Let us begin, like British emigration in the nineteenth century, with a long sea voyage. Stretching to upward of four months at midcentury, the journey out was an especially “defining moment” for those heading to Australia and New Zealand.¹ Anthony Trollope, who sailed with his wife to Australia in 1871, described the peculiarity of emigrant ship culture in his 1879 novel *John Caldigate*: “No work is required from anyone. The lawyer does not go to his court, nor the merchant to his desk. Pater-familias receives no bills; mater-familias orders no dinners. The daughter has no household linen to disturb her. The son is never recalled to his books. There is no parliament, no municipality, no vestry. There are neither rates nor taxes nor rents to be paid. The government is the softest despotism under which subjects were ever allowed to do almost just as they please.”²

Trollope’s perspective is distinctly middle class, suitable for lawyers and merchants, but the experience of extended leisure would have been shared by both steerage and upper-deck passengers. That in-between state of seeming inertia, monotonous days with little change of scenery, gave passengers ample time to consider the futures that awaited them in the antipodes. Catherine Helen Spence’s novel *Clara Morison: A Tale of South Australia during the Gold Fever* (1854) opts not to dwell on “the monotonous life on board a passenger ship during so long a voyage,” but in her autobiography Spence recalls “all the young men” onboard “reading a thick book [about sheep] brought out by the Society for Promoting Useful Knowledge” and then, in the evenings, passengers dancing “to the strains of Mr. Duncan’s violin.”³

Long weeks at sea were punctuated by the circulation of newspapers that were edited and printed onboard (see figures 2 and 3 for examples of
ship newspaper mastheads). By the 1860s, passengers embarking for Australia or New Zealand would have expected a shipboard periodical. A writer for *Chambers's Journal* explains in 1867 that “in not a few of our large, long-voyaging clipper-ships, it is customary . . . to publish a weekly newspaper. Some person of talent among the passengers undertakes to edit it; its literary contributors are volunteers from all quarters of the ship—Saloon, Second Cabin, Intermediate, and Steerage; the captain generally favours it with quotations from his Log . . . and the medical officer promulgates in it his bulletins of health.”

Imagine the delight of receiving a newspaper after weeks at sea, the comfort of a periodical’s generic familiarity. In their shipboard formats, short works of serial fiction were not uncommon; in many cases, fully one-third of the newspaper content, and sometimes more, was poetry. Emigrant ships from earlier in the century had circulated newspapers as handwritten manuscripts, sometimes accompanied by ornate watercolor illustrations. As shipboard printing became more commonplace, subscriptions were taken out among passengers for bound editions, keepsakes for subscribers printed after ships had reached their destination.

While still onboard, the journals were important in framing the first experiences of emigration. Insofar as passengers at sea had few ways of knowing what was happening outside their ship—“cut off for the time from communication with the great world,” one contributor put it in 1870—the ship journals offered emigrants local news, documenting the goings on of their isolated community: this “small world in which we are now moving,” wrote one journal in 1860; “our own floating world,” wrote another, “which, for the time being, is all the world to us.”

Drawing from the traditions of British periodical printing, including serialization, the mixing of genres, and the anonymity of contributors, the shipboard journals’ foremost duty, attested to in editorials and letters printed in their pages, was to alleviate the monotony of ocean travel: the 1875 *Sobraon Occasional*, for example, “wishes to encourage the fine arts of sea-life—arts of killing time, of grumbling, of gossiping, of chaffing.”

In their negotiation of British literary traditions, however, emigrant ship compositions also contributed to the necessary work of locating passengers both physically and psychologically as they approached the colonial periphery. If passengers aboard emigrant ships were “[not] exactly British,” as Elleke Boehmer writes of British settler colonialists more generally, then their literary productions were not quite British either. Both the passengers and the periodicals reflect an in-between status: not exactly British,
but not quite colonial. In neither subject position could passengers imagine themselves fully at home.

Shipboard publications point to this sense of homelessness by thematicizing the ambivalences of geographic displacement and the anxieties of abandoning home for unknown futures abroad. Though necessarily implicated in greater networks of imperial power, the individuals whose poems I read in this chapter generally imagine themselves without authority, reflecting what the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* call “the backward-looking impotence of exile.”11 Victorian emigrants heading to Australia and New Zealand were themselves between continents and between cultures. The poetry they published en route to the colonies reflects their persistent engagement with both British poetic traditions and emerging diasporic, emigrant identities. Their work points as well to the ways poetry offered British emigrants vehicles for cultural mediation unavailable in prose writing: specifically, by echoing, revising, and parodying popular lyrics and songs recognizable to nearly all nineteenth-century British subjects. Through parodic revisions of canonical British poems, emigrants discovered strategies for mediating feelings of impotence, for exerting control over the in-between states of transition.
An impressive number of British citizens emigrated to Australia and New Zealand in the nineteenth century. In 1852 alone, according to Blackwood’s, 568 ships sailed from Britain for Australia, carrying 87,881 adult passengers.\(^\text{12}\) More recent estimates suggest roughly a half million persons emigrated to Australia and New Zealand in the 1850s, the height of the Australian gold rush and the point at which the stigma of the continent’s convict history seems to have abated (transportation of convicts to New South Wales stopped by 1840; transportation to Van Diemen’s Land, now Tasmania, came to an end in 1853 and continued to Western Australia up until 1868, at which point the entire system was brought to a close).\(^\text{13}\) Life would have varied on board those hundreds of ships, sometimes significantly, but overall there would have been a mix of passengers from different classes. The *White Star Journal*, published on board a ship headed from Liverpool to Melbourne, writes that “if we have on board no members of the titled classes, there are scions of families so old and distinguished, that title would add little to their honors; and there are individuals and families representing the various grades of middle-class life, skillful artisans, and laboring men.”\(^\text{14}\) Passengers of all classes would likely have shared the desire for a better life ahead and experienced what one traveler in 1842 described as the “becoming and kindly spirit of intercourse which ought to prevail among fellow passengers who are bound together by a community of hopes and circumstances.”\(^\text{15}\)

