Plagiarizing Culture

We have seen that nineteenth-century colonial poetry, according to Victorian critics, was essentially derivative and drawn primarily from British sources. The accusation of plagiarism—direct and intentional copying—naturally weighed heavily on colonial writers. For Oscar Wilde, the connection between Australia and fraud was axiomatic, originating in Australia’s foundations as a penal colony. His 1889 essay “Pen, Pencil and Poison” showcases the common nineteenth-century association between forgery and penal transportation by way of the poet, painter, and poisoner Thomas Griffiths Wainewright (1794–1847). A minor literary figure in the 1820s, Wainewright in 1837 was found guilty of forgery, sentenced to transportation for life, and sent to the British colony at Hobart (charges that he had murdered several family members by poisoning were never proved). Wilde writes of Wainewright as “an art-critic, an antiquarian, and a writer of prose, an amateur of beautiful things and a dilettante of things delightful, but also a forger of no mean or ordinary capabilities, and . . . a subtle and secret poisoner almost without rival in this or any age.” Wainewright’s crimes, in Wilde’s view, “seem to have had an important effect upon his art,” bringing a “strong personality to his style” that had been lacking before his turn to sin.

As a forger in what was to become Australia, Wainewright would have been in good company. Sydney’s most important colonial architect, Francis Greenway (1777–1837), had been transported in 1814 for forgery. One of Australia’s noted early landscape artists, Joseph Lycett (c.1774–c.1825), was also transported to Sydney in 1814 on conviction of forgery. Both thrived in the antipodes. In general, Britain tended to transport not violent criminals
but instead those convicted of “minor theft,” robbery, larceny, swindling, and forgery: all “crimes against property,” as Robert Hughes has shown. One writer in the 1830 *Sydney Gazette* argued for leniency toward those convicted of forgery, which in both Britain and Australia was still a capital offense: “We are of opinion, notwithstanding its injurious consequences to society, that it ought not, except in cases of singular enormity, to be punished with death.” With so many rehabilitated forgers contributing to Sydney’s early development, such a position made good sense.

Establishing literary culture in a new colony always raises questions of authenticity, and this would have been especially true on the Australian continent, a space already associated in the British mind with crimes of unauthorized replication. Even in nineteenth-century America, as Lara Langer Cohen has shown, *fraudulence* and *literature* were intertwined terms, a result of “the hopelessness of distinguishing impostures, forgeries, plagiarisms, and hoaxes from literature proper.” In imagining new homelands on the Australian continent, colonial poets regularly demonstrated what Susan Stewart in a different context identifies as “crisis[es] in authenticity.” Nonetheless, this chapter takes Wilde’s lead in finding positive aesthetic consequences to Australia’s criminal origins. Like Wilde, who sees Wainewright’s acts of forgery as foundational to his artistry, I reframe unauthorized literary replication as constitutive of emerging British colonial cultures, both in Australia and elsewhere.

Let’s start by considering cultural replication from a different perspective. When Oliphant Smeaton wrote in the 1895 *Westminster Review* of the “slavish imitation” practiced by nineteenth-century Australian poets, he was casting in a negative light what James Belich calls the “cloning system” of nineteenth-century Anglophone settlerism. The accusation of “slavish imitation” registers differently when read against the history of Australia’s great forgers; *derivativeness*, along with *copying* and *forgery*, should be understood as dismissive terms for what in other contexts is called “cultural replication.” Such dismissiveness tends to be yoked primarily to literature and the arts, and not to other cultural institutions. For example, when in 1835 the *Eclectic Review* wrote about the just-approved colony of Adelaide, replication and derivativeness appeared as entirely positive outcomes for South Australia: “If the present experiment should . . . be attended with success, a foundation will be laid for the existence, in the southern hemisphere, of a nation, in which the laws, the language, the religion, and the institutions of England may be perpetuated; and in which they may form the character,
and ensure the happiness of unborn millions.” We see here and throughout the nineteenth century a profound double standard between replicating cultural institutions (laws, language, and religion), understood as a moral good, and replicating works of art, which critics deride without mercy.

Often lost among high-minded readers of nineteenth-century colonial literature is the comfort such derivativeness offered migrants arriving on the shores of Adelaide, Halifax, and Cape Town, among many other places. Weary from their long journeys, British emigrants found relief and pleasure in just the sort of derivativeness that Smeaton treats with contempt. Richard Henry Horne writes in 1853 that on “reach[ing] Melbourne, we were landed on a wharf which was overwhelmed with a confusion of men and things and carts and horses.” Horne and his compatriots are “exhausted” and prone to “despair” as they attempt to secure lodgings on their first night in the colonial city. An 1842 arrival to Wellington writes in a similar vein that “great numbers of our fellow-passengers are half-starved through want of employment. . . . A poor man can hardly be in a worse place than this. It is a most miserable country in the winter; such continual storms and tempests of rain and wind prevail as you in England have no notion of.” Emigrants in such circumstances valued the comforts of familiarity. Catherine Helen Spence recalls in her autobiography that, on arriving in the new colony of Adelaide in 1839, she “read over and over again” John Aikin’s Select Works of the British Poets (1820), along with “[Oliver] Goldsmith’s complete works,” both of which she “thoroughly mastered.” According to Geoffrey Serle, emigrants in the colony of Victoria through the 1850s “took immense pride in their creation of ‘another England’, and assumed that it was the virtue of British institutions which had made such success possible.” Here again the focus remains on “institutions” such as religion and the law, but for immigrants like Spence the aesthetic sphere would have been equally significant.

Given the weight nineteenth-century emigrants attached to cultural replication, we need a new set of strategies for considering early colonial literary derivativeness and reprinting, strategies that move beyond the simply dismissive. Rather than noting condescendingly that “the spirits of Felicia Hemans and Martin Tupper haunted the antipodean air”—this from the Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English—we should instead reflect on the important and even necessary work of colonial derivativeness and the ways poems by Hemans and Tupper actually circulated in those spaces. Like the nostalgic structures of the shipboard poems discussed in chapter 1, early colonial poetry looked both ahead and behind in temporal
and geographic registers, often inhabiting simultaneously both past and present, British and colonial. If the spirit of Felicia Hemans “haunted” the air of colonial Melbourne or Auckland, that was no doubt because Hemans was among the most popular English poets of the early nineteenth century. In recreating British culture in the antipodes, it would have been odd if emigrants in the new Victorian colony had not turned to Hemans—or to Martin Tupper for that matter, “the Royal Family’s favorite poet, one of the best-selling Victorian bards, who was a household name on both sides of the Atlantic until tastes changed in the 1860s.”

We should also remember the larger context of nineteenth-century literary copying and reprinting, which allows us to see British colonial “derivativeness” as part of a global culture of replication and circulation. Writing of the nineteenth-century “culture of reprinting” in the antebellum United States, Meredith McGill argues that “the mass-market for literature in America [was] built and sustained by the publication of cheap reprints of foreign books and periodicals” and that “the primary vehicles for the circulation of literature were uncopyrighted newspapers and magazines.” A similar story plays out in Britain’s colonial spaces. In early nineteenth-century colonial cities around the world, first newspapers and then magazines were largely responsible for establishing and maintaining a sense of literary culture. Booksellers such as “Connell & Ridings,” featured in Auckland’s Daily Southern Cross (1 Sept. 1857), advertised in colonial newspapers the volumes they had for sale (figure 4), and those same newspapers published poems and prose excerpts—almost certainly unauthorized—that would have helped establish the sense of a canon (works by Boswell, Young, Dryden, and Milton) while also maintaining enthusiasm for more recent authors (Dickens, Scott, and Hemans). None of the authors advertised in the Daily Southern Cross were of the New Zealand colony itself.

