Imagined Homelands

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Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

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Imagined Homelands: British Poetry in the Colonies.

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Unsettling Colonial Poetry

It yet may be our lot to wander wide
Through many lands before at last we come
Unto the gates of our enduring home.

—William Morris, *The Earthly Paradise* (1868)

The State Library of New South Wales in Australia sits atop one of Sydney’s relative high points. From the entry to that sandstone building, the view today takes in first the sprawling botanical gardens and then, after sloping grass lawns, the spectacular harbor into which Arthur Phillip first sailed in January of 1788: “the finest harbour in the world,” he wrote, “in which a thousand sail of the line may ride with the most perfect security.”1 From that vantage point, members of the Cadigal people, the original inhabitants of Sydney’s lands, may have looked out at Phillip’s approaching murri nowie, his “strange canoes.”2 The artist Gordon Syron imagines such a perspective in his painting *Invasion Day*. In the bloodied waters of Sydney Harbor and the skeletal faces of the arriving British, Syron aims to show us “the truth . . . the way it was.”3

We have been told many versions of this historical moment. Most accounts practice what Paul Carter calls “imperial history,” an approach that understands history as a dramatic narrative unfolding on a variety of world stages.4 As spectators of Sydney’s historical drama, we look out from the State Library, across the gardens and to the harbor, picturing storylines shaped by our knowledge of the events that followed—events broadly recognizable within the frameworks of British settlement and Indigenous displacement. Imperial history privileges coherent narrative and, as a result, overlooks elements peripheral to the dominant storyline. Carter’s own version of history, traced vividly through *The Road to Botany Bay* (1987), relies on letters, journals, and maps to move beyond “cause-and-effect” storytelling structures.5 Syron’s accounting takes the form of dynamic visual tableaux. The present volume turns to poetry.
Poetry was everywhere as nineteenth-century British emigrants ventured out to the lands we now call Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and South Africa: printed in the newspapers of emigrant ships; carried as physical volumes; and transported by memory, internalized by the tens of thousands who annually left Great Britain for colonial shores. These poems worked their way into the everyday lives of emigrants, from the bustling urban centers of Melbourne and Cape Town to the Canadian frontier and the Australian outback. They were recited and sometimes sung at public gatherings, printed in local newspapers, circulated by colonial lending libraries, and eventually rewritten, sometimes parodically, as colonial poetic cultures took root and developed into their own.

As a genre far more prominent in the nineteenth century than in our current day, poetry played a significant, necessary role as emigrants shaped new colonial identities for themselves. In Bendigo, for example, a gold town to the northwest of Melbourne, residents in 1863 might have heard Margaret Aitken recite Tennyson’s “The May Queen” at the town’s newly constructed Temperance Hall. A popular Scottish actress who toured Australia through the 1860s, Aitken earned praise from the *Sydney Morning Herald* for her performances at the Australian Library. A Melbourne newspaper reported that “she sobs as she gives the history of Tennyson’s hapless damsel”—the wild, wayward, and tragically doomed young woman of “The May Queen”—“and her sobs are freely responded to by gentle women and strong men.” These scenes of shared public emotion show that the poet laureate’s sentimentality resonated in the colonies, helping to bridge cultural divisions between Great Britain and the new homelands emigrants imagined for themselves overseas.

Scenes of public feeling also show that poetry throughout British colonial spaces was fundamentally political. Settler colonialism was communal by nature, as Lorenzo Veracini has argued, and poetry was vital in establishing that sense of community. Though “most of the colonists who moved to the New Worlds did so individually, without a conscious determination to establish a new, ideal, society,” nonetheless “ideas about entitlements”—about the rights settlers imagined for themselves in the colonies—proceeded from a “corporate” and “pluralistic” sensibility. Scholars have too often overlooked the role poetry played in this communal dynamic, perhaps because we have taken John Stuart Mill too much at his word in imagining that nineteenth-century British poetry was “overheard” and not “heard”: that
poetry in effect was something individuals experienced in isolation from their communities.\textsuperscript{11}