We might imagine the emigrant ship as a community in transit, connected not only by a shared destination and the conditions of the journey but also, for the majority of passengers, by roughly common socioeconomic aspirations. Benedict Anderson’s understanding of an imagined “national consciousness” coming into being “via print and paper” applies here in microcosm.\(^\text{16}\) Ship newspapers linked individuals onboard by means of a shared, if imagined, *emigrant* consciousness, both reflecting and shaping the enthusiasms, hopes, dreams, and anxieties accompanying the move from home to abroad. “We have left our homes for a strange land,” writes the editor of the *Maori Times* onboard a ship headed to Auckland in 1867, invoking with his “we” a shared experience among all his readers: “left friends, and all home-ties, to seek a fortune, and live a new life in another country.”\(^\text{17}\) The anonymity of most contributors deepened the newspapers’ sense of shared purpose: the essays, stories, and poems published onboard reflected communal experiences more than individual viewpoints. In most circumstances,
we cannot know whether their authors were male or female, privileged or poor. And while the newspapers depict some of the more grueling elements of long ocean voyages—deaths at sea, violent storms, sea-sickness, contagious diseases, close quarters—they more commonly offer a brighter, idealized version of emigration. By and large, the ship newspapers project a beau ideal of life in transit, constructing versions of emigrant experience that might replace the otherwise alienating and painful realities of life at sea. When at their journeys’ end passengers paid the subscription fee for a bound edition of the ship journal, they were getting not just a keepsake or a marker of their time at sea but an important alternative to displacement, physical pain, and emotional trauma.

Indeed, accounts from emigrant crossings suggest predominantly horrid conditions. An 1852 article in Household Words jokes that “taking a berth in a ship to Australia is like taking apartments with no exit for four months.” Passengers consigned to rooms without windows or air pipes faced “the risk of being, if not quite stifled, half poisoned.” A decade later, All the Year Round describes the steerage compartment as “a long low narrow apartment, with a very narrow, immovable table and two benches running its entire length.” On either side of this table were small, closet-like spaces designed for sleeping-rooms. “For six persons to inhabit a closet of this size day and night without quarrelling,” the author concludes, “must require a miracle of good sense and good temper.”

John Davies Mereweather, a passenger onboard a ship bound for Adelaide in 1852, describes the “most lugubrious and dungeon-like aspect” of the steerage compartments. “The emigrants complain sadly of the skuttles leaking. Some of their mattresses are saturated with water; consequently they rise in the morning with severe colds.” Mereweather finds fault with his fellow passengers as well: the rough, “heterogeneous mass,” which includes some “wretchedly dirty peasantry with large families” among others who are “small tradesmen” and “respectable mechanics.”

Given the strain of the outbound journey, even for those fortunate enough to be in upper-class accommodations, passengers were no doubt grateful for the distraction offered by ship newspapers. Opening a ship journal from the 1850s or '60s, one might encounter a poem celebrating Florence Nightingale, a humorous lyric on seasickness, a gossipy work entitled “Sketches by Booze,” or a “Lament of the Single Ladies,” voicing the frustrations of women on board. Predictably, one also finds passages from Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner” and various other poems on sea travel,
homesickness, and exploration. One journal, the Pioneer, offers a log of the ship’s journey in tetrameter couplets:

The 16th of November at four o’clock
We left the South West India Dock,
The fog cleared off, and with the tide
The Thames embraced his peerless bride.

Though these poems may at first seem like entertaining filler, recent scholarship on poetry and Victorian periodicals offers a more compelling interpretive framework. Linda K. Hughes notes two important functions for poetry in the mainstream Victorian periodical press: first, poems “could enhance the cultural value and prestige of the periodical itself,” and second, they “could mediate the miscellaneousness and ephemerality” of the newspaper’s content. Poetry, then, was vital to Victorian periodical culture in ways that modern reading practices have tended to obscure.

I propose three characteristics especially constitutive of Victorian shipboard poetry, and I examine each in turn in the sections that follow. First, poetry in ship newspapers regularly turned to a revisionary mode, rewriting well-known poems and poetic forms from the perspective of emigration and colonialism. Building on the rich British tradition of literary revision
and parody, emigrant poets actively borrowed metrical forms and rewrote canonical lyrics, often in parodic registers. I follow Margaret A. Rose in taking a broad view of parody, a mode encompassing not only mockery but also loving imitation, sympathy with the original work. Parody, Carolyn Williams argues, “is a rhetoric of temporality, projecting the difference between a ‘before’ and an ‘after’ as part of its structure.” For Victorian emigrants, before and after marked not only a temporal relationship between old and new, but differences between home and abroad, British and colonial, domestic and foreign. Poetic revision and parodic structure in the ship journals, that is, may be read as an index of shifting identifications, denoting the transition of those on board away from an easy or uncomplicated relationship to the place of their birth.