This chapter focuses on three scenes of colonial publication. With each, I show unauthorized poetic reproduction to be foundational to colonial culture. More specifically, these three scenes demonstrate the centrality of genre—and genre’s eminent reproducibility—to the work of colonial reproduction. From the 1828 printing of South Africa’s first anthology of English-language poetry, to the circulation of Felicia Hemans’s poetry in 1830s Can-

Figure 4. (Facing page) “Valuable Books and Engravings,” advertised in the Daily Southern Cross (Auckland, 1 September 1857). National Library of New Zealand, Wellington.
Valuable Books & Engravings

CONNELL & RIDINGS

Will sell by Auction, at their Mart, Queen-street, TO-MORROW, (Wednesday) 2nd September, at 1 o'clock,

A LOT of Valuable BOOKS and ENGRAVINGS

Amongst the Books will be found—
Rev. Lionel T. Berguer's British Essayists, 44 vols., elegantly bound
Boswell's Johnson, 4 vol.
Benjamin Franklin's Works, 2 vols.
Al Koran, fourth edition
Marceau's Conversations on Chemistry, 2 vols.
Grant's Superstitions of the Highlands
Young's Works, complete, 5 vols.
Fine old Bible, 1626
Dickens' Master Humphrey's Clock, complete
Maynard's, Josephus, folio, with plates
Dryden's Fables, by Dr. Aikens, with plates
French and English Dictionary
Directions for English Traveller
Curios old Work, 1643
Collens' Anatomy, 2 vols, folio, with fine plates
Doddridge's Family Expositor, (handsomely bound)
Burkitt's Notes on the New Testament, large quarto
Gifford's English Lawyer
Milton's Works
Buffon's Natural History, 15 vols., plates,
Village Farrier
Munroe's Anatomy, 4 vols 1 vol. plates
Memoirs of Mrs. Hemans, 2 vols.
Scott's Rokeby and Lady of the Lake
Wilson's Ornithology, 4 vols.
A Mirror for Saints and Sinners, very curious 1671
Lord Bacon's Sylva Sylvarum 1631, original edition, very curious
With numerous Standard Works, and
Several Account Books

ENGRAVINGS.

Jones' Views of the seats of Noblemen and Gentlemen
National Gallery
Heath's Gallery of Engravings
Views in Switzerland
Book of the Illustrations

Also,
A superior Microscope.
Imagined Homelands

In 1828, R. J. Stapleton published the first anthology of English-language poetry in South Africa, *Poetry of the Cape of Good Hope*, an effort “to rescue . . . from oblivion” poems printed originally in Cape Town newspapers.19 Likely unbeknownst to Stapleton, the opening poem of his volume was written not by an English-speaking emigrant to Britain’s Cape Colony but by the American poet William Cullen Bryant, who, in the late 1820s, was emerging as one of the United States’ most respected literary figures. In its original American contexts, Bryant’s “To a Water Fowl” was first printed in the 1818 *North American Review* and then reprinted in the poet’s 1821 volume *Poems*. The poem subsequently appeared in a Cape Town newspaper, the *South African Chronicle, and Mercantile Advertiser*, in November 1824, noted there as having been “extracted from a sailor’s album, on Dyer’s Island,” a small island off the South African coast near Cape Town.20 Four years later, Stapleton lifted the poem from the *South African Chronicle* and gave it pride of place as the introductory poem of his volume, thereby establishing Bryant, anonymously, as the first anthologized writer of English poetry in the South African colony (figure 5).

That Bryant’s poem was mistaken as an original of the Cape Colony was perhaps not entirely coincidental. Though Bryant was central to an emerging American literary culture, reviews of his poetry in the 1820s in both the United States and Britain characterized the poet as a *colonial* writer. For example, the inaugural issue of the *United States Literary Gazette* in 1824 highlighted not Bryant’s essential Americanness but instead his indebtedness to English poets: “[“To a Waterfowl”] is a beautiful and harmonious blending of various beauties into one. We have been awed with the boldness and sublimity of the metaphorical language of Wordsworth, have been soothed by the deep and quiet tone of moral sentiment, which pervades many of the works of Southey, and delighted with the skillful adaptation of epithets in the odes of Collins; but we do not remember any poem, in which these high excellencies are more happily united, than in the short ode mentioned above.”21 The *New York Mirror* in 1825 reprinted an article from the London *Monthly Magazine* that addressed Bryant’s poetry, and specifically “To a Water Fowl,” after noting that, “in point of literary dependence, America
seems to be still a British colony, and to draw her supplies, in a great degree, from the mother country.” Bryant reads as a colonial poet because his poems are generic congeries: they “blend . . . into one” elements borrowed from Wordsworth, Southey, and Collins.
“To a Water Fowl” succeeds as a South African poem precisely because of its generic nature. Like the bird in “Lines: Composed on the death of a chaffinch,” the *Superb Gazette* poem discussed in chapter 1, the waterfowl of Bryant’s poem signals that we have entered a particular version of lyric space: internalized, reflective, and universal. “To a Water Fowl” is meant to reflect human interiority abstracted from the particulars of time and place, so readers might imagine themselves anywhere historically or geographically. “Water fowl” should additionally be understood as categorical rather than specific, referring to varieties of “ducks, geese, and swans considered as a class.”

Whereas a poem such as Barron Field’s “The Kangaroo” (1819) uses wildlife to mark the specific place of its origin (the poem could only describe Australia), Bryant’s poem instead addresses a bird that could be from nearly any temperate climate the world over.

Like the bird he describes, Bryant’s landscape is also generic and indistinct:

Whither, ’midst falling dew,
While glow the heavens with the last steps of day,
Far through their rosy depths, dost thou pursue
Thy solitary way?

Vainly the fowler’s eye
Might mark thy distant flight to do thee wrong,
As, darkly-painted on the crimson sky,
Thy figure floats along.

For Bryant, the waterfowl is a sign that all life on earth has purpose and is guided by a greater spiritual truth. As a meditation on anxiety, feeling lost and without direction, and finally overcoming those feelings, the poem unintentionally articulates one of the fundamental experiences of emigration. More than just a poem resonant with emigrant experience, “To a Water Fowl” locates a horizon on which present anxieties fade into the comforts of domesticity, family, and rest:

And soon that toil shall end;
Soon shalt thou find a summer home and rest,
And scream among thy fellows; reeds shall bend
Soon o’er thy sheltered nest.
Through its generic framing, the poem suggests a collective experience of existential anxiety and then comfort, a shared process of acclimating that would have been as resonant in the American nineteenth century as it was in British Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Canada. It’s no surprise that “To a Water Fowl” circulated in Australia as well, reprinted in the *Sydney Herald* on 17 September 1832, this time with the author’s name attached to his poem.25

Bryant’s isn’t the only unattributed poem in *Poetry of the Cape of Good Hope*. Stapleton notes that he found “The Emigrant’s Song of Memory” in the *South African Chronicle*, but he leaves unsaid, and was likely unaware, that the poem was written by Margaret Holford (1778–1852), an English poet who never set foot in South Africa. Holford’s poem “On Memory. Written at Aix-la-Chapelle,” the source of “The Emigrant’s Song of Memory,” was originally published in London in 1823, in a collection edited by Joanna Baillie. When the *South African Chronicle* published the poem the following year (anonymously, so its place of origin was unclear, and with an entirely different title), the editor removed a stanza specifically detailing Charlemagne and troubadours, presumably to make the poem seem of South African origin.26

Unlike Bryant’s poem, which works in its original form as a generic reflection on the natural world and human feeling, Holford’s lines must be revised—abridged, adapted—into more general terms before it can fit into the South African locale: the poem must be made more generic. The specific context, Aix-la-Chapelle, must be excised, and the title changed entirely, transforming Holford’s poem about one particular site of reflection into a general meditation on dislocation from an adopted homeland. Holford’s poem on memory thus becomes, in its South African context, a poem whose publication history requires forgetting.