Mill’s notion of overheard poetry reflects a nineteenth-century ideal identified by Virginia Jackson as “lyricization.” Within this model, readers after the eighteenth century came to think of poetry as “requir[ing] as its context only the occasion of its reading,” to the exclusion of all other frames of reference: historical setting, place of publication, medium, author.\textsuperscript{12} To the contrary, as Jackson and others have argued, nineteenth-century poetry was more often shared and public.\textsuperscript{13} Within emigrant communities, poetry’s enthusiastic circulation helped substantiate the pluralism Veracini identifies. After the Bible and religious texts such as Pilgrim’s Progress, the most likely shared literary knowledge for British emigrants would have taken poetic form.\textsuperscript{14} Poetry in the colonial context resonated as especially political, as nineteenth-century poets and scholars came to understand certain forms of poetry as foundational to culture itself: “the ballad theory of civilization,” in Meredith Martin’s notable phrase, whereby a nation was thought to arrive at civilized “unity” through the communal experience of poetry.\textsuperscript{15}

That colonial poetry has for the most part failed to make its way into our understanding of the period—we generally do not find it on literature syllabi, in scholarly studies, or in modern anthologies of British literature—has kept from our attention an archive that significantly enhances our sense of both the nineteenth-century settler-colonial world and the broader canon of British literature. Indeed, the poems examined in this book offer insight not just into British settler culture and history but into nineteenth-century English-language poetry more generally. Edmund Clarence Stedman included in his 1895 anthology of Victorian poetry a significant “selection from the minstrelsy of Great Britain’s colonies.”\textsuperscript{16} Though he disparaged the “Australian yield” as a whole, he still included fourteen poets in his section on Australasia, plus works by English poets who spent extended time abroad. Twenty-three poets appear under the “Dominion of Canada,” and Stedman acknowledges Canada as having produced “a group of lyricists whose merit has made their names familiar” and whose work reflects “the sentiment, the atmosphere, of their northern land.” Even in the nineteenth century, then, and at a time generally uncharitable toward colonial poetics, Stedman (an American) understood the need to include poetry of Australia, New Zealand, and Canada in his “Victorian Anthology.”
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Stedman aside, however, Victorian colonial writing—poetry especially—has historically been understood as second-rate, leaving a vast and diverse body of colonial literature largely unexamined, generally misunderstood, and absent from historical account. Over the course of many archival trips, I became accustomed to the looks of skepticism that greeted me from archivists and friends alike. Both the tone and function of colonial poetry have been especially subject to misunderstanding, in part because scholars have tended to read local verse cultures as necessarily unsophisticated. From this perspective, colonial culture takes the guise of a reproduced, lesser version of British culture. The historian James Belich best represents this approach in arguing that a vast “cloning system” was foundational to nineteenth-century Anglophone settlerism, whereby legal, governmental, and cultural institutions familiar to the British at home were reproduced abroad. David Cannadine has similarly pointed to the “exaggerated regard for British traditions” visible throughout nineteenth-century colonial spaces.

Cultural reproduction was indeed a crucial part of settler colonial culture, and poetry played a necessary role in that process. But in focusing primarily on institutions such as the law and on public exercises like government ceremony, Belich and Cannadine overstate the exactness and pervasiveness of colonial replication while overlooking the many ways settlers distinguished themselves from their British origins—the ways their poetry reveals aspects of colonial culture otherwise difficult to perceive. Literary scholars have too infrequently recognized these counter-narratives because assumptions of aesthetic taste have relegated colonial poetry to the status of “verse.” Like the Victorians themselves, then, historical and literary studies have mostly dismissed colonial poetry as unworthy of critical attention: intellectually bereft and aesthetically disappointing.

The chapters that follow approach colonial poetry from a range of perspectives. This volume is not a thorough history of British colonial poetry; it is neither a survey of colonial literature nor an attempt to view colonial poetry as a system from afar, the “distant reading” advocated by Franco Moretti. “If you want to look beyond the canon,” argues Moretti, “close reading will not do it.” These chapters suggest otherwise. Colonial poetry, long absent from the canon of nineteenth-century British poetry, offers us clear historical, literary, and theoretical payoffs that come in part through the art of close reading. My chapters span a set of texts variously major and minor, published in different media, and composed under diverse circumstances and from manifold environs. I am most concerned with asking how reading British
colonial poetry reshapes our understanding of the period, its history, and colonialism more broadly. The answers to these questions are multiple and include a challenge to limited notions of colonial cultural replication, a more robust sense of poetry’s political compass, and an accounting of colonial homes and homelands that does not immediately take nationalistic form.