Second, emigrant shipboard poems often inhabit a structure of nostalgia (from the Greek, the longing to return home). Both “a sentiment of loss and displacement,” as Svetlana Boym suggests, as well as “a romance with one’s own fantasy,” nostalgia often inspires the emigrant’s turn to parody; parody, we might say, becomes a productive way for emigrants to negotiate nostalgia. The emigrant nostalgic casts herself forward, spatially and temporally, toward the colony, all the while glancing back, with mixed feelings, at what she’s left behind. Historians have described British emigrants alternately as having an “umbilical attachment” to their place of birth and, by the end of the nineteenth century, as developing various forms of “colonial nationalism[s],” resistance both to the British government and to imported British culture. The nostalgic poems I read here constitute a midpoint between these two historical models, demonstrating both imagined belonging to an originary (British) homeland and departure from that culture. Ship poetry, I argue, provided ways for emigrants to imagine colonial identities as neither umbilical nor fully independent: strategies for becoming colonial subjects without abandoning nostalgic attachments to home.

Lastly, Victorian emigrant poems express concern for the place of culture, and poetry especially, in the colonies. The British press, quick through the 1850s to encourage emigration among those “willing and skilled to work at useful employments,” also warned that “the colonies are still in a state in which the most robust in body make their way best.” When the English poet Richard Henry (later Hengist) Horne emigrated to Melbourne in 1852 to dig for gold, he publicly distanced himself from his identity as a poet, writing in a letter to the colony’s primary newspaper, “I never thought of coming out to Australia as a man of letters, but as one possessing active
energies and a very varied experience. I did not wish to exercise any abstract thinking, nor to write either poetry or prose, but to do something. . . . This Colony does not desire literature, or the fine arts at present, and I do not desire to contribute to them.”31 To emigrate in the mid-Victorian period, then, was to risk the loss of literary culture, and perhaps “culture” more broadly construed. Emigrant poems voice real concern about this possibility.

**Parody at Sea: Tennyson, Hood, Longfellow**

I'll begin with a mostly lighthearted parody, published in the *Rodney World* aboard the ship *Rodney* on her 1885 voyage from London to Melbourne.

Come into the boat, my lads,
   For the strong north wind has flown;
Come into the boat, my lads,
   I sit on the thwart alone,
And soon on the sea, we'll be wafted abroad;
   Tho' we pull, we shall never be blown.

For the good ship scarcely moves,
   And white sails flapping on high.
The mate, he turns into the bunk he loves,
   For scarce there's a cloud in the sky,
He lays himself down in the bunk he loves,
   To have forty winks, or he'd die.

Come, lads of the *Rodney*, be not like girls.
   Come hither, your luncheon is done.
The ship in the distance, like glimmer of pearls,
   Be our goal, and worthy a one.
Come down, little Cohn, with your beautiful curls,
   And row in the blazing sun.32

Stuck at sea without wind to carry their sails, the young lads of the *Rodney* decide to row a smaller boat over to a nearby vessel, “the ship in the distance.” The likely goal is to break the monotony of the day. The ship in the distance glimmers, mirage-like: a worthy destination, if for no reason other than its proximity and the relief it offers from mind-numbing, sleep-inducing tedium. But the sailors find themselves in trouble halfway between the two ships when a trade wind finally picks up, setting the *Rodney* on its way. For
a horrifying moment it seems their ship will leave them behind, until finally it stops to wait for their return:

She is stopping, our ship, so sweet;
She is waiting for us a-head;
We never will own we’re beat,
Tho’ we all will go early to bed.33

What might be lost to the modern reader, but would have been heard loud and clear in the nineteenth century, is this poem’s playful rewriting of Tennyson’s “Come into the Garden, Maud,” one of the most celebrated lyrics of the period. Tennyson was among the most parodied of Victorian poets; Walter Hamilton’s 1884 collection of Parodies of the Works of English and American Authors opens with a section on the poet laureate, whose every work seems to have inspired a parodic rewriting.34 The original “Come into the Garden, Maud,” part of Tennyson’s 1855 long poem Maud, would have been recognized by most passengers as the model for the ship parody:

Come into the garden, Maud,
For the black bat, night, has flown,
Come into the garden, Maud,
I am here at the gate alone;
And the woodbine spices are wafted abroad,
And the musk of the rose is blown.35

“Come into the Garden, Maud” was published regularly on its own as an isolated lyric. Within the larger context of Maud’s narrative, the poem serves as the pinnacle of the speaker’s delusional, likely imagined romance with his object of desire, Maud. The tone is bittersweet, apprehensive even, anticipating violence to come (the speaker and Maud’s brother duel immediately after, resulting in the brother’s death) and the collapse of the speaker’s romantic fantasy. The differences between the playful, jocular “Come into the boat, my lads” and Tennyson’s longing and ultimately tragic lyric are severe.

Those differences, of course, are part of what make the latter poem both humorous and important. We might, for example, notice that the “woodbine spices . . . wafted abroad” in Tennyson’s lyric become in the ship poem the sailors themselves, “wafted abroad.” The two poems’ sonic and structural resonances foreground the differences in their content: foreground, among
other things, the differences between *Maud*'s domestic, quintessentially English garden and the unforgiving sea of the emigrant ship. Consider the following two stanzas (Tennyson first, followed by the ship poem), which align an imagined romantic idyll—the hero’s wished-for tryst with Maud—with the labor of the sailors in their small boat:

From the meadow your walks have left so sweet
That whenever a March-wind sighs
He sets the jewel-print of your feet
In violets blue as your eyes,
To the woody hollows in which we meet
And the valleys of Paradise.\textsuperscript{36}

In the sails of the ship there comes so sweet
The faintest of trade wind sighs;
While, in the boat, all wetting our feet,
The water commences to rise—
And bailing her out, in this tropical heat,
Is certainly not Paradise.\textsuperscript{37}

Tennyson’s lines imagine a sympathetic relationship between Maud and the English landscape so profound that violets the color of Maud’s eyes spring from paths she wanders. The ship poem highlights instead the sailors’ dislocation from the natural world, their misfortune at being separated from the *Rodney* at just the moment a trade wind picks up, stranded in a boat slowly filling with water.