I print here the poem’s first two stanzas, italicizing the stanza deleted from the *South African Chronicle* version:

No! this is not the land of Memory,
   It is not the home where she dwells:
   Though her wandering, wayward votary
   Is ever the thrall of her spells;
Far off were the fetters woven, which bind
Still closer and closer the exile’s mind.

*Yet this land was the boast of minstrelsy,*
   *Of the song of the Troubadour,*
Whence Charlemagne led his chivalry
To the fields which were fought of yore;
Still the eye of Fancy may see them glance,
Gilded banner, and quivering lance!27

The poem’s opening emphasizes a sense of dislocation; “the exile” of the first stanza lacks a sense of personal attachment to the place of the poem’s genesis (“this is not the land of memory”). Since the original title indicates the poem was “Written at Aix-la-Chapelle,” a reader of the poem as it appeared in Baillie’s collection would have understood the deictic “this” as Aix-la-Chapelle, a placeholder then supported by the second stanza’s references to troubadours and Charlemagne. Holford’s readers are meant to reflect on the richness of storytelling and shared memory in Aix-la-Chapelle, or Aachen, now in western Germany, and to consider by contrast the absence of associated memory for the newcomer, “the exile.” The original poem says in effect, “when I stand here in Aix-la-Chapelle, I have no personal history associated with the place, but I recognize the city to be one of great historical significance.” The abridged version of the poem printed in South Africa says more generically, “as an emigrant I lack any connection to this land around me.”

Far from being an isolated act of literary appropriation, the *South African Chronicle*’s removal from Holford’s lyric of both author and context makes sense within a greater nineteenth-century culture of enthusiastic, unauthorized reprinting. Given that broader culture, there is nothing especially surprising about this particular example of unattributed reproduction. McGill’s important work on the nineteenth-century American culture of reprinting helps frame Anglo-colonial print culture for us, especially with respect to periodical culture and the circulation of unauthorized reprints. We should consider, she writes, “what kinds of literature were demanded by a democratic public, what counted as literature in this culture, and how high art might be reconfigured for middle-class and working-class audiences.”28 A slightly emended set of considerations should be turned toward Stapleton’s anthology, a work that seems keen to establish an English-language literary culture in the Cape colony.

What kind of literature might have been demanded by the Cape colony of 1828? Leah Price notes that an anthologist always “claims to stand within—and for—the same audience that he addresses.”29 Stapleton’s anthology arrived in Cape Town at a moment of political and cultural transition. The
authoritarian governor of the Cape colony, Lord Charles Somerset, had recently departed after fourteen years of firm control, which had included “unlimited powers of search, detention and banishment.” Somerset’s regime had been criticized for its policies both within Cape Town (the governor famously refused freedom of the press) and on the colonial frontier (in particular his brutal treatment of the Xhosa). With Somerset’s removal, the Cape colony began to move toward more humanitarian policies, reflecting what Alan Lester describes as “a new bourgeois subjectivity” originating in “middle-class opposition” to old-fashioned aristocratic practices. This included Ordinance 50, which “made ‘Hottentots and other free people of colour’ equal before the law with Whites,” and Ordinance 60, which allowed the Cape press to “print whatever it liked short of the common law of libel.”

Stapleton thus published his Poetry of the Cape of Good Hope at just the moment British colonialists in the Cape elevated liberal progressivism as a goal for South Africa. The 1820s marked more generally, throughout Britain’s colonial states, the beginning of a period of profoundly miscalculated confidence in the benefits European colonialists might bring to non-European spaces. In the middle decades of the nineteenth century, as Jennifer Pitts argues, political theorists across the ideological spectrum more or less followed John Stuart Mill in believing that “a British despotism was the best government to which . . . societies [perceived as undeveloped] could aspire, and also that such a despotism could be exercised knowledgeably and benignly to induce progress in such societies.” In Richard Price’s words, imperialism through the period “morphed from [being perceived as] a problematic construct to [being perceived as] a benign concept.” Key to this developing sense of liberal progressivism within the colonies were the ideals promoted by literature, which explains at least in part what was at stake in Thomas Babington Macaulay’s infamous 1835 insistence that “a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.”

Mill himself, model of a liberal progressive, believed poetry might represent the “sympathetic and imaginative pleasure, which could be shared in by all human beings.” Stapleton foregrounds this brand of idealized Romantic interiority in the poems of his anthology. Just five years after Stapleton’s volume appeared, Mill would write that the “object of poetry is confessedly to act upon the emotions” of its readers. Though not yet articulated in 1828, Mill’s formulation resonates throughout Poetry of the Cape of Good
Hope. In taking poems “from the columns of the South African Commercial Advertiser, South African Journal, South African Chronicle, the Verzamelaar, and the Cape Gazette,” Stapleton established space for shared affective experience, creating a version of universal humanism among English-language readers that was in keeping with the Cape colony’s new progressive political ambitions.  

Stapleton’s volume thus reflects the affective interiority that English-speaking settlers hoped to transport with them from Britain to their colonies. The status of those poems as copies is important—necessary, even—for a larger project of transportation and replication; their reproduction in Poetry of the Cape of Good Hope, following their reproduction in the pages of Cape Town’s periodical press, is part of a broader, intentionally derivative colonial culture. Dipesh Chakrabarty describes this structure of colonial development—“first in Europe, then elsewhere”—as foundational to “what made modernity or capitalism . . . [become] global over time, by originating in one place (Europe) and then spreading outside it.”  

That we find the American Bryant and the English Holford as representative South African poets should thus be seen as neither a failure of the colonial literary scene nor as its success, but rather as a feature of the period and of colonialism itself. Indeed, a significant portion of Stapleton’s volume is not of South African origin. In addition to other unattributed poets, the Scottish poets Henry Scott Riddell (1798–1870) and James Montgomery (1771–1854) each make an anonymous appearance, along with an unsigned “Ode to Enterprise” by English clergyman and mineralogist Edward Daniel Clarke (1769–1822). These poems’ shared affective interiority indicates the degree to which genre—here the Romantic lyric—mediated the transportation of culture from home to abroad.

Affective interiority similarly marks the poems in Stapleton’s volume of South African origin, including Thomas Pringle’s now canonical “Afar in the Desert,” originally published in the South African Journal in 1824. Unlike the poems by Bryant and Holford, Pringle’s landscape is distinctly South African, starting with the poem’s opening lines: “Afar in the desert I love to ride, / With the silent Bush-boy alone by my side.” Stapleton also prints detailed footnotes explaining Pringle’s more specialized South African terms: Gnoo, Hartebeest, Gemsbok, Eland. But Pringle’s metaphysical concerns—his feeling of dislocation and hopelessness followed by a reprieve—are without question of a piece with Bryant’s “Waterfowl,” signaling the poem’s generic affinities with the volume’s imported works.
In brief, the poem’s speaker rides out into South Africa’s vast and apparently uninhabited expanses; he discovers there “freedom, and joy,” but also, as he moves farther from the British colony, “a region of emptiness, howling and drear... A region of drought... void of living sight or sound.” Scholars have criticized Pringle for silencing his “Bush-boy” companion; they have also read the poem as a diagnosis of the South African colony, doomed, in Pringle’s view, to failure. The emptiness of Pringle’s landscape might be located near the start of an English-language tradition in South Africa, described by J. M. Coetzee as “a failure to imagine a peopled landscape, an inability to conceive a society in South Africa in which there is a place for the self.” In the poem’s final verse paragraph, the absolute visual and aural blankness is at last relieved by a “still small voice,” which comes at a moment of absolute despair, offering the possibility of optimism:

And here—while the night winds round me sigh,
And the stars burn bright in the midnight sky,
As I sit apart by the Desart Stone,
Like Elijah at Sinai’s cave alone,
And feel as a moth in the Mighty Hand
That spread the heavens and heaved the land,—
A “still small voice” comes through the wild,
(Like a Father consoling his fretful Child),
Which banishes bitterness, wrath, and fear—
Saying “Man is distant but God is near.”