Poetic Homelands

The concept of a homeland, composed of attributes both tangible and intangible, rests at the center of this study. I would like first to distinguish my use of the term *homeland* from that of Salman Rushdie, whose 1982 essay “Imaginary Homelands” considers the notion of homeland from the perspective of writers like Rushdie himself: those who, as “exiles or emigrants or expatriates” from their native homelands, “are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back.” *Homeland* in 1982 had yet to achieve its post-9/11 invocation as a space with borders to be defended and governmental departments charged to ensure its security. Rushdie instead writes metaphorically about “reclaiming [not] precisely the thing that was lost . . . not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind.” For Rushdie, the imaginary homeland is the India of the exile’s imagination, an imperfectly recollected land from which he has emigrated and to which he will never return, except as temporary visitor.

The “imagined homelands” of the present study, by contrast, are colonial spaces, shores upon which colonizing emigrants arrived throughout the nineteenth century. For these long-voyaging Britons, the imagined homeland was a future “enduring home” like that of William Morris’s *Earthly Paradise*: the place of arrival that might become, through hard work and perhaps only after the passing of significant time, a place of genuine belonging. My use of the term contradicts the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which defines “the homeland” as Britain itself, specifically in opposition to “British colonies and territories.” Reference to “the homeland,” according to the *OED*, is necessarily a reference to Britain, as suggested by an 1862 *All the Year Round* article cited in the definition: “The walls [of my tent] are decorated with such simple keepsakes and souvenirs of the home-land as I carry about with me.” The author of the *All the Year Round* essay is a traveler in Persia, and he fills his makeshift canvas tent with mementos of home, including “an English pointer” and “tea-things.” In no way does the traveler imagine he might create a homeland for himself in Persia; his “homeland” is a version of Rushdie’s, an England of his mind.
If both Rushdie and the traveler in Persia look behind to their own imaginary homelands, the emigrants of this study instead look ahead: they are in the continuous process of imagining homelands on the shores where they have arrived. As settler colonialists, their forward-looking aspirations require the often violent dislocation of others and the brutal transformation of natural landscapes. Imagining home also involved transporting the familiar to foreign shores, remaking forms of Britain in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and South Africa. This work of remaking took important literary—and specifically poetic—form, sometimes parodic, sometimes imitative, but most often knowingly asserting connections between home and abroad, or between an original home and a new homeland to come.

The chapters of this book propose a range of frameworks for thinking through this imaginative work. In each case, I show poetic genre to be a powerful mechanism supporting the cultural work of British colonialism. I begin with poetry of the voyage out: shipboard poems written in largely parodic registers and demonstrating a playful relationship between popular poetry and the life imagined on colonial frontiers. The four chapters that follow examine facets of colonial literary culture: the replication of canonical poems; the use of dialect to signal particular forms of cultural belonging; the challenges raised by questions of indigeneity; and the public duties of “colonial laureates,” or those poets who took upon themselves the role of colonial spokesperson. A final chapter examines the late-century turn to various forms of nationalism in the British colonies and the intersection of poetry with the racial politics of these newly nationalized spaces.

To view colonialism from the perspective of poetry requires understanding that poems have histories and also that the meanings of poems change as they circulate through different communities and across time. When Felicia Hemans first published “The Homes of England” in the April 1827 issue of *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, she could not have anticipated how that poem would resonate in Sydney in the 1840s, or in Saint John, New Brunswick, in the 1860s. Readings of Hemans’s poem evolved as it circulated through Britain’s colonial spaces. In the chapters that follow, I question as far as possible the changing meaning of poems, and I examine what those meanings might indicate more broadly for the colonial cultures in which they circulated. This style of reading should be understood as one manifestation of what has been called “historical poetics,” a set of methodologies that attend to the situatedness of poetic meaning: the necessary relationship between a poem’s readerly contexts and its meaning.23
The methods of historical poetics insist, in Yopie Prins’s words, that “we cannot separate the practice of reading a poem from the histories and theories of reading that mediate our ideas about poetry.” Poems are mediated by the cultural implications of their structure (metrical, rhythmic, and other formal features), by the media of their publication (newspaper, broadside, letter, chapbook, volume), their place of publication, modes of circulation, and a good deal more. Poems also change with time, as they move through physical and temporal space, inhabiting different media and circulating in different spaces among changing sets of readers. I take as axiomatic, then, that the meaning of any one poem is both contingent and malleable.