“She is sailing, our ship!” cry the sailors, “‘Tis clear / She’ll leave us alone to our fate.” I want to suggest that the *Rodney*, the departing ship—ship of state, mother ship—stands for a version of imagined abandonment against which the poem’s form struggles. Not only will the ship wait for her sailors to return (“She is stopping, our ship, so sweet; / She is waiting for us ahead”), those sailors will carry along with them the cultural structures of their original home: aesthetic forms, like *Maud*'s meter and rhyme patterns, whose iterations will maintain connections to the domestic scenes they’ve left behind. “Come into the boat, my lads” frames with a knowing, humorous style the traumatic separation between home and abroad, British culture and an unknown colonial life.

Through parodic echo and emendation, the ship poem establishes a nostalgic relationship to Tennyson’s original lyric and suggests strategies for
overcoming feelings of abandonment and isolation. Parodies of Tennyson published back home, such as those in Hamilton’s 1884 collection, would necessarily have functioned in different registers, given the absence of the specific context—the emigrant ship itself—to make sense of the parodic frame. That so many emigrants turned to parodic rewriting in the ship journals points both to the larger culture of Victorian parody, of which their poems were a part, and to the specific uses of parody within the context of emigration and colonization. The ship poems demonstrate that parody was a crucial mode of colonial reading and writing; the parodic double gesture—lovingly holding something at a distance—was constitutive of the colonial literary scene.

Take as another example the following play on Thomas Hood’s 1843 “Song of the Shirt,” among the most important political poems of the British mid-century. Published in the Nemesis Times in 1876, en route to Melbourne, “The Song of the Ship” transplants Hood’s poem about working-class women’s labor—“Stitch! stitch! stitch!/In poverty, hunger, and dirt”38—into a poem about the monotony of emigration:

With features pallid and wan,
   With colourless cheek and lip,
A lady sat on the quarter-deck,
   Watching the heaving ship.

Pitch, pitch, pitch,
   As her bow in the water dip,
In a tremulous voice, with a nervous twitch,
   She sang the Song of the Ship.39

“The Song of the Ship” exists in a moment predicated on the past; its representation of shipboard monotony comes into focus by way of the Victorian seamstress’s monotony. Life aboard the emigrant ship, in this instance, depends on a backward-looking formal gesture (the ship poet’s echoing of Hood’s poem). As far as the unhappy lady moves from her native England, she remains at a structural level in much the same place. In some ways her stagnation resembles the early British cartographers described by Paul Carter in The Road to Botany Bay, those newcomers to the Australian landscape who saw it less in terms of what was actually there than of what they expected to find. “What was named” by white settlers in Australia, argues Carter, “was not something out there; rather it represented a mental orientation, an
intention to travel. Naming words [for mountains, bays, and sundry geographical phenomena] were forms of spatial punctuation, transforming space into an object of knowledge, something that could be explored and read.⁴⁰ Like those early British explorers, who made use of what they already knew, the shipboard poets borrowed from a shared metrical vocabulary, using formal structure to make sense of the new worlds in which they found themselves. The map of established, familiar meter transformed the unfamiliar into recognizable, navigable space.

Of course there’s more than meter in the backward gesture of “The Song of the Ship”; the poem wouldn’t succeed if not for the specific verbal cues, the sonic echoes that recollect “Stitch, stitch, stitch” in the ship poet’s “Pitch, pitch, pitch.” But the converse argument is also true: the verbal cues wouldn’t work if not for the metrical backbone to which they’re bound. Arguments about class (the working-class seamstress who becomes an upper-class British émigrée) or gender (stultifying women’s labor, a constrained spatial compass) will be incomplete without attention to the poem’s formal tensions between metrical stasis (evoking structural historical fixedness) and the “pitching and tossing work” of the poem’s content (drawing attention to the specific contingencies of its composition).⁴¹ The metrical scaffolding helps make sense of the unfamiliar. One both knows and does not know “The Song of the Ship”; it is at once recognizable and foreign.

Metrical structure in the shipboard compositions offers a framework for feeling at home in a poem, whether one recognizes the specific referent—hear Hood’s poem, which itself echoes Tennyson’s 1842 “Break, Break, Break”—or not. I understand meter, both in this example and more generally, to be historically located and culturally ordered, particular to specific times and places.⁴² As such, the shipboard poet finds space for herself within Hood’s metrics because she recognizes her experience of monotony to be similar to those of the seamstress. The point is not that Hood’s meter is necessarily monotonous, but that “The Song of the Shirt” had, through its circulation and absorption within popular Victorian culture, become representative of monotony, allowing the shipboard poet to manipulate that sense of monotony for her own specific purposes.

Another style of parodic imitation appears in the Fiery Star Gazette, a journal printed in 1863 on a voyage from Cork (via London) to Brisbane. A play on Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s 1855 Hiawatha, the Fiery Star poem makes explicit its connection to Longfellow in its title: “Lines after the Style of Hiawatha.”
From the shores of dear old England,
From the mighty town of London,
Sailed forth our godly vessel,
Sailed forth upon the ocean;
To contend with storms and tempests,
And in triumph bear us onwards
To the distant Port of Brisbane—
To the colony of Queensland.  