Pringle’s referent is the Old Testament, the “still small voice” that comes to Elijah in the wilderness, suggesting the presence of a higher power even in the remotest of spaces. Like the missionary John Campbell, who discovers in the South African landscape both poetry and “the living word” (discussed in my introduction to this book), Pringle intentionally conflates religious epiphany with the overhearing of a Romantic breeze, a voice that comes to him, inspired, on the wind.

In the context of *Poetry of the Cape of Good Hope*, we might imagine Pringle’s poem overhearing not just the sound of the Old Testament’s deity or the inspiration of a Romantic breeze but, more particularly, an internalized voice of Anglo culture and tradition. Cape Town’s polyglot community was not welcoming to English speakers in the way of Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. In 1877, a half-century after Stapleton’s anthology, Anthony Trollope visited Cape Town and noted that it was predominantly
“not . . . an English-speaking population.” Pringle absents himself from this cacophony of non-English speakers, riding out into the mostly unpopulated—and therefore quiet—landscape, looking to hear again an internalized and familiar voice. Coetzee finds fault in this, suggesting that Pringle was guilty of “uninventively assimilat[ing] his data under the categories provided for him by the dominant poetic models of his time and place,” leaving him unable to perceive “the specificity of Africa.” This assessment is as true as it is unsurprising. Like the editors of the Cape Town newspapers, which sought to assimilate English-language poetry to South Africa, and like Stapleton, who reproduced without scrutiny their already derivative poems, Thomas Pringle seemingly wished to find a place for British culture in a space unwelcoming to it. Like most of his fellow colonialists in the early nineteenth century, Pringle’s aspiration was not to reinvent culture for the South African colony but to find a place for British culture within it.

Circulating Sentiments: Felicia Hemans in Canada and Australia

When Isabella L. Bird (1831–1904), an “Englishwoman in America,” took her “first view of Niagara,” her mind turned to Felicia Hemans to make sense of what was before her: “I forgot my friends . . . I forgot everything—for I was looking at the Falls of Niagara.” In the midst of so much forgetting, Bird remembers Hemans’s 1826 poem “The Traveller at the Source of the Nile,” two stanzas of which—slightly altered from the original—she prints:

No more than this!—what seem’d it now
   By that far flood to stand?
A thousand streams of lovelier flow
   Bathe my own mountain land,
And thence o’er waste and ocean track
Their wild sweet voices call’d me back.

They call’d me back to many a glade,
   My childhood’s haunt of play,
Where brightly ’mid the birchen shade
   Their waters glanced away:
They call’d me with their thousand waves
Back to my fathers’ hills and graves.

These stanzas seem at first an odd choice for Bird, given their suggestion that a traveler’s present will always be mediated by her past. Whereas Bird
claims to have forgotten everything once in sight of Niagara, Hemans’s lines show James Bruce, the Scottish author of *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile* (1790), recalling the landscape of his childhood at just the moment he comes upon “the marsh and the fountains of the Nile.” Bruce’s experience of the Nile seems the opposite of what Bird says of the Niagara: “Upon comparison with the rise of many [Scottish] rivers,” writes Bruce, “[the Nile] became now a trifling object in my sight. I remembered that magnificent scene in my own native country, where the Tweed, Clyde, and Annan, rise in one hill.”

What connects Bird to Bruce, via Hemans, is disappointment. Bird is first overwhelmed by the sight of Niagara, then disappointed by the “collection of mills” that “disfigures this romantic spot.” The tourists, too, challenge Bird’s romantic inclinations: “Not far from where I stood, the members of a picnic party were flirting and laughing hilariously, throwing chicken-bones and peach-stones over the cliff.” Here the sublime wrestles with the mundane: the immensity of Niagara versus the offensive minutia of chicken bones. Though she turns from Niagara for reasons quite different from those that turned Bruce from the Nile, Hemans’s poem nonetheless offers Bird an affective register for making sense of the jarring North American scene. Bird adapts Hemans’s lines to her own particular situation, both thematically and literally, shifting Hemans’s third-person perspective on Bruce—“They called him, with their sounding waves, Back to his fathers’ hills and graves”—to Bird’s own first-person: “They call’d me with their thousand waves Back to my fathers’ hills and graves.”

Hemans would have been among the more readily available poets for such appropriation and adaptation. A midcentury British or American reader like Bird could have encountered Hemans’s poem in any number of places, including Fanny Bury Palliser’s *The Modern Poetical Speaker, or a Collection of Pieces Adapted for Recitation . . . from the Poets of the Nineteenth Century* (1845) and Frederic Rowton’s *The Female Poets of Great Britain* (1848), two anthologies that were part of an emerging transatlantic culture of lyric circulation and recitation. Palliser’s volume, which also contains Pringle’s “Afar in the Desert” and Bryant’s “To a Waterfowl,” appeared at just the moment, according to Catherine Robson, that poetry began to “appear in British elementary classrooms in . . . significant quantities.” Bird would have been fourteen at the time Palliser’s volume was published, seventeen at the time of Rowton’s, and she was living at a moment that saw memorization and recitation as necessary components of education.
More than that, it was a time, in Virginia Jackson’s words, when lyric poetry “emerged” as a genre “independent of social contingency”: a period when poetry was more readily severed from its historical and cultural contexts and put to a reader’s personal uses. This helps to explain why Hemans’s lyric about Bruce’s experience at the Nile was so readily decoupled from its original context, signaling not the specific story of an eighteenth-century Scots explorer but the universal experience of disappointment. “The Traveller at the Source of the Nile” thereby transforms into a vehicle for personal use, a way for Bird—or anyone else—to make sense of the present in relation to the past: “The feelings which Mrs. Hemans had attributed to Bruce at the source of the Nile,” she writes, “were mine as I took my first view of Niagara.”

That feelings circulated via poetry through nineteenth-century Anglo-American reading publics has long been understood. Hemans’s lyrics were among the most successful in this regard, offering frameworks for readers to experience feeling in manageable doses. A review in the Edinburgh Monthly Review offers a representative perspective: “The verses of Mrs. Hemans appear the spontaneous offspring of intense and noble feeling, governed by a clear understanding, and fashioned into elegance by an exquisite delicacy and precision of taste.” Bird’s use of Hemans suggests an understanding of lyric poetry in keeping with Lauren Berlant’s reading of sentimentality, in which she provocatively describes genre as “an aesthetic structure of affective expectation, an institution or formation that absorbs all kinds of small variations or modifications while promising that the persons transacting with it will experience the pleasure of encountering what they expected, with details varying the theme.” Hemans’s poem “absorbs” the “variations” of Bird’s particular narrative, offering an aesthetic “structure of affective expectation” through which readers might recognize and imaginatively share in Bird’s own experiences.

