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John Gay’s *Polly* and the Politics of ‘Colonial Pastoral’

**Abstract:** In recent years, a number of ‘postcolonial’ readings of John Gay’s *Polly* have appeared that treat the play as an anti-colonial text. The present essay argues that while colonial practices and ‘colonial discourse’ are satirised on a surface level, the text is less radical than it is sometimes taken to be. Its criticism has to be contextualised in Gay’s multi-levelled genre parody, particularly with regard to the pastoral tradition. Furthermore, *Polly* does not present Macheath as a race-conscious rebel; and finally, both plot-structure and ending undercut an anti-colonial reading.