Poetry offers cultural and theoretical frameworks distinct from those offered by other genres, the novel in particular. Poetry’s portability—readily scribbled on a scrap of paper, reprinted in a letter, or fixed in an emigrant’s memory—meant it could circulate with ease through Britain’s colonies, spaces that at first were not equipped to publish longer works. Less bound by the physical limitations and expenses of printed books, poems could also adapt quickly to new cultural spaces: the particular cultures of emigrant ships, early colonial cities, or miner encampments in the Australian outback, to take just a few examples. Antoinette Burton and Isabel Hofmeyr’s notion of a “global imperial commons,” a shared literary canon circulating throughout the British Empire, works somewhat differently when considered from the perspective of poetry. Less a core of printed and bound texts radiating out from Britain to colonial peripheries, poetry adapted more quickly to colonial spaces, allowing for more local forms of expression: for example, rewritings of canonical works from colonial perspectives or repurposing of works in new media and with different effects. Burton and Hofmeyr consider printed, physical volumes traversing the globe; this study instead takes as its foundational object the individual poem and its permutations.

Take as just one example the Felicia Hemans poem mentioned above, which in its original form—composed in England, printed in Scotland—reads like a conservative paean to British class structure. An 1868 rewriting of the poem in Saint John, New Brunswick, recycled it a year after Canadian Confederation to celebrate the emerging industrialized Canadian nation, where,

From East to great Pacific’s shore,
The Iron Horse shall land,
Stores of great riches gathered up
By many a toil-worn hand.
Part of the Canadian poem’s effectiveness came from its resonance with Hemans’s lyric, which would have been both familiar and well loved. Equally important were the poem’s departures from the original, which allowed the Canadian poet Letitia F. Simson to assert her distance from the conditions of Hemans’s original. Most significantly, in Simson’s version, the hard-working, “toil-worn” Canadian has access, via the railroad, to the continent’s “great riches”: a narrative of potential upward mobility unimagined in Hemans’s neatly segregated England. (I’ll note parenthetically that Simson’s class progressivism here rests awkwardly but predictably beside her apparent disregard for the Canadian First Peoples to be displaced by the coming railroad and settler expansion.) Revisions to canonical works such as Simson’s appear everywhere in Britain’s colonies, assessing and critiquing colonial culture with an immediacy unavailable to most prose publications.

Simson allows us to go even further, to consider the scene of the poem’s composition: “Written upon hearing John Boyd, Esquire, recite Mrs. Hemans’ beautiful Poem entitled ‘The Homes of England,’ in the Union Street Congregational Church.”27 Pause for a moment to imagine the scene in the Saint John church, the public recitation of a poem that many would have known by heart. “The merry Homes of England!” wrote Hemans in 1827, “Around their hearths by night, / What gladsome looks of household love / Meet in the ruddy light!”28 In the original moment of John Boyd’s recitation, Hemans’s poem no doubt facilitated nostalgic recollections of the English homeland, memories that resonated in a way similar to the feelings Rushdie describes: homelands of the mind, here experienced communally. Simson’s revision is no slight adjustment to Hemans’s original. Her poem emphatically turns Canadian nostalgia into a forward-looking urgency, with both cultural and political consequences. From the scene of shared feeling, then, emerges a revisionary impulse, bristling with immediacy and the charge of an inspired, colonizing energy: “From East to great Pacific’s shore,” imagining homelands to come.

Poetry Everywhere

In addition to its portability, poetry also differed from prose in its ubiquity. “Poetry is everywhere,” wrote an 1869 newspaper aboard the S. S. Somersetshire during a voyage from Plymouth, England, to Melbourne, Australia: “It is circumambient.” No matter where one went, there was poetry. “It is found alike on the mountain top, or the deepest valley. In the waves, in their angriest moods, or the gentle ripple of the tide on the pebbly beach.”29 Insofar
as it is “circumambient,” poetry surrounded British emigrants, journeying from one place to another. Scottish Canadian poet Alexander McLachlin voiced this same sentiment in his 1861 volume *The Emigrant*: “Poetry is everywhere, / In the common earth and air.”