Such uses of Hemans might be found throughout the nineteenth-century Anglo world, making it literally true that “the spirit . . . of Felicia Hemans . . . haunted the antipodean air,” just as it haunted British North America. To be clear: I employ the word haunted here in a positive sense, rather than the pejorative of its original use in The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English. The spirit of Hemans haunted colonial Australia, New Zealand, and Canada not only because of the global culture of reprinting but also because Hemans’s affective style resonated among readers in those spaces, just as it did among readers in Britain. For colonial readers, Hemans’s poetry was representative of the affective lyric genre.
For example, Hemans's poetry featured prominently in Sydney's periodical culture of the 1830s. In 1829 and 1830 alone, the *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* reprinted “The Image of the Dead,” “The Dreaming Child,” “The Nightingale’s Death Song,” “The Treasures of the Deep,” “The Minster,” “The Magic Glass,” “The Requiem of Genius,” “Triumphant Music,” and “Music in a Room of Sickness.”61 The *Australian* reprinted “The Heart of Bruce, in Melrose Abbey” and “The Exile’s Dirge.”62 Elizabeth Webby has shown that Hemans's poetry was increasingly popular in colonial Sydney. Hemans's volumes appeared in eight Australian book auctions in the 1830s and sixty-four in the 1840s. These are impressive numbers when compared to those for authors we now tend to consider more canonical: volumes of Tennyson and Robert Browning each appeared just once in 1840s auctions.63 In 1838 the bookseller and printmaker William Moffitt advertised no fewer than five Hemans volumes for sale at his Sydney bookshop.64 Across the Tasman Sea in New Plymouth, New Zealand, the Taranaki Institute’s “Monthly Soirée” of August 1858 featured “a recitation from Felicia Hemans” in addition to “a reading from the Pickwick papers.”65

As I suggested in the introduction to this study, Hemans’s “The Homes of England” was an especially resonant poem for colonial readers, though its conservative politics inspired some important revisions. The poem circulated in its original form through a variety of Australian periodicals, appearing in three different journals in the 1840s alone.66 In imagining an England unified across class lines, “The Homes of England” stands out as one of Hemans’s more politically suspect works. Tricia Lootens points to the poem’s linking of “‘stately,’ ‘merry,’ and ‘cottage’ dwellings within a harmonious national hierarchy” and rightly finds the lyric “sentimental, reactionary pastoral fantasy at its crudest”67.

The Cottage-Homes of England!
   By thousands, on her plains,
They are smiling o’er the silvery brooks,
   And round the hamlet-fanes.
Through glowing orchards forth they peep,
   Each from its nook of leaves,
And fearless there they lowly sleep,
   As the bird beneath their eaves.68

Hemans's idyllic framing of English poverty would have been especially suspicious to those emigrants who had left Britain in search of greener
pastures. In 1845, Adelaide’s *South Australian* reprinted a Chartist revision of Hemans’s lyric that makes explicit the original poem’s conservative, obfuscating bent:

The happy homes of England, alas! where have they gone?
Like leaves in wintry weather, they have fallen, one by one;
And where are now the rural sports that made the village gay?
Some blight is, sure, upon the land, where all have pass’d away.

The mansions of the great, ’tis true, still rise in pomp and pride,
And round them rich demesnes are seen, extending far and wide,
Where forest trees are waving green, and deer are bounding on;
But the happy homes of England, O! where are they gone?

Readers of the *South Australian* likely would have distanced themselves from the blighted and iniquitous scene painted here, as Adelaide in 1845 was enjoying an economic boom fueled by the mining of mineral deposits and a twenty-five-fold increase in the city’s grain exports. Adelaide’s homes may have seemed happy indeed in relation to its residents’ memories of England.

In Saint John, New Brunswick, an 1868 revision of “The Homes of England” serves first to reflect nostalgically on England and then to establish a new Canadian sentiment, distinct though tied to Great Britain (I print the poem in full to make this turn apparent). The author is Letitia F. Simson, who revised Hemans’s poem after hearing it recited in a local church just one year after Canadian Confederation:

The pleasant homes of England!
Oh how we love to praise,
The dear Old Country of our birth,
The scenes of early days.

The daisied fields and heath-brown hills,
O’er which we used to roam,
E’er yet ambition stirred our hearts,
To seek our distant home.

The cottage homes of England!
We never can forget:
The calm, and sweet content, and peace,
Is lingering with us yet.
The palace homes of England!
   So ancient and so grand;
Are treasures of our memory still,
   In our adopted land.

Here, where a few short years ago,
   The Red Man’s whoop was heard,
Nor sound of other human voice,
   Awoke the forest bird:

Here, where wild Nature reigned supreme,
   In deep, expressive praise;
And Art is hastening to unfold,
   Long hidden mysteries:

To cleave a highway for the feet,
   Of nations yet unborn—
Where fields and barren mountains top
   Shall wave with golden Corn.

From East to great Pacific’s shore,
   The Iron Horse shall land,
Stores of great riches gathered up
   By many a toil-worn hand.

O England! Mother England!
   We render thanks to thee;
For all they guardianship to us,
   In helpless infancy.

And now we’ve grown to manhood’s strength,
   We would go hand in hand,
To honour and to love thee still—
   Our dear old native land.
St. John, April 17th, 1868

Simson finds in the newly formed Canadian Confederation Hemans’s sense of domestic and national harmony. She finds as well a belief in upward mobility, enabled in part by westward expansion. Politically, then, the move to North America enables significant change, but in terms of sentiment—the affective ties imagined in Hemans’s original lyric—the homes of England
and Canada remain nearly the same. Simson thereby imports the poem’s genre and affective register, even as she alters its original content.

Hemans’s haunting of both Canada and Australia might be traced not only in the reprintings and revisions of her own poems but also in poems that are clearly indebted to her in affective and thematic registers. Felicia Hemans proliferated through the works of colonial poets in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, contributing to the global culture of Anglo sentimentality. Among the more notable examples of this phenomenon were the poems of Eliza Hamilton Dunlop (1796–1880). Born in Ireland, Dunlop was newly arrived in New South Wales in 1838, the year she earned notoriety for publishing a poem on the real-life massacre of twenty-eight Indigenous Australians at Myall Creek. Scholars have rightfully positioned Dunlop’s poem, “The Aboriginal Mother,” in relation to other “crying mother” poems of the 1820s and ’30s, including Hemans’s “Indian Woman’s Death Song” (1828) and Lydia Sigourney’s “The Cherokee Mother” (1831). More broadly, Dunlop’s poem is distinctly that of a political poetess, a term Tricia Lootens has shown to be a lynchpin for thinking about race and sentimentality in the global nineteenth century.

Dunlop’s “Aboriginal Mother” invites sympathy from readers through the pathos of her speech, in much the same manner of Hemans’s and Sigourney’s Native American women:

Oh! hush thee—hush my baby,
I may not tend thee yet.
Our forest-home is distant far,
And midnight’s star is set.
Now, hush thee—or the pale-faced men
Will hear thy piercing wail,
And what would then thy mother’s tears
Or feeble strength avail?

Dunlop had been in Australia only a few months when the massacre took place. Widely reported and debated in local newspapers, the horrific event included the murder of a three-year-old boy and the decapitation of several Indigenous children. The eleven stockmen accused of the crime were first acquitted by Sydney’s Supreme Court, but in a second trial seven were found guilty and, on 5 December, sentenced to death. Dunlop published her poem in the 13 December issue of the Australian, in between the contentious second trial and the execution of the murderers, which took place on 18 December.
The political register of “The Aboriginal Mother” stands out as distinct from Dunlop’s earlier publications. But stylistically Dunlop was using techniques on display throughout her writing, all of which fall within the broader work of sentimental lyric that Hemans epitomized. Dunlop’s “Songs of an Exile” series, published in the *Australian* and including “The Aboriginal Mother” (the fourth in the series), demonstrates this stylistic consistency. For example, the third poem, from 29 November, considers the death of two Irish brothers who had emigrated to Vicksburg, Mississippi. A footnote indicates the poem’s subject was lifted from a Dublin newspaper:

He knelt beside a brother’s bed—
Far in the stranger’s land:
And gently raised the dying head;
And clasped the lifeless hand.

