the 1930s and her brief media comeback associated with endorsement of the Concorde in the 1970s, but ultimately it would not serve her well when feminists began to write women back into the largely male domain of flight history. Here she has been overlooked perhaps primarily because feminism assumes a sisterhood that had no obvious or articulated place in Batten's singular pursuit of her goals. Yet Jean Batten's media presence in Australia reveals a sophisticated recognition and manipulation of the performative nature of gender; and it provides a fascinating picture of the contradictory and conflicted nature of Australian attitudes toward the modern woman and the modern technology of flight in the 1930s. It may also be that Batten has been largely overlooked in the histories of flight because she was merely 'a dominion woman',<sup>30</sup> but as in so many other areas, the story of twentieth century modernity is coming to recognise the centrality of the margins, and the degree to which life at the edges of empire was often the driving force of technological and social change.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Ian Mackersey in *Jean Batten: Garbo of the Skies* (London: Warner Books, [1990] 1992), p. 238.

<sup>2</sup> Newsreel footage included in Ian Mackersey's documentary film, *Jean Batten: The Garbo of the Skies* (Energy Source Productions, 1988), Documentary Film, 20063 NZ Film Archives.

<sup>3</sup> 'Scrapbook of Joyce Prime,' Jean Batten Archives, MOTAT, Auckland, NZ, n.p.

<sup>4</sup> 'Luck and the Record Breaker,' Unpublished memoirs held by Rick Batten. Quotation from the memoirs is reliant upon Ian Mackersey's citation in the Warner edition of *Jean Batten* (1992) as public access to the memoirs is currently restricted. This quote p. 239.

<sup>5</sup> Nancy Bird, *My God! It's a Woman* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1990), p. 116.

<sup>6</sup> Jean Batten, *My Life* (London: George G. Harrap, 1938), p. 252. *My Life* was later re-released as *Alone in the Skies* (1979).

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Mackersey, *Jean Batten*, p. 47.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Jean Batten, *Solo Flight* (Sydney: Jackson & O'Sullivan, 1934), p. 118.

<sup>10</sup> Reference is made to Judith Butler's work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>11</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 October 1936 [the page number is not identifiable on my copy of the microfilm].

<sup>12</sup> Newsreel, 1937, BUFVC Film Archives, LV308, Issue 140, 'Jean Batten arrives at Croyden.'

<sup>13</sup> Jean Batten, *My Life*, p. 252.

<sup>14</sup> Mackersey, *Jean Batten*, p. 233.

<sup>15</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 October 1936, p. 17.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

<sup>17</sup> Mackersey, *Jean Batten*, p. 244.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted by Mackersey in *Jean Batten*, 1992, p. 167.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>20</sup> From the 'Scrapbook of Joyce Prime.' No source or page number given for this clipping.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 October 1936, p. 15.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Cutting from 'Scrapbook of Joyce Prime.'

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> See description and discussion of female pilot's attire in Shirley Laine's *Silver Wings: New Zealand Women Aviators* (Wellington: Grantham House, 1989), p. 17.

<sup>27</sup> Jean Batten, *My Life*, p. 58.

<sup>28</sup> 'Luck and the Record Breaker,' quoted in Mackersey, *Jean Batten*, p. 75.

<sup>29</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 October 1936, p. 10.

<sup>30</sup> J. B.'s description of herself.