British emigrants carried literary works out with them to the colonies, but they also understood poetry to exist around them, waiting to be heard. Charles Harpur (1813–68), son of Australian convicts, suggests as much in “The Voice of the Native Oak,” a poem first published 13 September 1851, in Sydney’s foremost liberal newspaper, the *Empire*. Harpur instructs his readers to lie under “a lone oak by a lonely stream” and listen to the sounds emanating from it:

> Up in its dusk boughs, down tressing,
> Like the hair of a giant’s head,
> Mournful things beyond our guessing
> Day and night are utterèd.31

The character of these Australian sounds eludes the poet, but Harpur nonetheless testifies to their uncanny presence. In 1851, the poet Judith Wright reminds us, Australia was as yet “largely unexplored, without literature or pride or nationhood, with little to its credit, and seen through European eyes as ugly, barbarous and monotonous.” Accordingly, Harpur does not yet know how to describe the sounds of Australian nature; he does not yet know what kind of poetry the continent will produce. He knows only that poetry—unwritten future poems—resides there in one form or another.

Even explorers generally unfamiliar with poetic composition found inspiration in colonial spaces. Such was the case for John Campbell, a Scottish missionary to South Africa who published a volume on his travels in 1815. With just one exception, Campbell wrote in prose; but on a winter’s morning in July, he looked out over the South African landscape and realized “that no European eye had ever surveyed these plains, and mountains, and rivers, and that [he] was ten thousand miles from home.” In awe of the natural world before him, Campbell discovered poetry. “I snatched a scrap of paper from my pocket, on which I wrote the following lines”:

> I’m far from what I call my home,
> In regions where no white men come;
> Where wilds, and wilder men are found,
> Who never heard the gospel sound.
Indeed they know not that there's one
Ruling on high, and God alone.—
In days and nights for five months past,
I've travell'd much; am here at last,
On banks of stream well named Great,
To drink its water is a treat.—
But here to have the living word,
Enriching treasure! Spirit's sword,
A favour this that can't be told,
In worth surpassing finest gold.
May Bushmen and the Bootchuanas,
The Namacquaas and the Corannas,
All soon possess this God-like feast,
And praise the Lord from west to east.33

What strikes me as important here is Campbell's elision between the “living word” of his Christian faith and that of his own poem, which came to him as an inspiration, scrawled on a stray scrap of paper. Campbell's poem makes sense as part of a colonizing narrative—he was, after all, a missionary—but we should also read it as a work of simultaneous discovery: of both Campbell's god and poetry, omnipresent “from west to east”; they are both, according to Campbell, everywhere; they are both, the memoir suggests, circumambient.

British explorers, colonialists, and emigrants carried poetry within them, in their hearts, their minds, and their blood, importing poetry to spaces where it may not have existed before. But these pioneers also brought with them the capacity to write their own poems, poems that eventually might fall within the long and increasingly wide tradition of British poetics. Campbell's poem, for example, inhabits the South African landscape by way of iambic tetrameter couplets, among the most common structures of British ballad poetry. Words unfamiliar to the average British reader—Namacquaas, Corannas, Bootchuanas—seem less strange within Campbell's familiar metrical structure. So too, Fidelia Hill's 1840 poem on the new city of Adelaide, South Australia, part of the first volume of poetry published by a woman in Australia, carries forward into the streets and shops of the colonial outpost her memories of London and the blank verse of Wordsworth's “Tintern Abbey” (see chapter 5). Adam Lindsay Gordon, riding through the Australian outback in the 1850s, hears in the rhythm of his horse's hooves the galloping
stanzas of Robert Browning’s “How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix” (see chapter 2).

These two perspectives on poetry’s origins—poetry as existing already in distant places versus poetry carried by travelers to foreign lands—offer a broad framework for this volume. Scholarship on nineteenth-century British poetry has for the most part been limited to works composed and printed in the United Kingdom, primarily England and Scotland. Even studies
focused ostensibly on poetry and the British Empire have relied primarily on works composed from within the British Isles—or, at best, continental Europe: Matthew Reynolds’ excellent *Realms of Verse* (2001), for example, attends primarily to Alfred Tennyson, Robert Browning, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Arthur Hugh Clough, as does Christopher Keirstead’s *Victorian Poetry, Europe, and the Challenge of Cosmopolitanism* (2011).