Though an American poem, *Hiawatha* circulated globally as one of the best-known English-language poems of the century. According to *Chambers's Journal* in 1856, Longfellow was “the most popular poet living” and *Hiawatha* “America’s first written epic.” At least one British critic found Longfellow’s meter especially suited to his theme—“In it, we hear, as it were, the swaying of trees, the whirr of wings, the pattering of leaves, the trickling of water”—but more readers delighted in its parodic iterability. Not only in America and Britain, but in Australia, too, parodies of *Hiawatha* proliferated. The *South Australian Register*, for example, notes that the poem “has created quite a furor amongst the satirical parodists.” The journal then reprints a San Francisco paper’s metrical report on court proceedings:

In the Mayor’s Court this morning,
Monday morning, blue and blear-eyed,
Blear-eyed soakers from the lock-up,
Came like Falstaff’s ragged army.  

Unlike this particular parody, however, which attaches Longfellow’s trochaic tetrameter to material entirely dissociated from the original poem, the ship parody—“Lines after the Style of Hiawatha”—edges close enough to *Hiawatha* itself to raise the interpretive and political stakes of its publication.

The original *Hiawatha* concludes dramatically with the Native American chief retreating from earth by canoe as the white man, bearing Christianity, comes to usurp his power. Longfellow strains to present the Europeans’ arrival in North America as benign and even beneficent, to celebrate a moment that from other vantages reads as tragedy:

And the evening sun descending
Set the clouds on fire with redness,
Burned the broad sky, like a prairie,
Left upon the level water
One long track and trail of splendor,
Down whose stream, as down a river,
Westward, westward Hiawatha
Sailed into the fiery sunset,
Sailed into the purple vapors,
Sailed into the dusk of evening.

And the people from the margin
Watched him floating, rising, sinking,
Till the birch canoe seemed lifted
High into that sea of splendor,
Till it sank into the vapors
Like the new moon slowly, slowly
Sinking in the purple distance.\(^{48}\)

Hiawatha sails toward the descending sun, conscious of his people’s eminent decline. His death participates in a larger Victorian narrative trope of dying Indians that, according to Kate Flint, “found resonances in a British readership well prepared to celebrate its capacity for compassion at the loss both of a specific people and of an unrecapturable version of preurban society.”\(^ {49}\)

I will have more to say about the trope of the dying Indian and its specific manifestations in Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, in chapter 4. For now, I want to point out that in borrowing both the Hiawatha form and the specific language of sailing toward a distant horizon (echoing even Longfellow’s anaphoric “Sailed into” with his own “Sailed forth”), the poet on board the Fiery Star implicitly places his fellow passengers within a colonizing narrative, projecting their personal experiences of shipboard travel onto the map of European expansion:

Then arose the mighty east wind,
Rushing, roaring, from the eastward,
Raised on high, the surging billows,
Blew the spray into our faces.
Stowed, or reefed, was all our canvas,
Close reefed was the mizzen-topsail,
Still the ship was struggling onward—
Onward to her destination.\(^ {50}\)
Like “Come into the boat, my lads,” the Hiawatha parody points back to a familiar, popular poem and entertains both affinities to and distinctions from that original work. The gesture back to home would have been doubly complex on board the Fiery Star, as the ship had been chartered by a priest, Father Patrick Dunne, to transport poor Irish families to Queensland in the aftermath of the great famine: “for the benefit of his poor, sorely-tried countrymen and countrywomen, many of whom were saved by his splendid exertions from the fearful effects of famine or the dreaded degradation of the poor-house.”

Other poems in the journal reflect an explicit Irish nationalism:

When Ireland’s released from the yoke of Saxon,  
Och! then will our hearts beat with glee;  
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .  
Och! Erin Machree,  
It’s dear ye’re to me,  
Thou small little isle of the sea.

More accommodating to the British, an essay titled “Our Adopted Land” suggests that “one of the brightest features of the present emigration is the combination of the Celtic and the Anglo-Saxon races.” Irish emigrants, the essay goes on to say, will now work alongside the British to build the Queensland colony together: “There will the dauntless spirit of the Celt find ample scope to vie in honest rivalry with the boundless enterprise of the Anglo-Saxon. Through their united energy will be ensured the prosperity of their adopted country.”

The Irish at home, long accustomed to thinking themselves under the thumb of British imperialism, may well have identified in some respects with the colonized Hiawatha rather than the colonizing white man. A scathing 1856 Irish Quarterly Review essay, for example, described Longfellow’s arriving colonists as “Iagoos” [sic] to Hiawatha’s Othello. But en route to Australia, now colonists themselves, the Irish aboard the Fiery Star seem more easily to occupy the aggressor’s role. The Fiery Star publications reflect what Katie Trumpener identifies as the “reconciliation” of local tensions in colonial spaces: “The empire is not a site of struggle and conquest [among the English, Scottish, and Irish] but a place in which Britain is successfully reconstituted, in miniaturized form.” Hiawatha’s death sail thus becomes, via revision and parody, the triumphant struggling of a people bound for a greater destiny. According to the Fiery Star Gazette, the
emigrating Irish will now join the British in “defend[ing] the ruined hut against the aborigines of Australia.”