Dunlop’s common meter and stock sentimental tableau are mostly cliché, but the same cannot be said of the poem’s global purview. Dunlop casts a wide imaginative net in suggesting the affective resonances between an Irish emigrant’s experiences in Mississippi and those of her readers in Australia. Like Bird’s appropriation of Hemans’s lyric, Dunlop’s poem adapts the particular narrative she read in the Dublin newspaper, offering an aesthetic framework—what Berlant calls a “structure of affective expectation”—through which readers might recognize and make sense of their own experiences.

Dunlop’s poem is both structurally and thematically generic, qualities that would have allowed colonial readers easy access to its affective register. In ways similar to Bryant’s “To a Water Fowl,” the emotions of the Mississippi deathbed scene would have resonated anywhere Dunlop’s poem was published. Michael Richards, author of a historical catalogue of Australian books for the National Library of Australia, has shown that early Australian colonists “preferred imported literature to that written in New South Wales.” Not only were such publications “cheaper,” they also “reminced [colonists] of familiar scenes and themes.”

Newspaper poetry falls into a different category from published books, but Dunlop’s generic style is consistent with Richards’s assessment; a colonial reader looking to buy one of Hemans’s volumes for sale at William Moffitt’s bookshop in Sydney would likely have appreciated the sentiment of the “Songs of an Exile” series. With the “Aboriginal Mother,” we see Dunlop adapting the familiar, generic style of her earlier poems to the specific context of the Australian colony. What starts as an act of colonial replication—the “slavish imitation”
described by the Westminster Review—transforms into a more distinct product of the Australian continent, borrowing an affective framework familiar to a global Anglo-American readership.

The sheer abundance of sentimental poetry in Sydney’s newspapers pushes against the notion of a “crisis of authenticity” with respect to colonial poetry. Rather than critical self-consciousness, the proliferation of both sentimental reprints and derivative originals suggests an embracing of the global sentimental phenomenon. William Cullen Bryant’s poetry again offers a fine example of how poetic feeling migrated in the early nineteenth century, moving with ease through multiple colonial spaces. In 1832, Washington Irving published a collection of Bryant’s poems, writing in the dedication that his poems are “essentially American”: “They transport us into the depths of the solemn primeval forest—to the shores of the lonely lake—the banks of the wild nameless stream, or the brow of the rocky upland rising like a promontory from amidst a wide ocean of foliage. . . . His close observation of the phenomena of nature, and the graphic felicity of his details, prevent his descriptions from ever becoming general and commonplace.”

The literary world outside the United States patently disagreed, finding his poems generic enough to designate spaces far from North America. We’ve seen already the extent to which “To a Water Fowl” circulated in South Africa and Australia. Bryant’s “Indian Girl’s Lament,” a poem in keeping with the sentiment of Dunlop’s “Aboriginal Mother,” made its own global rounds, printed in the Sydney Herald (27 Sept. 1832) and Nova Scotia’s Bee (17 June 1835). John Wilson, writing for Blackwood’s, argues exactly my point in an 1832 review of Irving’s volume, noting that, far from being a poem particular to American readers, “the ‘Indian Girl’s Lament’ will inspire . . . universal sympathy. Into her lips [Bryant] puts language at once simple and eloquent, such as the true poet fears not to breathe from his own heart, when in mournful imagination personating a sufferer, knowing that no words expressive of tenderest, and purest, and saddest emotions, can ever be otherwise than true to nature, when passionate in the fidelity of its innocence, nor yet unconsolled in its bereavement by a belief that pictures a life of love beyond the grave.”

What makes both Bryant’s and Hemans’s poems adaptable is their generic nature: their adherence to formal structures and emotional effects that would have been familiar to English-speaking readers around the world. This generic framing of sentiment makes sense of Wilson’s claim—as a Scottish reader—to identify with the “Indian Girl’s Lament” as much as a
North American might, or a colonist in Australia. Dunlop’s “Aboriginal Mother” shows that she too understood the ways sentiment resonates generically. But her poem accomplishes something importantly distinct from the South African reprinting of Bryant’s “To a Water Fowl.” Whereas Bryant’s poem suggests the replication of liberal progressivism in colonial spaces (his poem might be published as is around the world, with a similar effect in each locale), Dunlop’s is instead an adaptation of liberal progressive beliefs to a specifically Australian context, not an exact duplicate or copy.

Other versions of Hemans abounded in colonial Australia. Caroline Leakey (1827–81) used sentimental adaptation to reflect on the challenges women faced both at home and abroad. After her 1847 arrival in Tasmania, the English-born Leakey spent most of her time there in a state of decline. She returned to England in 1853 and the following year published *Lyra Australia: or, Attempts to Sing in a Strange Land*. Striking in Leakey’s volume is her logic of association, by which she uses her knowledge of England to make sense of what she discovered in Tasmania. In the case of “Pale Oleander of the South,” a Tasmanian oleander is the starting point for remembering scenes from an English childhood: “now I look on thee,/ And know I’ve seen thee once before.” In Leakey’s account, the oleander comes to represent first the tenuous position of women and then the specific death of a female childhood friend. The flower, she says, “didst unconscious lead me back/To that fair girl, in her once home of flowers,/Where tears alone now leave their track.” Much as Dunlop’s “Aboriginal Mother” makes sense of the Australian present by way of Hemans’s account of Native Americans, Leakey understands her experience of Tasmania by way of her past in England. She adapts her knowledge of the oleander and her particular experiences of the flower, to the specific context of the Tasmanian colony, finding solace even in painful connections between home and abroad.

Yet another colonial Hemans, Fidelia Hill (1794–1854), arrived in the fledgling town of Adelaide, South Australia, in late 1836 on board the HMS *Buffalo*. Hill was both the first European woman to set foot in the South Australian colony and, four years later, the first woman to publish a volume of poetry on the Australian continent. I will have more to say about Hill in chapter 5, but I note here that her poetry follows that of Dunlop and Leakey in suggesting the degree to which, in nineteenth-century Australia, reproducing Britain meant reproducing sentiment. “Here may I dwell,” writes Hill while reflecting on her early arrival in the colony, “and by experience prove,/That tents with love, yield more substantial bliss/Than Palaces without it, can
Hill informs her readers that her poems were “written during seasons unfavorable to composition, of severe domestic calamity, and bodily suffering”; her poems suggest that these trials were mediated—and made endurable—by the domestic affections Hemans’s poetry so consistently foregrounded.

**Plagiarizing Browning: The Case of Adam Lindsay Gordon**

Adam Lindsay Gordon shot and killed himself outside Melbourne on 24 June 1870, a day after the publication of *Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes*, the book that would eventually make his reputation as Australia’s most beloved midcentury poet. Born in the Azores into a Scottish military family and educated in England, he was sent by his father to Australia in 1853 at the age of twenty. Gordon planned to spend only a year or two in the colony before returning to England. Instead, he remained as an officer in the South Australian mounted police, riding among settlements with only Macaulay’s *Lays of Ancient Rome* for entertainment; according to his biographer, “he knew [the poems] by heart from end to end.” By 1857 Gordon had left behind the mounted police and was instead training horses and riding in steeplechases and hurdle races. An acquaintance from this time recalled riding with Gordon across the outback, amazed as the young man “recit[ed] quotations at length from Virgil, Homer, and Ovid,” as well as “long passages from Racine’s *Athalie*, and Corneille’s *Cid*. . . . It was a puzzle to me how he managed to get books and carry them about and get time to read them.”