Mary Ellis Gibson’s work on English-language poetry in colonial India, *Indian Angles* (2011), offers an important exception, constructing a historical framework for poetry composed on the Indian subcontinent from the eighteenth century to the early twentieth. Gibson’s study, which “argues for an understanding of a canon that takes nationalism as a subject of inquiry rather than a criterion for selection,” inspires some of my own thinking here.34 Alison Chapman also looks “away from insular Anglocentrism and towards the transnational, international, and cosmopolitan” in her recent *Networking the Nation* (2015), a study of British and American women poets in Italy during the Risorgimento.35 The emigrant spaces of Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and South Africa, however, differed significantly from the imperial spaces of India and the internationalist spaces of midcentury Italy, so one’s approach to the poetry written there must be different, too. These are spaces long inhabited by historians of the nineteenth century, but for the most part overlooked by scholars of poetry.36 Those scholars who have addressed British colonial poetry have most often narrated its contributions toward nationalist projects, the emergence of literary traditions that eventually took national form.37 Rarely have we considered colonial poetry in connection with a larger constellation of nineteenth-century British culture and literary history.38

This volume looks to the global composition and movement of British poetry, works important both to Britain’s domestic literary scene and to Britain’s emerging colonies. Nationalism remains as just one among many constitutive terms. The dates of the project envelop the 1832 and 1867 Reform bills, which opened voting rights and pushed Britain closer toward democracy. The period also represents the height of British colonial efforts and the onset of skepticism with respect to that global project; by the 1860s, emigrants in Australia and Canada had begun the move toward political independence from Britain. Poetry through the nineteenth century participated actively in Britain’s political challenges, at home and abroad, even as it helped settlers negotiate the transition abroad.
I by no means offer a comprehensive study of British colonialism, either from a historical or a literary perspective. India, for example, remains largely absent, as does British Guiana, Sierra Leone, and Hong Kong: territories that were politically and financially significant to the British Empire, but which were not primary destinations for British emigrants. Immigration to the United States is similarly excluded, understood as culturally distinct from settlement in nineteenth-century British colonial spaces, as are poems written in other languages—French poems in Canada, for example, and Dutch poems in South Africa. Focusing on British emigrant poetry has meant that the authors examined, with just one exception, are white, and the absence of nonwhite voices in this body of poetry is a persistent, painful reminder of the iniquities that shaped the British colonial world. I address some of these wrongdoings, specifically in relation to race, in chapters 4 and 6. For the most part, colonial poetry was not a radical political endeavor, and a search there for progressive values will usually turn up short. The political energies of colonial poetry instead tend toward a limited collective rather than the broadly humanitarian, drawing our attention to the immediacy of colonial life rather than distant utopian possibilities.

What follows then is a study of key issues in the history of British settler poetry, problems representative of challenges faced across the British Empire: the transportation and adaptation of British culture; the use of poetry to make foreign spaces seem familiar; and the emergence of new traditions, and ultimately new national identities, in those spaces colonists eventually came to call home.

Reframing Colonial Poetry

My archive of settler poetry allows me to depart significantly from most literary work in British colonial studies. With rare exception, the novel has occupied center stage in calibrating nineteenth-century British engagements with the world. Edward Said’s claim at the opening of Culture and Imperialism (1993)—that the novel stands as “the aesthetic object whose connection to the expanding societies of Britain and France is particularly interesting to study”—continues to reflect the field of Victorian colonial studies more broadly. For example, Lauren Goodlad’s compelling study, The Victorian Geopolitical Aesthetic (2015), takes the novels of Trollope, Collins, Eliot, and Forster as its primary literary objects of study. Not one of the Ten Books That Shaped the British Empire (2014) is a volume of poetry. As a
field, literary scholarship has encouraged the devaluing of poetic texts that were signally important to the ways British emigrants thought of themselves and the work of British colonialism.