“Come into the boat, my lads,” “The Song of the Ship,” and “Lines after the Style of Hiawatha,” then, all work playfully to situate emigrant experiences both within a larger literary tradition and in relation to homelands left behind. That these poems would also have resonated politically among their shipboard readers—both explicitly, through their content, and implicitly, through their formal echoing and revision—should, I hope, be clear. The ship poems work in one register to confront the monotony and dislocation induced by ship travel, but they also suggest a greater communal purpose, providing a venue for reflecting on passengers’ shared experiences of emigration. “Here are a number of people, all of them perforce separated for a time from their ordinary circumstances,” writes one contributor to the Caldera Clippings, published in 1877 on a trip from England to Cape Town. It will be beneficial, the essay continues, to “disconnect one’s-self temporarily from one’s natural prejudices and tastes, and to be ready to accept the general conditions of the moment . . . to forget one’s-self, in short, and to think first of the general comfort of the little community.”

Many of the journals address head-on their political aspirations. A good number proclaim absolute removal from partisan viewpoints: for example, the Sobraon Occasional, sailing to Melbourne in 1875, “recognizes no law but that of its own spasmodic existence, which is that it should appear in public whenever it feels so disposed. It has no great cause at heart. It does not care what Party is in. It deals impartially with Tory, Liberal, and Radical.” On the other hand, the Aconcagua Times—sailing from Adelaide on a return trip to Plymouth in 1879—pointedly insists that on “our floating commonwealth,” the journal’s “principles will be strictly Conservative. It will support by its influence the government, the discipline, the good order of the organised society in which for six weeks we are here to live.” The journal of the Argo, a naval ship sailing from Portsmouth to Madras in late 1857—carrying the Left Wing 68th Light Infantry to support British forces in India after the rebellion earlier that year—declares that its “political opinions . . . are liberal—very liberal, and it will on all occasions, to the best of its ability, do all that lays in its power to forward the liberal interests of the country.”

My point here has less to do with the specific politics of any one ship and more with the fundamental idea that the ship journals would have been understood by their contributors and readers to be political ventures, to have
political value: more often than not, they were explicitly framed as such from the outset. Within this context, the shipboard revisions and parodies open themselves to a variety of political uses. Parody itself, as Williams argues, “can be—and often simultaneously is—both conservative and progressive, since it preserves the memory of past forms while turning away from them into its own, more highly valued, present.” When poems like “Come into the boat, my lads,” “The Song of the Ship,” and “Lines after the Style of Hiawatha” look both behind and ahead, they acknowledge their literary and cultural origins while writing their own present and future. Emigrant ship poets began the process, continued on arrival in the colonies, of constructing new settler identities without fully abandoning the old. The circulation of these poems on board established these identities in necessary relation to broader emigrant communities.

**Forms of Remembering**

Like parody, nostalgia also works in divided temporal and spatial registers. Nicholas Dames suggests that “a nostalgic looking-backward is . . . necessarily a looking-forward—a dilution and disconnection of the past in the service of an encroaching future.” One contributor to the 1870 *Commissary Review* captures this nostalgic double gesture, noting that “we, on board this vessel, going out to seek a new home, in a country to most of us unknown—going, some to seek a livelihood, others for the conservation of that boon good health—although our faces are turned toward the South, yet cherish the fond remembrance of our dear old English home.” An 1866 lyric from an emigrant ship headed to Cape Town elegantly echoes those thoughts and feelings:

> Far from that best of harbours, home,  
> From all that's dear to me;  
> Where'er I stray, where'er I roam,  
> My thoughts are still of thee.

The sentiments of this poem—no matter how far I go, my love, I think of you—appear consistently throughout the shipboard publications, their significance regularly augmented by way of metrical structure. The poet who thinks of his love “where'er [he] roam[s]” does so by way of common meter: alternating lines of iambic tetrameter and trimeter, a structure standard in both English hymnody and ballad poetry. His loving thoughts, then, are mediated by a metrical form that itself enacts a nostalgic looking-backward, to the songs of childhood, the sounds of home.
As poetic structures that would have been familiar to anyone growing up in nineteenth-century Britain, ballad meters especially communicated the sense of home and the new pain of distance from that home. The following ballad-like poem, which imagines a fantastical “fairy land” only to be brought back harshly to the cold present of an emigrant ship, was published on an 1872 journey from Liverpool to Melbourne.

I stood in a land, a fairy land,
Of fruit, and flower, and tree,
Of sunny mount and sparkling fount,
The flower of my heart with me.

I clasped her hand—a fair, soft hand,
And gazed into eyes of blue,
More deep and clear than the azure sphere,
Than the light of heaven more true.

As I clasped the hand—a fair, soft hand,
Of her I treasured most,
I awoke, half mad, for I only had
Fast hold of my cold bed-post.

Unlike most ship poems, this lyric is signed by its author, Xaverius Thomas McNiven; the following month’s issue posts an obituary notice for McNiven, who “suffered from what is supposed to have been bronchial decline. . . . The damp climate of Ireland proving too much for him, he [had] determined, if the climate suited him, to reside permanently in Australia.” The dying McNiven’s lyric reads as doubly desperate, straining toward a fantastical future with his beloved while at the same time nostalgic for a past, perhaps equally fantastical, when they were once together. The poem’s ballad meter contributes to its pathos, gesturing toward the lost comforts of familiarity and home.

Among a subset of educated emigrants, complex metrical structures offered further layers of historical and cultural resonance. For example, an 1875 lyric published on board the Sobraon during a voyage from Plymouth to Melbourne frames nostalgia by way of elegiac couplets, the metrical form Ovid used in composing his poem of exile, the Tristia. Unlike the parodic poems discussed in the previous section, “A Dream” maintains a sincere, devotional relationship to Ovid’s original work, offering an elegant and moving meditation on the author’s beloved, left behind in England while he ventures out to Australia:
Was it a voice, or a dream, or a sigh of the wind through the gloaming
Came to my soul in its pain, soothing the sorrow to sleep?
Or was it thy spirit, my darling, over the blue waters roaming,
Sought me, and found from afar, murmuring—“Love, do not weep”?