Gordon witnessed and participated in the rise of Melbourne as a major colonial city with genuine literary aspirations. In the early 1850s, when gold was discovered in Victoria, Melbourne was not yet two decades old. By 1873, three years after Gordon’s death, Trollope would call Melbourne “the undoubted capital, not only of Victoria but of all Australia,” and marvel at its quick ascent: “I believe that no city has ever attained so great a size with such rapidity.” As the colony of Victoria grew from a population of 76,000 in 1850 to 537,000 in 1860, the London press followed its progress with interest. According to the 1856 *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine*, Melbourne had been “simply a provincial city” until the discovery of gold “agitated the whole civilised world,” transforming the city “as if by the wand of a magician, into one of the most bustling emporiums in the world.”

An 1858 contributor to the *Dublin University Magazine* concurs, writing of how the “gold-fever led to the growth of Melbourne so marvellously that in two
years it sprang from the rank of a third-class English town to that of a first-rate English city.”\textsuperscript{93} Artist Henry Burn captured this moment of enthusiasm—“new opportunities, sudden wealth, and a hearty egalitarianism,” in the words of historian John Hirst—in his iconic 1861 painting “Swanston Street from the Bridge” (figure 6).\textsuperscript{94} By 1890, according to James Belich, “Marvelous Melbourne ruled Victoria, a colony as populous and rich . . . as the American state of California.”\textsuperscript{95}

Both in Melbourne and back in Great Britain, critics voiced concern for the place of culture within the rapidly expanding city. “To bring about the future greatness which we have predicted for the colony, as the centre of a wealthy and powerful Anglo-Saxon empire in the Pacific, whose population are governed by British laws, and are in the enjoyment of British institutions,” wrote \textit{Blackwood’s} in 1854, “it is most important that the British element should be as largely as possible infused amongst them. Society in Australia calls especially for the presence of an educated middle class, capable of ameliorating, by its example, the rudeness of character and manners which may be expected from amongst her successful gold-diggers, bush-farmers, and traders.”\textsuperscript{96}

Ground was broken in July 1854 for a university and a public library, an ambitious project that would become the University of Melbourne and the State Library of Victoria. Sir Charles Hotham, governor of the colony, proclaimed at the groundbreaking ceremony that “he could conceive no institution more necessary, constituted as society was here, and taken in connection with the University, than the Library they were about to establish. . . . There was nothing more calculated to promote morality than sound knowledge and knowledge could not be better acquired than in a public library.”\textsuperscript{97} In 1856, after the opening of the library, a writer for the \textit{Argus} wondered that “any well-conducted person has now nothing to do but to walk up stairs and take down the books he wants, conditionally only on his replacing them unharmed when he has done with them. No place that we have ever visited in Melbourne has so impressed us with a sense of the advance of civilisation in Victoria as the Public Library.”\textsuperscript{98}

Adam Lindsay Gordon arrived on this enthusiastic colonial scene, a city that maintained higher literacy rates than those found in any other British colony or in London itself: 89 percent of the European men living in the colony of Victoria and 78 percent of women were to some extent literate in 1861.\textsuperscript{99} These are especially impressive numbers when one considers Victoria’s population explosion: the colony more than doubled, from 95,000 to 200,000
between December 1851 and December 1852. David Malouf describes Melbourne in the 1860s as

related to London and all it stood for in the same way as any other large provincial city—Manchester, for example, or Leeds or Birmingham, places that had grown to be cities in the same period as Melbourne, and where much the same culture was to be found; the same grand buildings, the same plays and operas (Melbourne saw its first performance of Gounod’s Faust just six months after the London opening), the same books in the public libraries and reading-rooms, the same serialisations of new novels by Dickens or Mrs Gaskell or George Eliot to be breathlessly awaited and passed around.
By the late 1860s, Melbourne would also have within its bounds a circle of writers—including, in addition to Gordon, Marcus Clarke, George Gordon McCrae, and Henry Kendall—eventually recognized as some of Australia's founding literary figures. In 1868, these men together founded the Yorick Club, a literary clique with high aspirations for Melbourne's emerging print culture.

According to Andrew McCann, local writing in Melbourne had up to this point been overlooked in favor of imports from Britain and America; colonial publications, primarily in the form of circulating periodicals, were viewed as “mass produced and ephemeral,” whereas books published in England by Tennyson and Matthew Arnold, for example, were of “enduring cultural value.” The books lining the shelves of the newly constructed public library would have been almost entirely European and American in origin. Clarke, who took over editing the Colonial Monthly in 1868, aimed to overturn this dynamic and to establish Melbourne as a colonial literary capital.

His task was a tall one. If we take the reception of Gordon's poetry as representative of the period in which he wrote it, what emerges is a patchwork of contradictions. For all the romanticism attached to 1860s Melbourne, those trying to earn a living by the pen generally failed in their endeavors. Melbourne's literary bohemia, writes McCann, was “an underworld—a space haunted by poverty, death, alcoholism, drug abuse and above all, literary failure.” The two volumes Gordon published in 1867—one a lengthy closet drama, the other a collection of lyrics—were mostly ignored, and dismissed by those few colonial newspapers that chose to review them. Clarke himself trumpeted Gordon as “the most Australian of our literary aspirants,” and by the end of the nineteenth century, in the decades when Australia was looking for national heroes, he came to be regarded as a foundational Australian poet: “Australia's hero, as well as her poet,” according to Douglas Sladen.

Spectators who knew Gordon as a horse racer thrilled to poems such as “How We Beat the Favourite,” which captured the rhythms of riding horseback and anticipated Banjo Paterson's later bush ballads (discussed in chapter 6). Gordon “felt Australia in his veins,” writes Sladen, “the glittering Australian climate, the champagne-like air, the long days in the saddle, the shooting of extraordinary game . . . the excitements of raging floods and raging bush-fires.” All that said, Gordon himself lived the last years of his life in a state of “restlessness, depression and ill-health,” and literary scholars
have more or less discounted his work. He earns just two quick mentions in Paul Kane's *Australian Poetry* (1996); Judith Wright is more generous, but even she deems Gordon “no more than mediocre”: “a kind of secondhand Byron, with modern overtones, a legend rather than a poet.”

Wright is especially critical of Gordon’s imitative capacities: his poem “From the Wreck,” she writes, “is so close to its [Robert] Browning original that it is practically an infringement of copy-right.” The “Browning original” Wright refers to is “How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix,” part of Browning’s *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1845), and there can be no doubt that Gordon had the Browning poem in mind. Gordon’s contemporaries, too, worried at his imitative tendencies. Just three months after his suicide, the *South Australian Register* wrote that “[the poet] is one who makes. To make he must be original, and the warmest of Mr. Gordon’s admirers must admit that originality was not his leading characteristic.”

Oscar Wilde, writing of Gordon in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1889, suggested that “From the Wreck” is “a sort of Australian edition of” Browning’s poem. Wilde blames Australia for Gordon’s derivativeness, not the poet himself: “On the whole, it is impossible not to regret that Gordon ever emigrated. His literary power cannot be denied, but it was stunted in uncongenial surroundings, and marred by the rude life he was forced to lead. Australia has converted many of our failures into prosperous and admirable mediocrities, but she certainly spoiled one of our poets for us. Ovid at Tomi[s] is not more tragic than Gordon driving cattle, or farming an unprofitable sheep-ranch.”