Scholars outside the nineteenth century have begun addressing global Anglophone poetry, but that work—such as Jahan Ramazani’s *A Transnational Poetics* (2009)—has focused almost exclusively on the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, rather than taking account of nineteenth-century global movement and circulation. My book shows the many ways poetry opens significant new perspectives on British colonialism. There could be no genre more interwoven with the everyday lives of nineteenth-century British individuals, from religious hymns to the communal recitation of songs and ballads, the circulation of lyrics in newspapers, the reprinting of poems in anthologies, the memorization of poetry as part of grade-school curricula, and the continued practice of reading poems as part of one’s everyday life. In all these ways and more, poetry was built into the lives of British citizens both at home in the United Kingdom and abroad. Poetry, as the author on board the 1869 S. S. *Somersetshire* knew, was “everywhere” in the British colonial world, and we have much to learn from attending to the stories its many forms have to tell.

The chapters that follow propose six distinct frameworks for thinking through British colonial culture. The first chapter, “Floating Worlds: Poetry and the Voyage Out,” examines poetry published in newspapers and journals onboard mid-Victorian emigrant ships en route from England to Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. “Printed at Sea, where the Press is Licensed,” as the *Wanderer’s Gazette* wryly put it in 1841, these publications, more than sixty of which are now housed at the State Library in Sydney and the National Library of Australia in Canberra (see appendix A), capture the enthu-
siasms, dreams, and anxieties of British subjects as they moved toward the colonial periphery. They were printed on presses while at sea and distributed to passengers; in many cases they were later bound as keepsakes for subscribers. These poems and the journals in which they were published say much about the experience of mid-Victorian emigration and the ways in which poetry might have helped to shape that experience. I use the shipboard poems to open a larger conversation about imitation, rewriting, and parody, all of which feature prominently in colonial poetry. In rewriting familiar, canonical poems such as Tennyson’s *Maud*, Hood’s “Song of the Shirt,” and Longfellow’s *Hiawatha*, emigrant poets heading to the colonies
performed a double gesture, looking back toward the literary traditions they were leaving behind while also, through their own innovation and creativity, pointing the way toward a future as colonialists.

Once British emigrants arrived in colonial spaces such as Melbourne, Cape Town, and Halifax, newspapers and literary journals were not long in following, and the poetry of these journals continued the shipboard tradition of parody and revision. My second chapter, “Colonial Authenticity: Circulation, Sentiment, Adaptation,” explores the literary culture of those early colonial cities, tackling head-on the assessment that colonial culture was often derivative, if not plagiaristic. Plagiarism, viewed within the specific context of settler publications, was a necessary component of colonial culture. The chapter begins with the first anthology of English-language poetry published in South Africa, *Poetry of the Cape of Good Hope* (1828), which opens with an unattributed poem by the American poet William Cullen Bryant. Significantly, then, the first anthologized South African poem in English was actually written by an America. Subsequent sections of the chapter consider the ways Felicia Hemans’s form of sentimental lyricism circulated in colonial Australia and Canada, and the degree to which Adam Lindsay Gordon was an outright plagiarist of Robert Browning. Throughout the chapter, I argue that replication and derivativeness were important first steps toward establishing independent colonial cultures: plagiarism, then, might be reframed in colonial contexts as a sort of virtue.

Chapter 3, “Sounding Colonial: Dialect, Song, and the Scottish Diaspora,” uses Scottish dialect poetry to think through the ways poems circulated in emigrant communities. When Thomas Pringle is recognized as founding an English-language poetic tradition in South Africa, we infrequently recognize his Scottish origins, just as we often marginalize the importance of Scottish culture within British colonial culture more broadly. Dialect was a significant feature of colonial poetry, capturing the particular sounds of such localities as the borderlands of Scotland. More than that, dialect signaled an especially communal form of identification, given the long association between dialect and oral culture. Scottish dialect poems in emigrant communities had a special power to invoke a communal consciousness, a sense of being together that arose from having come from the same place. Even into the twentieth century, and in some cases to the present day, Scottish dialect served an important function in the New Zealand and Canadian communities descended from nineteenth-century Scottish
settlers. This chapter offers a corrective to narratives of a roughly unified “British” culture that was transported the world over. In fact, diverse cultures from within the United Kingdom were transported and then adapted, and both dialect and song were important markers of those processes. Other chapters of this book might have examined the specific cultures transported from elsewhere in the United Kingdom: from Ireland, for example, or various regions within England; instead, I take the Scottish case as representative of the larger phenomenon.