Why did you come to me, O my love; were you sleeping or waking?
How did you find me so far over the sorrowful seas?
Did your heart, in its loneliness, feel that my heart in its anguish, was breaking?
Did the wings of some pitying dream waft you safe to me here on the breeze?

Elegiac couplets—alternating lines of dactylic hexameter and pentameter—were written before Ovid, but primarily as epigrammatic witticisms; it was the Roman poet who opened up their expressive potential. Exiled from Rome in the year 8 CE, he was sent to Tomis, an outpost colony on the peripheries of the Roman empire, where he spent his remaining years dwelling among those he called “barely civilized.” Peter Green argues that Ovid’s exile in Tomis “cut him off, not only from Rome, but virtually from all current civilized Graeco-Roman culture” and “rubbed the poet’s nose in the rough and philistine facts of frontier life.” Ovid composed the first part of his Tristia while voyaging from Rome to Tomis. “Every word,” he informs his readers at the end of the poem’s first part, “was written during the anxious days of my journey.”

One begins to see why an educated British emigrant, feeling dislocated from his love, traveling by ship to the far reaches of empire, might settle on the elegiac couplet as an appropriate vehicle for expressing himself. Both Tomis and Australia represent, for ancient Rome and Victorian Britain, respectively, the outermost limits of empire; both colonies impose a near-total isolation from home. More particularly, both Ovid and the ship poet are compelled to leave behind their loved ones and find themselves cast off, alone, adrift. Though not British in origin, Ovid’s elegiac couplets represent for a European emigrant the larger compass of Western civilization: a cultural frame one might fear losing while voyaging to the antipodes. Much as Anderson understands ideas of both home and nationality as “less experienced” by exiles “than imagined, and imagined through a complex of mediations and representations,” poetic form becomes in the ship publications a mediator of cultural identification, a nostalgic structure through which home might be imagined. As in the parodic structures of “Come into the boat, my lads” and “Lines after the Style of Hiawatha,” this sort of formal
echoing operates on both conservative and progressive registers, looking behind to the poet’s native England while also looking ahead, tentatively, to a new life beyond. The author of “A Dream” remains haunted by his past, the voice that follows him out to sea; he tries by way of the poem to understand his relationship to the past, the present, and the future. The poem thus becomes a tool for mitigating nostalgic pain.

The third and fourth stanzas of “A Dream” further clarify the poet’s nostalgic relationship to formal imitation, suggesting the ways metrical repetition might have been understood as a coping mechanism for traumatic loss and profound change:

I saw you not, dear, though I felt your presence around and about me,
Like a girdle of infinite calm, and your voice for a moment I heard,
Like the wail of a harp by the wind softly touched, thro’ the spell that enwound me,
In a language that souls understand, or the sweet weary song of a bird.

And over my soul there swept a measureless, infinite longing
To clasp you again to my heart, in spite of the years and of fate,
And I turned from the blaze of the sun, and saw where the shadows were thronging,
But you were not there—you were gone, and I wept, for I knew I must wait.

Invoking the Romantic figure of an Aeolian harp, the poet feels an absent presence: fleeting, ephemeral, and yet unmistakable, like the bounds of Englishness that girdle round the Australian emigrant. The voice that follows him from shore, felt bodily and emotionally with “infinite longing,” structures his outbound journey, his venture into the unknown. Through its iteration and the gradual changes in its echoing form, the emigrant poet inhabits a nostalgic structure so as to understand his own experience of difference and distance. Ovid’s elegiac couplets allow the Sobraon poet to recognize what it means to be displaced and yet still attached, an emigrant cast off and yet still a European deeply rooted in Western culture and tradition.

**Anticipating Colonial Culture**

But what was to be the place of culture and tradition at the far reaches of British colonization? How would emigrants replace the homelands they’d left behind? The five chapters that follow explore in different ways the complexities of these questions. Onboard emigrant ships, the answers tended to be exhortative: “Be men, be gentlemen,” proclaims one ship journal in 1870,
“and let each one feel that the heritage of our England is a noble patrimony and one we will seek to hand down as the richest dowry untarnished to our children.”77 “Emigrant!” writes another ship journal in 1862, “cultivate polite literature in order to be worthy of your future learned fraternity!”78

According to the British press, however, that literary heritage was not manifesting in a culture of colonial poetry. Francis Adams, writing in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1892, criticizes “Australia’s neglect of her ‘men of letters,’ and especially of her poets”: “the average Australian cares nothing for, and indeed knows nothing of” the foremost Australian poets of the day, “[Henry] Kendall, and [Charles] Harpur and [James Brunton] Stephens. . . . The case for the hopeless illiterateness of the average Australian seems made out.”79 Not only were colonial Australians, so it was said, uninterested in poetry, but poets themselves found their labors at odds with the requirements of colonial life. An 1884 *Temple Bar* essay on Adam Lindsay Gordon, the best-known midcentury Australian poet, suggests that Gordon may not have committed suicide at the age of only thirty-six if not for his commitment to poetry: “It may be maintained that Gordon’s troubles sprang from his cultivation of the Muses; and here the average emigrant is not likely to follow his example.”80 Poetry in fact was thriving in Australia by the later Victorian period, as the final chapter of this study shows. But for British citizens embarking on emigration, the perception of colonial culture, mediated by the British periodical press, was more important than the reality.