Wilde’s assessment returns us to the opening of this chapter and the broader nineteenth-century connections among Australia, criminality, and unlicensed copying. One might read Gordon’s rewriting of Browning’s poem as yet another “crisis of authenticity,” a failure of the emigrant poet to stake out truly original territory. But this would be a misreading, first, of Gordon’s poem, and second, of the literary moment in which he was writing. Gordon’s poem is not a work of “slavish imitation,” nor is his engagement with Browning passively derivative. Like the parodic shipboard poems examined in the first chapter of this study, Gordon’s “From the Wreck” uses old materials to establish a genuinely new work. The poem is as much a critique of Browning’s lyric as it is a galloping account of the Australian outback and the challenges it posed for European emigrants.

In Browning’s original poem, three horsemen famously ride out “into the midnight” to deliver news from Ghent to Aix:
I sprang to the stirrup, and Joris, and he;
I galloped, Dirck galloped, we galloped all three;
“Good speed!” cried the watch, as the gate-bolts undrew;
“Speed!” echoed the wall to us galloping through;
Behind shut the postern, the lights sank to rest,
And into the midnight we galloped abreast.  

The specific news Browning’s horsemen carry remains a mystery, and Browning himself insisted that the premise of the poem was fictive and not based in any historical reality: “I was in a sailing vessel slowly making my way from Sicily to Naples in calm weather. I had a good horse at home in my stables, and I thought to myself how much I should like a breezy gallop. As I could not ride on board ship, I determined to enjoy a ride in imagination; so I galloped all through the night with the steed Roland.”114 Browning transports himself imaginatively by means of both the poem’s theme and its anapestic galloping rhythm—a prime example of meter serving, in Yopie Prins’ words, as “a technology for poetic transmission.”115 The experience of reading Browning’s poem is meant to resemble, and even embody, a vigorous horse ride.

Gordon, a horse racer and trainer, would have been drawn to Browning’s poem for obvious reasons. But Gordon clearly also needed to distinguish himself from Browning’s original, effectively one-upping Browning in the difficulty of his ride and the suffering it entailed. Like “How They Brought the Good News,” “From the Wreck” opens with three riders heading out to a distant town with important news:

Between the tall gum-trees we gallop’d away—
We crashed through a brush fence, we splash’d through a swamp—

The immediate differences between Browning’s and Gordon’s poems are as significant as the similarities. Gordon especially highlights the rough Australian landscape his riders must navigate—crashing through a brush fence, splashing through a swamp—as opposed to the road between Ghent and Aix, which Browning’s poem seems to take for granted. Like a set of parallel horseraces, Gordon competes with Browning at every stride:

Still galloping forward we passed the two flocks
At M’Intyre’s hut and M’Allister’s hill—
She was galloping strong at the Warrigal Rocks—
On the Wallaby Range she was galloping still—
And over the wasteland and under the wood,
By down and by dale, and by fell and by flat,
She galloped, and here in the stirrups I stood
To ease her, and there in the saddle I sat. (130)

Browning’s riders carry unspecified “good news” from Ghent to Aix; Gordon’s riders bring news of a shipwreck off the South Australian coast. The ship *Admella* was wrecked on 6 August 1859, breaking into two pieces on a reef and scattering passengers into the sea. Those that survived were marooned for eight days, until they were finally rescued by a lifeboat from shore.117 Gordon’s poem follows the riders who hope to inform authorities in time for some of the passengers to be rescued:

Look sharp. A large vessel lies jamm’d on the reef,
    And many on board still, and some wash’d on shore.
Ride straight with the news—they may send some relief
    From the township; and we—we can do little more. (126)

In no way could Gordon have been unaware of his indebtedness to Browning: the poem’s structure and theme are explicitly, patently imitative. To accuse him of plagiarism, or a failure of originality, misreads Gordon’s clear critique of the original poem.

The implicit overlapping of European and Australian scenes makes all the more explicit the differences between their content and the apparent competitiveness Gordon brought to his revision. Wilde erroneously insisted that Gordon remained always “distinctly English” and that “the landscapes he describes are nearly always the landscapes of our own country.”118 To the contrary, Gordon’s distinctly Australian scene seems to wag a finger at privileged European readers: *here in Australia*, the poem suggests, *we ride hard, and without the luxury of roads, without the absurdity of an unspecified purpose*. Like Simson’s revision of Hemans’s “The Homes of England,” which imagines Canadian mobility and opportunity in contrast to English stasis, Gordon’s revision of Browning demonstrates colonial pride in a rougher, more urgent outback lifestyle. To borrow Caroline Levine’s notion of formal *affordances*, we can say that imitation with a difference affords the colonial poet a clear structure for critique.119

If “From the Wreck” is an “Australian version” of “How They Brought the Good News,” then it is one with a critical agenda. Browning closes his poem with the lone surviving horse drinking “a measure of wine” in cele-
bration of having successfully brought the news to Aix. Gordon's poem instead ends mercilessly with the horse's death: "A short, sidelong stagger, a long, forward lurch, / A slight, choking sob, and the mare had gone down."

As if to emphasize the absolute brutality of the Australian scene, Gordon's rider concludes by wondering "What was she worth?" and "How much for her hide?" (131). Readers who understand these lines simply as an imitation of Browning's lyric miss all the signals to the contrary. Gordon resists as much as he borrows from Browning.

**Conclusion**

We've seen through this chapter three varieties of colonial reproduction. Stapleton's *Poetry of the Cape of Good Hope* reproduces British and American poetry without attribution, omitting or altering stanzas that would have identified their origins. Like the South African periodicals from which he took most of his poems, his anthology reproduces Anglo-American culture en masse, offering colonial readers a version of culture nearly indistinguishable from what would have been found in Britain or the United States; his is a copy-and-paste model for one sort of colonial cultural reproduction.

Dunlop, Leakey, and Hill composed original poetry within the genre of the sentimental lyric, allowing popular Anglo-American structures of feeling to circulate in colonial Australia and adapting those structures of feeling to their particular locales: Dunlop's New South Wales, Leakey's Tasmania, and Hill's Adelaide. Their model of reproduction transports genre and affect from home to abroad and might as easily have been found in Canada, as we saw in Letitia Simson's poem, and elsewhere.

Finally, with Gordon we turn to critical rewriting and adaptation, a distinct shift from an original English lyric to something grittier and more in keeping with the harsh Australian outback. Gordon borrows a great deal from Browning, but he also adapts "How They Brought the Good News" to his own purposes, ultimately devising a new poetic mode for his colonial scene.

Rather than stages of development, these versions of colonial poetry were instead overlapping strategies that produced for colonial readers different affective modes. Unattributed reproduction says in effect, *you can feel here exactly what you might have felt elsewhere*. Sentimental imitation says *you can feel here in a way similar to what you might have felt elsewhere, but with some important differences*. Critical revising, finally, says *you can feel here in a way that resembles what you might have felt elsewhere, but in fact*...
your experience will be quite different. All three strategies contributed significantly to emerging nineteenth-century Anglo-colonial print cultures, and none should be viewed through the lens of “crisis.” Indeed, we do both the poems and colonial print cultures a disservice when we read these works as anxious about their own authenticity.

The colonial cultures of South Africa, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand all participated in a global culture of enthusiastic reprinting, borrowing, and adaptation, in which such practices would have been both expected and welcome. In chapter 3, I extend this argument by turning to the more specific example of Scottish culture and the ways Scottish bardic voice was transported to the Cape colony, New Zealand’s Otago province, and Canada. I intend chapters 2 and 3 to be read together in suggesting alternate models for understanding British cultural reproduction in the colonies.