British settler colonial engagement with Indigenous peoples has been the subject of much important historical and literary work. Chapter 4, “Native Poetry: Forms of Indigeneity in the Colonies,” takes up the question of indigeneity from the perspective of the second- and third-generation immigrants who liked to call themselves “native.” The chapter looks at the key ways poetry engaged with questions of belonging for colonists born in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and South Africa who grew up knowing nothing but those colonial spaces and yet living, as Elleke Boehmer writes, “culturally in exile.” My focus here examines how colonial perceptions of Indigenous cultures shaped the colonialists’ sense of their own belonging, their own culture in exile. British emigrants’ cultural identification with Britain was, as Simon Gikandi has noted, always “uneasy”: an uneasiness stemming in part from questions of indigeneity and belonging brought into uncomfortable relief by the presence of actual Indigenous peoples throughout British colonial spaces.

Emigrant poets throughout the nineteenth century were expected simultaneously to maintain their roots in the long history of British culture and to be poets recognizably of the colonies: to be at once British and indigenous. When in 1862 the Athenaeum printed a few poems by the then-unpublished Henry Kendall—born near Ulladulla, in New South Wales, and soon to be among the most important of nineteenth-century Australian poets—the journal echoed a popular sentiment of the period in demanding poetry recognizably Australian in nature: “From a new country should come, in time, a new literature. Those images of a virgin nature, found in the sky and landscape, in the Fauna and Flora of Australia, must one day speak to the true poet and find an utterance in his song. . . . One day or other, we shall catch the brightness of an Australian sky on the page of an Australian bard.” Even as the shipboard poems show emigrant nostalgia to operate in both backward- and forward-looking registers, the question of indigeneity here reveals a similar duality in the ways British emigrants
understood themselves after having arrived in the colonies. Second- and third-generation emigrants continued to eye Great Britain from afar and to question the degree to which they could ever belong in the lands where they were born.

As part of the effort to establish local culture, British colonies looked for local poets. These “colonial laureates,” the subject of chapter 5, acted as arbiters of poetic taste and culture. Among the most significant was Richard Henry (later Hengist) Horne, a minor midcentury English poet who arrived in Melbourne in 1852 and produced two years later “the first Poetical Work ever published in this Gold-trading Colony.” Over the next two decades, he would go on to publish in Australia a handful of mildly well-received volumes, including an epic drama. Horne, now known primarily as a correspondent and sometime collaborator with Elizabeth Barrett Browning, was called “Melbourne’s official literary spokesman” for this period, “the unofficial Laureate of Victoria.” Similar accolades accompanied the publications of Susanna Moodie and Charles Sangster in Canada. The work of these pioneers, these colonial laureates, was foundational to the culture of Anglo settler colonialism: the transportation and revision of cultural institutions from home to abroad.

This book concludes with the late-century turn to nationalism throughout British colonial spaces. Significantly, these emerging forms of nationalism were accompanied by an equally enthusiastic celebration of imperial federation: the notion that all of Britain’s colonies—“Greater Britain,” as it was often called—would remain part of a larger Anglo community, united by both loyalty to the queen and shared Anglo-Saxon blood. Race, then, emerged at the end of the century as an organizing principle for “nationalist” feeling. In poetry by the Bulletin School in Australia and the Confederation Poets in Canada, we see how racial identification complicated the turn from British loyalty to national sentiment. Believing themselves to be part of a global Anglo-Saxon community, poets at the turn of the twentieth century experimented with verse forms that were thought to reflect both that imagined racial origin and innovations unique to the specific colonial spaces in which they found themselves.

If we take seriously Isobel Armstrong’s claim that “the effort to renegotiate a content to every relationship between self and the world is the Victorian poet’s project,” then a literal world of new possibilities opens itself to readers of poetry composed in nineteenth-century British colonies. I first glimpsed some of these possibilities as a reader at the State Library of New South Wales, gingerly turning the pages of shipboard newspapers and trying
to imagine the ocean-bound worlds their contributors might have inhabited. What emerged for me over the following years of archival searching was not just a trove of emigrant poetry but a reorientation toward poetry itself: alternate ways of reading and making sense of poems few scholars have thought worthy of attention. Our traditional, canon-based disciplinary practices have by and large excluded colonial poetry. In decentering the established geography of British poetry, I found I needed new strategies for making sense of literary objects that have fallen outside our established reading practices. This volume foregrounds these strategies: argumentative and methodological frameworks for understanding the cultural work of British poetry in the global nineteenth century.