Fin-de-siècle British critics mostly agreed on the derivative nature of Australian colonial poetry. But the *Westminster Review* points out with a mix of encouragement and patronization that, “during the earlier stages of ‘nation-making,’ intellectual progress and development naturally remain in abeyance”; poetry, then, will come to Australia once it establishes itself on firmer political ground:

The fact that the Muse of the Antipodes has not yet wholly cut her leading-strings and abandoned an almost slavish imitation of English and American models, results from the circumstance that hitherto the mass of the inhabitants has been too busily engaged in “nation-making” to permit primarily of the enjoyment of those years of widely diffused liberal education indispensable to the creation of the literary taste and “atmosphere” of culture; and, secondarily, of that patient, studious development of the imaginative faculty, and of the cultivation of its “voice” in metrical expression which learned leisure and the existence of a literary class *in se* tends to foster.81
According to the Westminster, the Australian poetic impulse is, for the time being, doomed either to silence or to “slavish imitation,” not only because of unsettling geographic and cultural displacement, but also because of the absolute commitment—and subsequent loss of leisure time—required by the colonial enterprise. The poet Richard Hengist Horne, who spent nearly two decades in and around Melbourne, reflects on these views in an unpublished epic from 1866, *John Ferncliff: An Australian Narrative Poem*: “Here was reality, and no romance: / No words his practiced [hand?] could enhance.”

Especially in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, Australia was characterized as a place of gritty realism (“no romance”), a place unconducive to the imaginative work of poetic composition.

The sixth issue of the *Superb Gazette*, published in 1882 during a journey from England to Melbourne, offers what might be read as a poetic meditation on this theme. “Lines: Composed on the death of a chaffinch, which flew on board while going down Channel, and died in lat. 42˚ S., long. 82˚ E.,” was written by one H. Alderton, and it mourns the death of a bird whose ill fate landed it onboard the ship as it sailed from the English shore.

> Poor little bird, how sad a fate,  
> How sorrowful, how desolate;  
> Far from green fields and pleasant lane,  
> To perish on the mighty main;  
> No loving mate or kindred near,  
> But all so bleak, so cold, and drear.

Though far from achieving the gravitas of Percy Shelley’s skylark (“Hail to thee, blithe spirit!”), Alderton’s chaffinch nonetheless takes on attributes of a Romantic songster. Notice in the lines that follow how the diminutive bird’s song comes to signal, first, national belonging, and then the experience of captivity and exile:

> Poor little bird, two months before,  
> Sweetly thou sang on England’s shore,  
> And hopping gaily all the day,  
> How happy passed the time away,  
> With sweet young mate to cheer the hours,  
> In hawthorn hedge or shady bowers.  
> But venturing upon the sea,  
> You fell into captivity;
And on a ship far outward bound,
This luckless little bird was found;
And torn from every earthly tie,
Was caged to pine away and die.
Week after week thy fragile form
Endured the tempest and the storm;
Week after week! oh, what an age,
Within a narrow prison cage,
With nought but bitterness and pain,
An aching heart and throbbing brain.
But Death at last, poor suffering bird,
Thy sorrowful lamenting heard,
And touched thee with his magic hand;
When nearer drew the distant land,
When hope beat high in every breast,
Thy weary spirit sank to rest.

Alderton points to the English landscape—“green fields,” “pleasant lane,” “hawthorn hedge,” and “shady bowers”—with a nostalgia characteristic of emigrant writing. Within this space, its rightful home, the chaffinch sings with full-throated ease. Caught unwittingly aboard an emigrant ship, the poor bird suffers, pines away, and finally dies. Its “fragile form” cannot endure the loss of English landscape, the change of climate, and the experience of captivity aboard the ship.

Birds such as the chaffinch were regular freeloaders on emigrant vessels: “Sometimes,” notes an 1858 Chambers’s Journal essay, “birds seem to be induced by mere curiosity or love of mankind to put out from their native shore, and alight on ships at sea.” I read in the death of this particular chaffinch a degree of skepticism about the culture of Australian colonialism and the possibility for genuine belonging available to British emigrants. Though the passengers aboard express enthusiasm as they approach their new home—“hope beat high in every breast”—the chaffinch cannot bear the final mark of separation from its original home, the arrival in the colony. Perhaps the bird’s “aching heart” and “throbbing brain” reflect the experiences of any British citizen transplanted so far from home, “torn from every earthly tie.” More specifically, birdsong was understood throughout the nineteenth century as a figure for lyric poetry; the chaffinch poem suggests that lyric song, or even poetry more generally, will not readily thrive on foreign soil.
Both the anxieties implicit in Alderton’s 1882 poem and the critiques of colonial “slavish imitation” from the *Westminster* remind us of how poetic revision and parody shaped works such as “Come into the boat, my lads,” “The Song of the Ship,” and “Lines after the Style of Hiawatha”: poems that both foreground imitation and insist, with a wink and a smile, on difference. Emigrant ship poets embraced imitation strategically, to negotiate the emotional trials inherent to geographical and cultural change. The elegiac couplets of “A Dream” may similarly be called imitative, and yet their recontextualizing of classical poetic tradition should instead be seen as a self-conscious, stylized work of replication, one with clear emotional value.

Poems such as these challenge commonplace assumptions about colonial derivativeness such as those voiced by the British press at home. British emigrant poetry intentionally maintained the structure of a greater cultural replication (from core to periphery, home to abroad); to critique it on account of its derivativeness misses the point of its composition. The chapter that follows turns to the colonies themselves and to the circulation of imitative poetry within emigrant communities. What we see there expands the ship journal paradigm and points to the foundational place of imitation in British colonial poetics.